

BULLYING

In support of *This We Believe* characteristic:

- An inviting, supportive, and safe environment

Bullying is the repeated and ongoing negative action toward one or more students (Olweus, 1993). These negative actions can be direct, as in verbal or physical contact, facial or other body gestures, or indirect, as in the intentional exclusion or refusal to comply with another person's wishes. Bullying occurs when the victim, typically someone viewed as powerless and not retaliatory, is sought out by another, who is characteristically seen as physically powerful or dominant (Rigby, 2002). Hence, bullying may be simply defined as the act of constant aggression toward another individual who lacks the same power.

Who Are the Victims of Bullying?

- International and national studies indicate that between 9% and 15% of any student population is a victim of bullying (Horowitz et al., 2004; Malecki, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2002).
- A U.S. study of more than 15,000 sixth to tenth grade students indicated that 10.6% were victims of bullying (Nansel et al., 2001).
- Researchers have found that bullying among adolescents at the middle school level is extensive (Malecki, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 2002).
- Most victims are identified as physically and socially weaker than their peers (Olweus, 1993).
- Even though boys and girls are equally at risk of being bullied, several studies report that middle school boys are more often victimized (Olweus, 2003; Shakeshaft et al., 1997).
- Passive victims exhibit reclusive and introverted mannerisms while provocative victims may appear hyperactive, lack concentration, and generally tend to irritate others. Although it may appear that the provocative victim is aggressive, this individual is typically overpowered by the bully and ultimately becomes the victim in the end (National Middle School Association (NMSA), 2001).
- Olweus (1993) reported that victims of bullying "often look at themselves as failures and feel stupid, ashamed, and unattractive" (p. 32).

- Many adolescents think that teasing, name-calling, shoving, and other harmful actions are just playful pranks (Shakeshaft et al., 1997). This mindset may be reinforced by the adults in their lives.
- Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) reported that some adults maintain a belief that students must learn to deal with bullies by themselves (i.e., tough it out). Negative feelings, combined with a mixed array of changes in their bodies, their relationships with their peers and adults, and their emotions increase the risk factors associated with adolescence.

What Coping Mechanisms Are Used by Victims of Bullying?

- Depression, isolation, low self-esteem, lack of hope, fear, insecurity, and violent or self-destructive behavior are just a few of the mannerisms evident in victims of bullying (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993).
- Victims of bullying often avoid hallways, restrooms, and even switch schools in an effort to distance themselves from other students (NMSA, 2001). Instead of being visible to others, they will "hang out" in the office, other classrooms, or a secret corner during lunch and break time.
- Some students will create a map of safe havens and plan a circuitous route through school to escape being victimized (Wessler, 2003).
- Most victims will not report incidence of bullying (Shakeshaft et al., 1997).
- Aggressive victims will internalize the continuous victimization until they can no longer cope. Once they have reached their limit, they resort to violence (i.e., shooting a gun, starting a fire, or becoming bullies themselves). Others may choose self-destructive behaviors such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or taking drugs (Olweus, 1993).



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How Can Educators Instill Resiliency-Building Strategies in Victims of Bullying?

To help middle school victims of bullying break the cycle of despair, it is imperative that the adults in these children's lives take action. Olweus (1993) reiterates this point: "The attitudes, routines, and behaviors of the school personnel, particularly those of the teachers, are decisive factors in preventing and controlling bullying activities, as well as in redirecting such behaviors into more socially acceptable channels" (p. 46). School-wide intervention programs led by caring adults with high expectations and an actively engaging curriculum that includes meaningful literature, collaborative learning, and service learning activities are specific strategies that appear to foster resiliency in victims of bullying.

School-wide intervention programs such as the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, *Bully Busters* (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004), *Life Skills Training*, *Promoting Alternative Things Strategies* (PATHS), and the *Incredible Years* have been used to decrease bullying incidents and improve the social climate of schools (Olweus, 1993). These programs advocate the implementation of school policies that include astute observation, clear communication, and consistent protection. Furthermore, researchers assert that changing school culture requires the active involvement of teachers, administrators, support staff, and volunteers (Cooper & Snell, 2003; Garbarino & deLara, 2003; Shakeshaft et al., 1997). Every adult must make a commitment toward eradicating incidents of bullying.

High expectations and caring relationships build resiliency in youth (Benard, 2004). By increasing pro-social bonding, establishing and clearly communicating consistent boundaries, teaching life skills, providing care

and support, and offering opportunities for meaningful participation, school personnel can foster support and resiliency for youth in need (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Additionally, teachers who notice student interactions and respond immediately to inappropriate behavior (Wessler, 2003), and those who listen carefully and respond thoughtfully, while simultaneously challenging student thinking, demonstrate high expectations in a culture of care (Benard, 2004).

An actively engaging curriculum that includes meaningful literature, collaborative learning, and service learning fosters resiliency-building in victims of bullying. Connecting the curriculum to student lives promotes in-depth discussion through critical and compassionate thinking (Quinn et al., 2003). Furthermore, Oliver, Young, and LaSalle (1994) advocate the use of quality literature that incorporates coping and problem solving strategies. By identifying with literary characters' experiences, victims of bullying can relate these events to their own lives (Quinn et al, 2003). Since peers are probably the greatest asset for middle school youth, drawing upon this resource is vital for empowering victims of bullying (NMSA, 2001). Collaborative learning can be a successful strategy for "reconnecting disruptive and alienated students" (Benard, 2004, p. 71). Changes in self-esteem, peer perception, and individual social status can lead to a feeling of school connectedness and positive peer relationships—protective factors that can be fostered in every middle school student (Benard, 2004). Service learning is also acknowledged as an effective method that supports empowerment, engagement, and the development of community (Benard, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000). With each of these protective factors in place, no student is left on the fringe.

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ANNOTATED REFERENCES

Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here? *School Psychology Review, 32*(3), 365-383.

The authors reviewed more than 10 years of research on bullying in U.S. schools and provided an analysis of its relationship to prevention and intervention. They identified four insights: 1) Generating a single comprehensive definition and assessment methodology for bullying and peer victimization is difficult. However, most authors agree that bullying includes ongoing physical and/or verbal aggression by one or more individuals who hope to attain dominance, status, or property. 2) A wide range of bully-victim behaviors or roles are present. This includes a bully, a victim, a bully-victim, and/or a bystander. 3) Relational aggression and its association to relational victimization is complex. In other words, research has shown that bullying is evident in both sexes. Although, overt aggression (physical and verbal) is most often expressed by boys and covert aggression (e.g., gossiping and trying to damage friendships and feelings) is mostly expressed by girls, research studies indicate contradictory findings in regard to relational aggression. Therefore, the authors suggest that future research should address relational aggression and victimization. 4) Many social and ecological factors, including peers, families, schools, and communities, contribute to incidents of bullying and peer victimization. The authors conclude that although much has been learned in the past, additional research should address developmental differences over time, as well as social system influences on bullying.

California Department of Education. (2003). *Bullying at school*. Sacramento, CA: Author.

This comprehensive report was developed by the Counseling and Student Support Office within the California Department of Education. It was designed to help schools identify bullying and other aggressive behaviors as well as assist communities in developing and implementing effective strategies for creating safe schools. This document encourages schools to recognize the link between bullying, victimization, and other forms of school violence and implores school staff and communities to use research-based methods to respond to incidents of bullying. The appendix includes sample surveys that schools can use to assess potential bias and aggressive behavior. Specific strategies for prevention are designed to help administrators, teachers, students, and parents work collectively and take action. Implementing a school policy, allowing time for discussion, and reporting and responding to incidents of bullying immediately are just a few prevention measures that are offered. Suggestions for working with perpetrators to alter negative behavior and supporting and protecting targets of bias or hate are included. A detailed reference list provides additional resources.



ANNOTATED REFERENCES *(continued)*

Henkin, R. (2005). *Confronting bullying: Literacy as a tool for character education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

This book is based upon the author's personal research derived from classroom observations, student writings, and writers' workshops. An advocate of critical literacy, Henkin believes that middle school students make meaning through their experiences with reading and writing, which may result in a "better and safer world." Henkin draws attention to the severity of bullying in American schools through a plethora of startling statistics. However, she does not stop there. Henkin describes two model classrooms that use this approach and also provides practical suggestions for cultivating safe schools. Henkin believes that through critical reading and writing, schools will notice a decrease in bullying, and an increase in literacy skills. Through in-depth discussions about literature on the topics of aggression and harassment combined with writing assignments designed toward reflective and personal insight students learn about trust, tolerance, and respect. Additional resources include detailed lessons, Web links, and an annotated bibliography of children's literature.

Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285(16), 2094-2100.

This study analyzes the data derived from a national survey supported by The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The Health Behavior of School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey was given to 15,686 youth in grades 6-10 in public and private schools throughout the United States in 1998. Because the majority of bullying research had been conducted in other countries and little was known about it in this country, Nansel and associates initiated this study to determine the prevalence of bullying in the U.S. The sample consisted of students stratified by racial/ethnic background as well as geographic region and metropolitan statistical area status. These measures ensured an oversample of black, Hispanic students, and students residing in large urban/not large urban areas. A self-reported questionnaire included questions about bullying and psychosocial correlates. Results and conclusions confirm the serious prevalence of bullying in the U.S. One finding of note: bullying occurred with greater frequency among middle school-aged youth than among high school-aged youth. The researchers suggest that prevention and intervention rely upon a strong understanding of environmental factors that can promote and impede bullying behavior and aggression.

Pellegrini, A. S., Bartini, M., & Brooks, F. (1999). School bullies, victims, and aggressive victims. Factors relating to group affiliation and victimization in early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91(2), 216-224.

Pellegrini and associates examined the occurrence of bullying, victimization, and aggressive victimization during early adolescence. The sample population included more than 100 fifth grade students from five schools in northeast Georgia. Results from several student questionnaires and teacher checklists addressed the four research questions related to: incidence of bullying, relations with others, peer-group affiliation, and protective factors. Key findings indicated that there were more victims than bullies among the sample population; bullies are emotional, physical, and find friendships with other bullies; and peer friendships are important protective factors. One of the suggestions for future research, school policy, and intervention is addressing teacher and administration attitudes and propensities toward aggression and victimization (i.e., Does the action and inaction of adults on campus encourage or discourage aggressive behavior?).

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2005). *A visit to one school's bullying prevention program* (videotape or DVD and viewing guide). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

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Quinn, K. B., Barone, B., Kearns, J., Stackhouse, S. A., & Zimmerman, M. E. (2003). Using a novel unit to help understand and prevent bullying in schools. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 48(7), 582-591.

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National Middle School Association (NMSA) produces research summaries as a service to middle level educators, families and communities, and policymakers. The concepts covered in each research summary reflect one or more of the characteristics of successful middle schools as detailed in the NMSA position paper, *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*. Further research on each topic is available in the book *Research and Resources in Support of This We Believe*. Both books are available at the NMSA online store at www.nmsa.org

