



# Social and Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention



**Overview:** While bullying is a pervasive problem in many schools, schools can take specific steps to improve the school climate and encourage positive interactions designed to reduce or prevent bullying. Schools using a social and emotional learning (SEL) framework can foster an overall climate of inclusion, warmth, and respect, and promote the development of core social and emotional skills among both students and staff. Because bullying prevention is entirely congruent with SEL, it can be embedded in a school's SEL framework. The aims of this brief are to (a) provide a basic description of a school-wide SEL framework, (b) illustrate the relationship between social and emotional factors and bullying, and (c) explain how an SEL framework can be extended to include bullying prevention.

## Research, Practices, Guidelines, and Resources

Bullying may be the most frequent form of school violence (Nansel et al., 2001). Surveys consistently indicate that almost one-quarter of all students experience hurtful interactions with peers on a monthly or daily basis (Dinkes, Cataldi, & Lin-Kelly, 2007).

State legislatures are increasingly requiring schools to develop and implement bullying prevention policies and approaches (National Council of State Legislatures, n.d.).<sup>1</sup> But even without these legislative mandates, many schools are addressing bullying as part of their efforts to create physically and emotionally safe learning environments.

Because much remains to be learned about best practices in bullying prevention, when schools seek to identify a bullying prevention program to implement, they face a confusing array of interventions, many of which have not been evaluated or have produced only marginal gains in reducing bullying behaviors (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008).

Research does indicate, however, that multifaceted approaches to reducing bullying in schools are more likely to succeed than single-component programs. Such programs may include a *school-wide component* centered on training, awareness, monitoring, and assessment of bullying; a *classroom component* focused on reinforcing school-wide rules and building social and emotional skills, such as social problem solving and empathy; and an *intervention component* for students who are frequent targets or perpetrators of bullying. Programs directed at only one of these levels, or interventions designed only for the targets and perpetrators of bullying, are less likely to be effective (Birdthistle et al., 1999; Ttofi & Farrington, 2009; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). When schools are able to scaffold bullying prevention onto a larger, more comprehensive framework for prevention and positive youth development, they strengthen their prevention efforts while also addressing some of the underlying contributing social, emotional, and environmental factors that can lead to bullying. A social and emotional learning (SEL) framework can serve just this purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.bullypolice.org> for a list of state-by-state laws and related information.

## What Is SEL?

SEL is an educational movement gaining ground throughout the world. It focuses on the systematic development of a core set of social and emotional skills that help children more effectively handle life challenges and thrive in both their learning and their social environments. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as the processes through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to recognize and manage their emotions, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging social situations constructively.

CASEL has identified five core categories of social and emotional skills:

- **Self-awareness**—accurately assessing one’s feelings, interests, values, and strengths/abilities, and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence
- **Self-management**—regulating one’s emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting personal and academic goals and then monitoring one’s progress toward achieving them; and expressing emotions constructively
- **Social awareness**—taking the perspective of and empathizing with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; identifying and following societal standards of conduct; and recognizing and using family, school, and community resources
- **Relationship skills**—establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed
- **Responsible decision-making**—making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate standards of conduct, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; and contributing to the well-being of one’s school and community

These skills allow children to calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships, resolve relationship conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. To develop these capacities, children need to experience safe, nurturing, and well-managed environments where they feel valued and respected; to have meaningful interactions with others who are socially and emotionally competent; and to receive positive and specific guidance.

Many excellent SEL curricula and programs are available that provide sequential and developmentally appropriate instruction in SEL skills, and structured opportunities for children to practice, apply, and be recognized for using these skills throughout the day. SEL programs are ideally implemented in a coordinated manner throughout the school district, from preschool through high school. Lessons are reinforced in both classroom and non-classroom settings (such as the hallways, cafeteria, and

playground), as well as during out-of-school activities and at home. Educators receive ongoing professional development in SEL, and families and schools work together to promote children's social, emotional, and academic success.

## What Is Bullying?

In its *Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools* Fact Sheet, the Center for the Study and Prevention of School Violence (2008) uses three criteria to distinguish bullying from other occurrences of misbehavior or isolated cases of aggression:

1. It is aggressive behavior or intentional harm-doing.
2. It is carried out repeatedly and over time.
3. It occurs within an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power.

Thus, a student is bullied or victimized when he or she is the repeated target of deliberate negative actions by one or more students who possess greater verbal, physical, social, or psychological power.

*Direct bullying* is a relatively open attack on a victim that is physical (hitting, kicking, pushing, choking) and/or verbal (name calling, threatening, taunting, malicious teasing) in nature. *Indirect bullying* is more subtle and difficult to detect. It involves one or more forms of relational aggression, including social isolation, intentional exclusion, rumor-spreading, damaging someone's reputation, making faces or obscene gestures behind someone's back, and manipulating friendships and other relationships.

Students increasingly bully others using electronic communication devices and the Internet. *Cyberbullying* involves sending hurtful or threatening text messages and images with these devices in order to damage the target's reputation and relationships. This form of bullying can be very difficult for adults to detect or track, and almost half of those victimized do not know the identity of the perpetrator. Electronic bullying most commonly involves the use of instant messaging, chat rooms, and e-mail (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

## Bullying Prevalence and Consequences

According to the 2008 *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* report from the Institute of Education Sciences, 24 percent of elementary and secondary schools report daily or weekly bullying incidents (Dinkes et al., 2009). The frequency of actual bullying incidents is probably much greater, since adults are often unaware of, or fail to adequately respond to, bullying (Pepler & Craig, 2000). In 2007, 32% of students ages 12–18 reported being bullied within the past year, with 63% percent of these students bullied once or twice over the year, 21 percent bullied once or twice a month, 10 percent bullied once or twice a week, and 7 percent bullied almost every day.

Most forms of bullying begin to decline by the end of the elementary grades and continue to decrease through the middle and high school grades. This decline is temporarily reversed, however, if students transition from an elementary school to a middle school or junior high school during the middle grades. In these cases, there is frequently a spike in bullying during that transition year, perhaps reflecting a desire for students to reestablish dominance or achieve a position of leadership (Pelligrini, 2002).

The damage to victimized children is compounded by the relatively stable nature of victimization, such that the same children often remain victims from one school year to the next (Nansel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2007). Consequences for such children include emotional distress, such as loneliness, anxiety, and depression, as well as poor school performance and attendance, low self-confidence and self-concept, and social marginalization. These effects can be very long-lasting. For example, being a target of bullying during adolescence is linked to higher levels of depression and anxiety in early adulthood (Dempsey & Storch, 2008).

As for children who bully, while some socially “high status” bullies often appear well-adjusted, other children who bully frequently experience a range of negative outcomes, including poorer school adjustment, more peer rejection, and more externalizing and internalizing behaviors, such as conduct problems, delinquency, criminal activity, and depression (Paul & Cillessen, 2007; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007; Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

Witnessing bullying incidents can produce feelings of anger, fear, guilt, and sadness in observers (Batsche & Porter, 2006). Bystanders who witness repeated victimization of peers can experience negative effects similar to the victimized children themselves (Pepler & Craig, 2000).

## Social-Ecological Perspectives on Bullying

Although the definition of bullying focuses on the aggressive behavior of individual students, bullying is actually a *group* phenomenon, playing out in a social context (Salmivalli, 1999). It is important to remember that many students engage in some form of bullying behavior on a periodic basis, and that most students are teased or experience some form of peer harassment during the school year (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Peers are also present as bystanders during most bullying episodes and play a pivotal role in either the prevention or the promotion of bullying (Storey & Slaby, 2008). For these reasons, some researchers stress that bullying should be viewed along a continuum, rather than a categorical labeling of some children as bullies, others as victims, and the remainder of students (and adults) as uninvolved (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Others caution that labeling children further contributes to a negative climate, overemphasizes the role of individual children while minimizing contextual factors, and fails to accentuate the positive capacities of children to contribute and interact in positive ways (Brown, 2008).

There are numerous individual, peer-level, school-level, familial, and community factors that influence bullying. At the level of the peer group, social theories describing why bullying increases during late childhood and early adolescence include homoph-

ily theory, dominance theory, and attraction theory, and there is some research evidence supporting each (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). *Homophily theory* states that people tend to form friendships and spend time with those who are similar to them in certain key ways. Students tend to hang out with others who bully at the same frequency, and among these bully-prone groups, bullying frequency increases over time. According to *dominance theory*, students use bullying as a strategy for moving higher in the social pecking order, particularly during the transition from elementary school to the middle grades, when patterns of social hierarchy are being established. *Attraction theory* posits that as children enter middle school, their attraction to aggressive peers increases.

Family interaction patterns may also influence peer interaction patterns. Children who are both victims and perpetrators of bullying at school are much more likely to also bully and/or be victimized by siblings (Duncan, 1999). Parents of children who bully others are more likely to lack emotional warmth and be overly permissive (Rigby, 1994). Parents of victimized children, in contrast, are more likely to be highly restrictive, controlling, and over-involved (Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1994).

## The Connection Between SEL and Bullying Prevention

Given these contributing social factors, preventing and reducing bullying requires a focus on the social, emotional, and moral climate of the school, as well as on the social and emotional competence of the entire school body (Bosaki, Marini, & Dane, 2006; Knoff, 2007; San Antonio & Salzfass, 2007; Vreeman & Carroll, 2007; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Although much remains to be learned about best practices for bullying prevention and intervention, the existing research suggests that universal school-based prevention programs (i.e., those designed for all children) can be effective. A recent report by the Task Force on Community Preventive Services (Hahn et al., 2007) concluded that universal school-based programs designed to prevent or reduce violent behavior, including bullying, significantly reduced rates of violent behavior and aggression for all grade levels.

Vreeman and Carroll (2007), in their systematic review of school-based interventions designed to prevent bullying, concluded that the most effective interventions typically use a whole-school approach consisting of some combination of school-wide rules and sanctions, teacher training, classroom curricula, conflict resolution training, and individual counseling. Anti-bullying programs exclusively directed at the bully, the victim, or both, without involving other students or addressing larger school climate issues, are less likely to be effective.

In order to successfully address bullying problems, the entire school must comprise a culture of respect. Expectations for how staff and students treat one another should be clearly reflected in school policies, and the rules for classroom interaction should be consistently modeled by adults and enforced and reinforced in all school settings.

At the student level, schools using an SEL framework teach students skills in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and responsible decision-making. These core SEL skills are the foundational competencies that students need in order to deal with bullying. The six skills often overlap and complement one another, as illustrated below.

### *Self-Awareness and Self-Management Skills*

**Recognize and manage emotions in order to respond to conflict in calm and assertive ways.** In order to handle conflicts effectively, children need to be able to recognize when they are getting angry, and learn to calm themselves before reacting. Children who frequently bully others tend to have trouble managing anger and to strike out aggressively. Bosworth, Espelage, and Simon (1999) found that children who are the angriest are the most likely to bully others. Children report that the need to relieve stress and having a bad day are the primary reasons they bully others (Swearer & Cary, 2007).

A recent study found that students expressing higher levels of sadness and emotional instability are more likely to be bullied (Analitis et al., 2009). Hyperactivity and emotional outbursts are the two factors most likely to annoy and provoke peers. Such provocation increases the likelihood of being victimized and not supported by peers over time (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003).

Research suggests that many victims (43 percent) respond to being bullied in an aggressive, retaliatory, or emotionally reactive manner that both prolongs and escalates the bullying episode (Wilton, Craig, & Pepler, 2000). These victims lack effective emotional regulation skills and may yell, scream, or cry in response (the least effective ways to stop bullying), thereby rewarding the aggressor (Goldbaum et al., 2006; Salmivalli, 1999) and making themselves more vulnerable to further victimization.

### *Social Awareness*

**Be tolerant and appreciative of differences, and interact empathetically with peers.** Research suggests that children often lack empathy for the victims of bullying, and that they view being different from the social ideal, or social norm, as the cause of bullying (Swearer & Cary, 2007). When active bystanders were asked why they chose to intervene, they were likely to attribute feelings of empathy for the victim and a general concern for the well-being of others as motivating factors. Bystanders are also more likely to intervene when they have positive feelings and attitudes toward the victim (Rigby & Johnson, 2006).

### *Relationship Skills*

**Initiate and sustain friendships and other relationships.** Victimized children tend to have fewer friends, to only have friends who are also victimized, and to have more enemies than non-victimized children (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). Many are socially withdrawn and lack confidence and skills in effectively interacting with peers (Pelligrini, 2002; Salmivalli, 1999). Because of their lack of peer support, victimized

children are less likely to have other children come to their defense when they are bullied (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003; Slaby, 2005).

Research suggests that having high-quality friendships, or at least one best friend, can help prevent children from being victims (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999; Goldbaum, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2006). Interventions that help peer-rejected children learn how to positively communicate with peers (e.g., ask questions, show support, make suggestions) can help them be more accepted by peers, less likely to be bullied, and more likely to be assisted by peers if targeted by a bully (Pelligrini, 2002).

**Resist social pressure to enable, encourage, or directly participate in bullying, and actively defend victims.** Studies have revealed that when bystanders observe bullying, they spend most of their time either actively participating in the act or passively encouraging the aggressor by serving as an audience; less than one-quarter of the time do they try to assist the victim (O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Slaby, 2005).

There are a variety of reasons that bystanders don’t come to the assistance of victims:

- They are intimidated by the social or physical power of those doing the bullying
- They fear retaliation
- They are reluctant to challenge group norms supporting bullying
- They don’t recognize the act as bullying
- They lack a sense of personal responsibility or self-confidence
- They don’t know what to do to help

It’s worth noting that when bystanders do assert their disapproval of a bullying act, the episode usually ends quickly—in fewer than 10 seconds, in about half the cases (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Salmivalli, 1999).

**Be able to seek help from peers or other adults when needed.** Research suggests that victims and bystanders typically do not seek help from peers or adults when they are unable to solve the problem on their own (O’Connell et al., 1999). Self-identified victims are particularly likely to blame themselves for their victimization and to “suffer in silence” (Graham, Bellmore, & Juvonen, 2006).

### *Responsible Decision Making*

**Think through and resolve social problems effectively and ethically.** Effective social problem-solving requires an accurate assessment of the situation. Research indicates that children who frequently bully tend to misinterpret social interactions as being more hostile, adversarial, or provocative than their peers do (Dodge, 1993). These children also tend to hold more supportive beliefs about using violence and are less confident about using nonviolent strategies to resolve conflict (Bosworth et al., 1999). Not surprisingly, these students’ relationships with friends and family members tend to be fraught with conflict (Society for Research in Child Development, 2008).



Problem-solving also requires an evaluation of possible and likely consequences. Youngsters who are both bullies and victims tend to be emotionally volatile and to react aggressively before thinking through the consequences (Pelligrini, 2002).

Bullies may narrowly consider the positive short-term consequences of bullying for themselves, but are less likely to consider the negative consequences of their actions on others or on their own relationships over time (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001). Because of the potentially anonymous nature of cyberbullying, students may be even less likely to recognize and consider the effects that these actions will have on the victims.

Victims also often lack effective social problem-solving skills (Biggam & Power, 1999). Problem-solving strategies are 13 times more effective at de-escalating conflicts than are the aggressive, retaliatory, or emotionally reactive responses most frequently used by targeted children (Wilton et al., 2000). Even among victims who use a problem-solving strategy in response to bullying, the vast majority employ a passive strategy, such as avoiding, acquiescing to, or ignoring the bully, instead of a more effective assertive strategy, such as talking with others to find a solution or asking others for help (Wilton et al., 2000).

## Applying an SEL Framework to Bullying

To effectively reduce bullying behavior, schools need to provide students with instruction and practice in applying their SEL skills to a variety of bullying situations. An SEL framework provides a supportive foundation for these prevention efforts. Ttofi and Farrington (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 59 well-designed evaluations of bullying interventions to identify the specific features that had the greatest impact on decreasing bullying behavior and rates of victimization. They found that the most important components were parent training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, school conferences or assemblies that raised awareness of the problem, classroom rules against bullying, classroom management techniques for detecting and dealing with bullying, and the work of peers to help combat bullying.<sup>2</sup>

Building on these findings and other SEL research, the following strategies can help schools apply an SEL framework to bullying prevention.

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<sup>2</sup> While a bullying prevention curriculum is also generally believed to be an effective school-wide strategy, there were not sufficient studies to evaluate the effectiveness of specific classroom curricula.

## School-Wide Approaches

### Assessment

Schools need to conduct an assessment in order to determine how often bullying occurs, the forms it takes (e.g., sexual harassment, relational aggression, cyberbullying), where the incidents occur, and how students and adults respond to such incidents. Experts recommend conducting bullying assessments annually in the spring, after peer groups have formed in schools (Swearer, Espelage, Love, & Kingsbury, 2008). See “Selected Resources” at the end of this brief for sample assessments.

### Awareness and Training

All adults who oversee groups of children (staff and volunteers) need to be trained to respond to bullying incidents. School staff, students, and parents need to be aware of what bullying is, the various forms that it can take, the factors that put children at risk for victimization, the warning signs that a child has been victimized, and what they should do when bullying occurs. Adults and students need to examine their own beliefs about bullying and its causes and consequences.

Numerous helpful resources exist for developing this awareness. *Eyes on Bullying: What Can You Do?* (Storey & Slaby, 2008), for example, is a downloadable toolkit designed to help children and adults examine their beliefs about bullying, learn how to recognize and effectively respond to bullying both at the time of the incident and after it has ended, and take strategic steps to help prevent bullying from occurring. Additional resources can be found under “Selected Resources.”

### Rules and Reporting Procedures

When staff reach a consensus on what bullying is and agree to intervene to prevent and reduce it, rates of bullying can drop significantly (Wright, 2004). To help establish the moral climate of the school, school-wide rules prohibiting bullying need to be developed, with students as part of the process. The rules then need to be clearly communicated and distributed in writing (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Examples of rules a school might establish are as follows:

- *We will not bully others.*
- *We will try to help students who are bullied.*
- *We will include students who are easily left out.*
- *When we know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and at home* (West Regional Equity Network, 2008).

There is some evidence that children who frequently bully others are more morally disengaged and view bullying behavior as much more acceptable or justified (Hymel, Rocke-Henderson, & Bonanno, 2005). Clear standards of conduct that do not allow

bullying can help to decrease this disengagement among both students who bully others and bystanders who witness the acts.

Anonymous reporting procedures should also be established and communicated.

### **Discipline Policy**

The discipline policy should clearly indicate that bullying is not acceptable, specify the consequences for policy violations, and be consistently enforced.

However, according to Swearer et al. (2008), the traditional punitive and reactive responses to bullying, such as zero-tolerance policies and security equipment and personnel, often cause problem behaviors to *increase* rather than diminish. Such responses are also not effective ways to improve school climate or academic engagement.

The consequences for policy violations around bullying should instead include some form of remediation that helps students understand the incident and practice prosocial behaviors.

### **Adult Supervision**

As determined by the assessment, all areas where bullying tends to occur (e.g., hallways, cafeteria, playground) should be adequately monitored by adults.

### **Adult Models of Behavior**

Adults in the school need to model respectful and caring behavior toward students and one another, and demonstrate social problem-solving skills. For example, a principal who has lunch with a small group of students once a week demonstrates caring for the students on the part of the administration (and also promoted cohesiveness among the students by helping them learn more about one another).

Adults also need to model active bystander behavior by intervening quickly when bullying incidents occur and by not dismissing or minimizing bullying (Slaby, 2005).

### **Promoting Positive Peer Interactions**

Creating opportunities for students to interact with one another in cooperative, positive, and inclusive ways can help generate cohesion and compassion among students and encourage them to apply the SEL skills they have been taught. At times when adult supervision is less available, such as during recess, problem behaviors among students can be reduced by giving them access to a variety of games and sporting equipment, such as Frisbees, hula-hoops, and Bingo (Swearer et al., 2008).

During the transition from elementary to middle school, promoting ongoing and cooperative interactions among groups of students is especially important. Some schools have students remain in intact cohorts throughout the year to encourage and increase cohesion among the group (Pelligrini, 2002).

## Classroom Approaches

### Classroom Climate

Teachers play an enormously important role in setting the classroom climate. If aggressive norms become established and are not corrected, the students in these classrooms display more aggressive acts in future years (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). As Rodkin and Hodges (2003) state:

*Teachers lie just outside of the peer ecology and help shape, intentionally or unintentionally, the critical microsystems in which children at school interact. Successful teachers guide children toward higher levels of moral reasoning, show warmth, and anticipate interpersonal problems by knowing their students' social status, peer groups, friends and enemies (p. 391).*

Teachers need to establish respectful standards of conduct for interactions and take action when student norms support aggression. Teachers need to work with students to develop classroom rules for respectful interactions, and to hold periodic classroom meetings to discuss bullying.

Classroom activities and discussions that help change students' views about the "coolness" of bullying may represent an important strategy for reducing bullying (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). Because of their social power among peers, "high status" bullies can have a particularly negative impact on the overall classroom climate (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003)—and when the peer group norms favor bullying, aggressive acts among both boys and girls increase, particularly at the middle school level. However, if other students and adults disapprove of bullying, and this disapproval is reflected not only in the school rules but also in the established classroom climate, students may suffer a "social cost" when they bully, and may be less likely to do so (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001).

Teachers should model inclusive behaviors, making a special effort to reach out to peer-rejected and withdrawn students and to encourage students to be inclusive of their peers. There is evidence that when teachers are warm and caring to everyone, including aggressive and peer-rejected children, all students in the classroom are less rejecting of their peers (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). Peer-rejected children should have a valued and respected place in the classroom, for example, as an "expert" in some content or skill area or as a classroom assistant.

Teachers should work to promote caring learning communities through such strategies as class meetings, group celebrations, and cooperative group work (San Antonio & Salzfass, 2007).

## SEL Curricula and Activities

Helping children think about the harmful consequences of their bullying behaviors on others and on their own relationships may reduce these behaviors. Students need opportunities to practice their SEL skills by role-playing how to respond appropriately in bullying situations. For example, when learning about empathy, students can discuss what it feels like to be bullied and to watch an incident of bullying. They can practice effective responses to bullying situations and help-seeking behaviors for both victims and bystanders. Teachers can brainstorm with students how bystanders should behave, and then practice these actions in role-play situations. Teachers should then encourage students to apply what they are learning outside the classroom.

Giving children opportunities to practice effective helping behaviors can help them develop the confidence to intervene in bullying situations, as they are more likely to do so once they have done it successfully, even in a role play (Rigby & Johnson, 2004). Children who actively defend victims of bullying tend to feel more confident than their peers about how to help victims and how to do it effectively (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2008).

Likewise, prevention curricula are much more likely to significantly reduce rates of bullying and victimization when students have opportunities to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-life situations (Hirschstein, Edstrom, Frey, Snell, & MacKenzie, 2007). See “Selected Resources” for suggested classroom curricula and activities.

## Interventions

Beyond classroom curricula, students who are victimized, who witness bullying, or who regularly bully others need extended opportunities to practice relevant SEL skills, such as anger management, assertive communication, and social problem-solving. Pairing at-risk children with more well-adjusted and socially competent peers through a buddy system may help less socially and emotionally competent children develop these skills, and may also help protect at-risk children from further victimization (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003).

Schools also need to establish a support system for victims of bullying, as some may need therapeutic interventions to address their resulting psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety. Victimized children who are in pernicious bully-victim dyads with another child may benefit from the intervention of a school psychologist or social worker (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003).

## Parental Involvement

Since family interaction patterns can contribute to both bullying behavior and victimization, it’s important to help parents reflect on their own parenting styles and behavior, and to provide them with specific guidance on handling conflicts at home. Parents also need guidance on how to best encourage the adoption of prosocial values and promote social and emotional skill development.

In addition, since many victims are more likely to confide in their parents before other adults, parents need to be aware of what bullying is and what they should do at home and in concert with the school if their child is either a victim or a perpetrator of bullying. Schools can use awareness- and skills-building resources as a starting point for school-family dialogues about bullying.

## Summary

Bullying is a pervasive problem in many schools. Unfortunately, many attempts to reduce the problem—such as engaging bullies and victims in peer mediation, punishing bullies, telling victimized children to ignore the bullying or to work things out on their own (Merrell et al., 2008), inserting a few bullying prevention lessons in the curriculum, or adopting an anti-bullying policy without any of the needed supports—are not effective and are unlikely to have a lasting impact.

However, schools *can* take specific steps to improve the school climate and create more positive interactions among students. When schools embed bullying prevention efforts within an SEL framework, these efforts become a natural extension of the underlying SEL practices in the school and are more likely to succeed. By fostering an overall climate of inclusion, warmth, and respect, such schools can promote the development of core social and emotional skills in students and staff alike. Students with greater social and emotional competency are less likely to be aggressors, targets of bullying, or passive bystanders.

Just as bullying involves the entire school community, bullying prevention likewise requires the school community as a whole to get involved and take appropriate action. Schools that create a positive school-wide learning environment simply are not conducive to bullying, and these behaviors are much less likely to occur or continue.

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## Selected Resources

### **American Association of University Women**

This organization's free guide *Harassment-Free Hallways: How to Stop Sexual Harassment in Schools* provides background information on the problem; surveys for students to help them understand what sexual harassment is, if they've been victimized, and what they should do if they are harassed; and recommended actions for schools and parents to help prevent sexual harassment. <http://www.aauw.org/research/upload/completeguide.pdf>

### ***Bullying in Schools and What to Do About It***

This website by Dr. Ken Rigby provides background information on bullying, recommended approaches for schools to use, bullying assessment questionnaires, and articles about ways to help children become more active bystanders. <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/>

### ***CDC Violence Compendium***

This website offers a variety of downloadable assessment measures, many of which relate to bullying. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/measure.htm>

### **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**

CASEL's *Safe and Sound* guide (available at <http://www.casel.org/pub/safeandsound.php>) provides information on numerous outstanding SEL programs that can be expanded on and directly applied to bullying. Below are some programs that have specifically extended their SEL instruction to include bullying:

- ***Steps to Respect***: Using this Committee for Children program, the school establishes a school-wide framework of anti-bullying policies and procedures and determines consequences for bullying. Parents also receive materials about bullying. All school staff members are trained to work directly with children involved in bullying incidents. Classroom teachers deliver the lessons in the upper elementary grades (3–5 or 4–6). Children learn and practice bullying prevention skills, including how to recognize, refuse, and report bullying, and how to make friends. The website includes a sample lesson on bystander involvement that may be downloaded. <http://www.cfchildren.org/media/files/str%5Fms%5Flesson.pdf>
- ***Lions Quest***: This organization has prepared a bullying prevention document that summarizes how its programs address key elements of bullying prevention. It also offers an in-service workshop on bullying prevention for schools using its programs. <http://www.lions-quest.org/>

- **Responsive Classroom** (<http://responsiveclassroom.org>) and **Developmental Studies Center** (<http://www.devstu.org>): These websites offer books, activity guides, and curricula that promote positive and inclusive student interactions between students within the classroom and school-wide. The Developmental Studies Center Caring School Community program has been found to significantly reduce bullying in a large-scale evaluation.
- **Committee for Children:** This organization has developed a bullying report for teachers using the Steps to Respect program, which can also serve as a helpful checklist for teachers to evaluate their classroom bullying prevention practices. [http://www.cfchildren.org/media/files/str\\_sel\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.cfchildren.org/media/files/str_sel_checklist.pdf)  
The accompanying *Staff Preparedness Survey* is designed for teachers to assess how prepared they feel to deal with bullying. <http://www.cfchildren.org/media/files/STRStaffPrepSurvey.pdf>

### ***Eyes on Bullying***

This website offers information and activities on many bullying topics. Its downloadable toolkit, *Eyes on Bullying: What Can You Do?*, includes activities to help children and adults recognize and respond to bullying. <http://www.eyesonbullying.org>

### **Jim Wright**

School psychologist Jim Wright has prepared a free booklet for educators, titled *Preventing Classroom Bullying: What Teachers Can Do*, which lists concrete steps that schools and classroom teachers can take to educate students about bullying. Included are lesson ideas for having students practice assertive victim and bystander responses, recommended classroom rules, tips on confronting students about bullying, considerations for providing appropriate consequences, activities to determine bullying “hot spots,” and recommended strategies for promoting inclusive behaviors among students. <http://www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfdocs/bully/bullyBooklet.pdf>

### ***MindOH***

This website offers numerous resources on bullying, including Bullying Tips and Tools for teachers and parents, several “Thinking It Through” classroom lessons for students on bullying topics (e.g., teasing, bystander roles), tips for preventing cyberbullying, an entire lesson plan series, and parent-child activities on bullying. <http://www.mindoh.com/>

### **New Jersey Department of Education Model Policy**

This example of an anti-bullying policy lists factors to consider when determining consequences and appropriate remediation strategies, and suggests a range of individual, classroom, and school-wide responses to consider. <http://www.state.nj.us/education/parents/bully.pdf>



## ***Stop Bullying Now***

This U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website is directed toward children, with 12 bullying “webisodes,” surveys to help kids understand if they’re bullying others or are themselves a victim of bullying, and various other resources to help children understand what bullying is and the harm it does. <http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp?area=main>

## **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

This website offers a variety of helpful assessment tools, for example:

- *Inventory of Wrongful Activities*  
[http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/pdfs\\_bully/bully\\_supps\\_pg3.pdf](http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/pdfs_bully/bully_supps_pg3.pdf)
- *Handling of Bullying Staff Questionnaire*  
[http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/pdfs\\_bully/bully\\_supps\\_pg4.pdf](http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/pdfs_bully/bully_supps_pg4.pdf)

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