

# Bullying Prevention in Out-of-School and Afterschool Settings

This guide, produced by Center for Safe Schools and Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (PSAYDN), was originally developed with funding provided by the Highmark Foundation. It was informed by research and the perspectives of youth development and bullying prevention practitioners and updated in 2023 to reflect current best practices and research.

## What is bullying?

Bullying is a form of intentional negative behavior directed at another person who has a difficult time defending himself or herself.<sup>1</sup> The child who bullies may be stronger, more popular or hold some type of power over the child who is bullied.

### Three-component definition of bullying:

- It involves an intentional negative behavior.
- The behavior may be repeated over time.
- It involves an imbalance of power or strength, which can be real or perceived.

Bullying can be physical or verbal and may involve manipulation of social relationships. This latter type of bullying, a form of relational aggression,<sup>2</sup> tends to manifest differently in males and females. Among girls, relational aggression often takes the form of deliberate exclusion or rumors.<sup>3</sup> Among boys, this type of aggression often draws attention to a student's perceived masculinity or sexual orientation.<sup>4,5</sup>

Cyberbullying is "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices".<sup>6</sup> While cyberbullying is of increasing concern, face-to-face bullying is much more common and many instances of online bullying include an element of face-to-face aggression.<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, it is important for out-of-school time (OST) programs to implement proven strategies to prevent and address face-to-face bullying and supplement those strategies with education related to cyberbullying.

Afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) programs are in a position to address bullying because they offer activities and relationships that can assist students in developing important life skills. According to the Afterschool Alliance, afterschool programs "provide access to caring adults and offer a more informal environment that is distinct from the school day." Such settings may allow children to feel safe from peer pressure, build confidence and learn how to deal with bullying.<sup>20</sup> Yet, in order for OST programs to effectively prevent and address bullying, OST leaders need to be knowledgeable about the issue and implement specific strategies.





## How should OST programs address bullying?

OST programs can prevent and address bullying by adopting strategies that emphasize the role of these programs in providing safe environments, building healthy relationships and promoting youth development.

Establishing a safe environment for youth involves a combination of strategies grounded in sound policy, staff training and intervention when bullying is suspected.

By providing a caring staff that is effective in intervening in bullying situations, OST programs demonstrate to youth that bullying behaviors will not be tolerated. Because bullying resembles other forms of aggression and often goes undetected, it is important that staff be trained in how to recognize bullying, how to support students who are targeted, and how to implement OST policies related to bullying and peer aggression. It is important that OST staff address all forms of peer aggression, even acts that do not meet the definition of bullying.

At its core, bullying prevention is about nurturing healthy relationships among children and youth. Research suggests that children are less likely to become victims of bullying when they have higher perceived levels of social support from teacher, parents, peers and close friends.<sup>12, 18</sup>

Out-of-school time programs offer smaller, more intimate settings for building positive relationships among children and youth and with adults. By engaging youth in planned activities that focus on teamwork, identifying each other's strengths and supporting one another, OST programs can play an important role in supporting healthy relationships among youth. Activities that focus on building youth relationships "ensure that students develop a strong network of friends," a protective factor in students' lives.<sup>2</sup>

While safety and positive relationships are important components of students' OST experiences, it is also critical for OST programs to implement youth development strategies that address bystanders' responses to bullying. According to experts in bullying prevention, the reaction of bystanders to peer aggression can play a critical role in determining if bullying will persist.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is essential for OST providers to develop expectations for how youth will respond when they witness aggression from others and engage youth in building a climate of support.

Children and youth can work together to promote a safe and supportive community through service activities that have an anti-violence or anti-bullying message and through outreach to younger youth. This type of community service "cultivates empathy, improves self-esteem and promotes positive attitudes".<sup>2</sup>

## Is bullying really a problem?

When it comes to bullying, statistics tell the story. According to federal data sources, approximately one in five students report being bullied. Approximately 46% of students ages 12-18 who were bullied during the school year notified an adult at school about the bullying.<sup>8</sup>

According to National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) students 12-18 report that being the subject of rumors, being made fun of, or called names were the most common types of bullying behavior that occurred. Of students reports of bullying, the majority occurred at school or on school grounds. Only 16% of bullying reports were reported to be online or via text.<sup>9</sup>

Studies in health and youth development emphasize the importance of attending to bullying issues. This research suggests that youth who are involved in bullying are more likely to experience mental health symptoms<sup>10, 11</sup> and suicidal ideation<sup>12</sup> than students who are not directly involved.

Targets of bullying can suffer socially and academically, due to the potential effects of bullying on self-esteem and school attendance.<sup>13</sup> Children who bully others are more likely to engage in anti-social or risky behaviors than non-bullying peers.<sup>14, 15, 16, 17</sup>

**"Beneficial programs across the country are aiding in the fight against bullying and teaching children that aggressive and detrimental behaviors are not something to be taken lightly".<sup>2</sup>**

# Elements of Bullying Prevention in OST Settings

1

Adopt bullying prevention policies that define bullying and cyberbullying; address reporting procedures for students, parents and staff; and identify prevention and interventions strategies that will be consistently used by program staff.

5

Teach social and emotional skills and active bystander skills, relying on evidence-based programs and practices when available.

2

Train staff on how to recognize bullying, how to have proactive conversations with students about bullying and peer relationships and how to intervene when staff witness any form of peer aggression.

6

Engage students in activities and service projects that reinforce social justice themes and peacemaking skills.

3

Use surveys or focus groups to determine the nature, prevalence and location of bullying issues in the out-of-school setting. Implement strategies to address common forms of bullying and ensure that staff are assigned to monitor trouble spots.

7

Involve parents proactively and responsively. Parents often look to schools and youth-serving organizations for information about bullying and related issues. Provide this information in a variety of formats. Make sure parents are aware of the program's policy of notifying parents of suspected bullying and available supports for children and families.

4

Implement follow-up procedures and supports for students involved in bullying. Follow-up conversations should reinforce adults' concern for students' safety and the program's expectations for student conduct. Programs should seek additional intervention or support for children that are involved in bullying situations when emotional or behavioral problems are persistent or severe.

8

Monitor bullying prevention practices over time to ensure strategies and interventions are having the desired effect.

## References

- 1 Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- 2 Dellasega, C., & Nixon, C. (2003). *Girl wars: 12 strategies that will end female bullying*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- 3 Wiseman, R. (2009). *Queen bees & wannabees: Helping your daughter survive cliques, gossip, boyfriends, and the new realities of girl world*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- 4 Pollack, W.S. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Owl Books.
- 5 Swearer, S.M., Turner, R.K., Givens, J.E., & Pollack, W.S. (2008). "You're so gay!": Do different forms of bullying matter for adolescent males? *School Psychology Review*, 37, 160-173.
- 6 Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J.W. (2009). *Bullying: Beyond the schoolyard*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- 7 Olweus, D. (2012). Cyberbullying: An overrated phenomenon? *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 1-19.
- 8 StopBullying.gov. Retrieved from: Research on Bullying: [https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts#\\_Bullying\\_Research](https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts#_Bullying_Research)
- 9 National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *Bullying at School and Electronic Bullying*. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved Jan. 23, 2024, from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/a10>.
- 10 Tofi, M.M., & Farrington, D.P. (2008). Bullying: Short-term and long-term effects, and the importance of defiance theory in explanation and prevention. *Victims and Offenders*, 3, 289-312.
- 11 Rigby, K. (2000). Effects of peer victimization in schools and perceived social support on adolescent well-being. *Journal of Adolescence*, 23, 57-68.
- 11 Bulach, C., Fulbright, J.P., & Williams, R. (2003). Bullying behavior: What is the potential for violence in your school? *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 30, 156-164.
- 12 Buhs, E.S., Ladd, G.W., & Herald, S.L. (2006). Peer exclusion and victimization: Processes that mediate the relation between peer group rejection and children's classroom engagement and achievement? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98, 1-13.
- 13 Nansel, T.R., Overpeck, M.D., Pilla, R.S., Ruan, W.J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P.C. (2001). Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, 2094-2100.
- 14 Gordon, M.S., Kinlock, T.W., & Battjes, R.J. (2004). Correlates of early substance use and crime among adolescents entering outpatient substance abuse treatment. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 30, 39-59.
- 15 Herrenkohl, T.I., Catalano, R.F., Hemphill, S.A., & Toumbourou, J.W. (2009). Longitudinal examination of physical and relational aggression as precursors to later problem behaviors in adolescents. *Violence and Victims*, 24, 3-19.
- 16 Griffin, R.S., & Gross, A.M. (2004). Childhood bullying: Current empirical findings and future directions for research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 9, 379-400.
- 17 Jenkins, L.N., & Demaray, M.K. (2012). Social support and self-concept in relation to peer victimization and peer aggression. *Journal of School Violence*, 11, 56-74.
- 18 Jenkins, L.N., & Demaray, M.K. (2012). Social support and self-concept in relation to peer victimization and peer aggression. *Journal of School Violence*, 11, 56-74.
- 19 Polanin, J.R., Espelage, D.L., & Pigott, T.D. (2012). A meta-analysis of school-based bullying prevention programs' effects on bystander intervention behavior. *School Psychology Review*, 41, 47-65.
- 20 Afterschool Alliance. (2011). *After-school: A Strategy for Addressing and Preventing Middle School Bullying*: Issue Brief No. 51. Retrieved July 19, 2013. [http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue\\_51\\_bullying.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_51_bullying.cfm)



Visit [CenterForSafeSchools.org](https://www.CenterForSafeSchools.org) for bullying prevention resources and services.

Center for Safe Schools is an initiative of Center for Schools and Communities,  
a division of Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit  
275 Grandview Ave., Suite 200, Camp Hill, PA 17011 • 717-763-1661 • [Info@CenterForSafeSchools.org](mailto:Info@CenterForSafeSchools.org)  
[CenterForSafeSchools.org](https://www.CenterForSafeSchools.org)