

Bullying Prevention Resource Guide

FOR SCHOOLS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Best Practices in Bullying Prevention & Intervention

In 2005, The Colorado Trust launched an \$8.6 million initiative to help schools, districts and nonprofit organizations in 32 counties throughout the state pursue diverse and distinctive strategies for curbing and preventing bullying among children and youth. Among the grantees were rural, suburban and inner-city schools and districts, and organizations ranging from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver to the Mountain Resource Council to the African Community Center.

In fall 2007, the evaluation team tracking the progress and impact of the initiative reported the following findings, based on surveys of more than 7,000 students and 1,500 teachers and other adults during 2006 and 2007:

Bullying can be prevented by changing the climate and culture of the school.

- 49% of sites participating in the initiative reported decreases in self-reported bullying perpetration, victimization or negative bystander behavior.
- 63% of participating sites reported increases in positive school climate/culture, and these improvements were associated with significantly reduced rates of bullying and reduced negative bystander behavior.

Lower levels of bullying and higher levels of positive school climate/culture are associated with higher levels of academic achievement.

- In schools ranking lowest (the bottom 25%) on indices of bullying perpetration, 74% of students scored proficient or better in math on state achievement tests – versus only 41% of students in schools that ranked highest (the top 25%) on indices of bullying perpetration.
- In schools that ranked highest on positive school climate, 78% of students scored at proficient or advanced in math – versus only 34% of students in schools that ranked lowest on positive school climate.

Program effectiveness is greatest when:

- Adults understand the extent of the bullying problem, and can distinguish bullying from other poor behavior
- Emphasis is placed on developing a positive climate and culture that does not support bullying, and promotes caring and concern for others
- Programs are coordinated and aligned so that clear messages about bullying become part of daily routines supported by adults and youth
- There is buy-in from administrators, staff and youth, coupled with an understanding of the importance of bullying prevention at all levels.

These findings – coupled with the diverse experiences and insights of grantees over the course of the BPI initiative, add to the growing knowledge base on “what works” in terms of bullying education, prevention and intervention.

EIGHT BEST PRACTICES

Based on research and observation, training and technical assistance for BPI participants, the following interrelated policies, strategies and investments as “best practices” in bullying prevention and intervention.

•Regularly assess the social climate in schools and other youth-centered environments.

Adults typically are unaware of the amount of bullying that students experience, the types of bullying that are most common, and when and where bullying occurs. An anonymous questionnaire given to students is a unique tool for probing into the social climate of the school that is typically visible only to them. It can yield vital information about when, where and how often bullying occurs; how children and youth feel about reporting bullying behavior to adults, and how they feel about other kids who report such information. Similar questionnaires given to teachers and/or the staff of youth-serving

organization will shed light on the extent to which adults' and kids' perceptions, behaviors and experiences with regard to bullying differ. Administered at the start of each school year and again in the spring, these climate surveys are a versatile tool for informing and guiding school/community bullying prevention efforts.

•Make bullying prevention an integral and permanent component of the school environment.

Anti-bullying themes, messages and rituals should be incorporated into school programs and activities. Teachers (with the support of administrators) should set aside 20-30 minutes each week, or every other week, to discuss bullying and peer relations with students. These meetings help teachers to keep their fingers on the pulse of students' concerns, allow time for candid discussions about bullying and the harm it can cause, and provide tools for students to address bullying problems. Anti-bullying messages and strategies should also be incorporated into youth-related activities in the community, including recreational activities, scouting and after-school programs.

•Establish and enforce school rules and policies related to bullying.

Although many school behavior codes implicitly forbid bullying, few use the term or make explicit the school's expectations for student behavior. It is important to make clear that the school not only expects students not to bully, but also to be good citizens, not passive bystanders. Developing simple, clear rules about bullying can help ensure that students are aware of adults' expectations that they refrain from bullying and help students who are bullied. School rules should be posted and discussed with students and parents. Appropriate positive and negative consequences also should be developed for following or not following the school's rules. To download a model bullying prevention policy and a sample "hierarchy of consequences," [click here](#).

•Provide ongoing training for school staff, and increase adult supervision in locations identified as "hot spots" for bullying.

Administrators, teachers, coaches, bus drivers, cafeteria workers and other adults should receive training to help them better understand the nature, dynamics and impact of bullying; how to respond when they observe bullying or it is reported to them; and how to work with others at the school to curb and prevent bullying. Designated staff should hold follow-up meetings with children who are bullied and, separately, with children who bully. The parents of affected students should be involved whenever possible. Teachers and other school staff should be assigned to monitor hallways, playgrounds, bathrooms and other locations identified by students as "hot spots" for bullying.

•Form a team responsible for coordinating bullying prevention efforts.

The formation of an inclusive leadership team sends a strong message that bullying is a problem that must be addressed in partnership. The effectiveness of the team is enhanced when there is as much balance as possible in roles. The 10- to 12-member team should include a school/district administrator; a teacher from every grade level; parents and students; a counselor, school nurse or mental health professional; and community or neighborhood representatives. The group should meet regularly, and be led by a committed chairperson with strong organizational skills and an ability to facilitate discussion, problem solving and decisionmaking.

•Garner the support of school staff, parents and other key partners.

A defining characteristic of successful prevention and intervention strategies is a strong sense of partnership among school/district staff, families and the broader community. The more time and energy invested in outreach, communication and partnership building over the course of a bullying prevention initiative – and particularly early on – the less likely it is to falter at some point, if not fizzle out altogether. A lack of buy-in among key stakeholders can be a major stumbling block to change and improvement, as evidenced by problems such as resistance on the part of teachers to dedicating class time to bullying prevention; conflict over, or outright opposition to, new policies and practices; and failure to develop a leadership team capable of advancing school/community bullying prevention efforts.

•Give young people an active and meaningful role in bullying prevention efforts.

Solicit and take into consideration all students' ideas, opinions and feedback. Older students should be involved as both participants and leaders in planning, implementation, partnership building and other key activities. Keep in mind that the great majority of kids are neither perpetrators nor victims of bullying, but many witness it on a regular basis. Consideration of these students is crucial to the development of a strong anti-bullying plan because they are the majority, and they are the students who are most likely to be won over to creating change. Prevention and intervention strategies should focus on increasing empathy and support for those who are victimized by bullying, raising awareness of individual responsibilities, and encouraging action by the majority of children who do not approve of bullying.

•Develop cultural competency strategies, skills and programs that are inclusive and enhance communication and relationship building.

Cultural competency is an ongoing process and practice that builds the capacity of individuals and institutions to develop a climate that understands, accepts and respects the unique contributions of all people, regardless of ability, age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographic region, health, language, mental health, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or spirituality. Assessing and managing bullying prevention programming through the lens of cultural competency will help identify the work that needs to be done to create a healthier social climate in schools and other youth-centered environments. Unfortunately, cultural competency is the most neglected area of research in the bullying prevention field, and many prevention and intervention models do not address cultural competency appropriately, or at all. For a list of resources useful in addressing this complex and challenging issue, [click here](#).

This online guide was produced by the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children and the Colorado Springs Assets for Youth as part of their services to support The Colorado Trust's Bullying Prevention initiative.

