

Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Changing bystander behavior is key, according to the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

by Mark Katz, PhD

Parents, educators. healthcare providers and well-informed consumers are finding creative ways to address the needs and daily challenges of those who struggle with AD/HD. In each issue of Attention, we highlight one innovative program, model, or practice and pass on appropriate contacts so you can implement similar efforts in your community. Appearance in this column, however, does not imply endorsement by CHADD.

WHILE EXPERTS HAVE BEEN WARNING US for

some time about the serious long-term emotional, physical, and academic effects of bullying on defenseless school-age children, some school administrators still refuse to take bullying seriously. And of those who do, says Marlene Snyder, PhD, some look to well-intentioned but misdirected remedies, among them, conflict resolution or peer mediation programs.

"In bullying situations, there's no conflict to resolve or problem to mediate. Bullying is peer on peer abuse, plain and simple," says Snyder, a research associate professor at Clemson University's Institute of Family and Neighborhood Life and a former CHADD board member. "It's one child with power harming another child who is powerless to do anything about it. And the effects can be devastating."

Bullying incidents can be reduced or prevented, Snyder says, but several things need to occur. First, attitudes have to change. School administrators, teachers, children, parents and others in the school community need to start treating bullying as a serious problem that won't be tolerated and won't be ignored. Next, students and staff have to be provided with the tools they'll need to create a school culture that provides a safe and suc-

FOUR ANTI-BULLYING RULES

Bullying and other forms of hurtful behavior usually begins to decrease soon after administrators, teachers, students, parents, school bus drivers and others who work in and around a school campus start to model OBPP's four universal behavioral principles.

1. We will not bully others.

As part of the training process, students and staff learn how to distinguish bullying from horseplay, good-natured teasing, disagreements, conflicts with a classmate, or physical fighting. As defined by OBPP, "Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has a hard time defending himself for herself." It's aggressive in nature, persists over time, and represents an imbalance in power or strength. Students and staff also learn that bullying can be either direct (physical bullying, name calling, taunting), or indirect (social exclusion, vicious rumors, cyberbullying).

2. We will try to help students who are bullied.

Changing bystander behavior is key to preventing and reducing bullying. Students and staff learn how to intervene to help a child in danger, or if it's unsafe to do so, how to speak up so that others can intervene. OBPP views bullying as peer on peer abuse. Just as

there are strong sanctions against other forms of abuse, OBPP proponents believe there must be strong sanctions against peer abuse.

3. We will include students who are left out.

Just as direct forms of bullying are not tolerated, neither are indirect forms, among them intentionally excluding others, spreading vicious rumors, and threatening or intimidating others through the Internet, text messages, or social networking websites. Safe schools are schools where every student has a right to feel that he or she belongs.

4. If we know that somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult at school and an adult at home.

Through initial trainings and follow-up coaching, schools and families become very familiar with OBPP's "bullying circle," and the science of bystander behavior.

It is important to note that there are a number of roles children may choose to play, that roles change, and that children can learn to choose to play positive roles rather than negative roles. As students and staff become increasingly aware of the different roles that bystanders play when witnessing or suspecting bullying, many begin to take a stand against it. The OBPP training process also strongly encourages this positive change in bystander behavior, which is key to creating the desired cultural shift toward safety and away from bullying and other forms of hurtful behavior.

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cessful learning environment for all children, regardless of how they learn. Then, when practices are in place and desired outcomes are finally achieved, a process will be needed for sustaining these changes over the long term. Snyder cites the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) as an example of how it can be done.

Perhaps the best known and most empirically validated model of its kind, the program weaves together schoolwide, classroom, individual, and community practices. Research shows that these four interlocking components, when replicated as designed, reduce incidents of bullying on and around the school campus. Social norms about bullying change; teachers, students and others in the school community learn how to spot danger and intervene early; and together all engage in a process

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that sustains bullying prevention practices over the long haul.

"When it comes to preventing bullying, short-term fixes (such as a single school assembly) don't work," says Snyder. "Change has to occur system-wide, and practices have to be sustained." Snyder currently serves as OBPP's national development coordinator and has been instrumental in bringing the program to schools and communities throughout the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Africa.

Before rolling out OBPP, students complete the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, an anonymous survey that provides school administrators, educators, staff, and parents with important information: where bullying is occurring, or campus "hot spots"; which children are being bullied and how often; whether or not these children have reached out for help; if so, whether help was forthcoming; and where other students lie on the bullying circle. The questionnaire is then repeated yearly to help assess the program's effectiveness and ongoing coaching needs.

Schoolwide, Classroom, Individual, and Community Components

At the schoolwide level, a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee (BPCC) is formed, comprised of eight to twelve mem-

bers and typically including the principal, teachers from each grade level, parents, and other community stakeholders. The BPCC assumes leadership and oversight functions. Members participate in a two-day OBPP training that prepares them to then train and coach school staff. The committee helps determine school policies against bullying, administers the Olweus Questionnaire and interprets results for staff and families, schedules ongoing OBPP school meetings and discussion groups, and assures that parents are actively involved in the program.

At the classroom level, teachers are trained on how to hold regular class meetings with students to promote and model the four universal behavioral principles, which are prominently posted in all classrooms. During class meetings, students also participate in role-playing in which they practice ways to handle a bullying incident should they see one occurring.

On the individual level, efforts are made to insure a sense of safety for any child fearing reprisal should he or she choose to come forward to report being bullied. Children who report being bullied by others are interviewed to determine the extent of the bullying they have endured. They are helped to find safe, supportive classmates and work with a responsible adult to determine a plan

to ensure their safety while at school. Parents of children who are being bullied often know of their child's problems before school personnel. Teachers and administrators work together with the parents to support the child and to get the bullying to stop.

Individual practices also target the actions of the child who bullies others. The message given is that bullying behavior won't be tolerated, and predetermined consequences will be strictly enforced. Parents are involved in the process here as well, collaborating with school staff on ways to prevent their child from bullying other children in the future.

Researchers say that individual intervention practices alone, no matter how intensive, won't prevent bullying. But in the context of schoolwide and classroom practices, where norms against bullying have been established and children and adults get involved rather than turn away, individual practices add another important source of protection and accountability.

At the community level, schools work closely with local health care agencies, police departments, business leaders or other community stakeholders interested in helping neighborhood schools prevent bullying and other forms of violent and aggressive behavior.

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OBPP is recognized as a model program by several national organizations, including the Colorado Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). OBPP has also received recognition from the U.S. Department of Education and the American Academy of Pediatrics, and received CHADD's 2009 Innovative Program of the Year award. The program is currently being implemented in over five thousand schools in 45 states. Those interested in learning more about OBPP are encouraged to visit its website at olweus.org, and Snyder can be reached via e-mail at nobully@clemson.edu.

Learn more about research-validated bullying prevention practices at stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov, the website for the Stop Bullying Now! campaign sponsored by the Health Resources and Services Administration division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The largest and most comprehensive public health effort of its kind to date, the federally funded campaign provides a toolkit of research-validated bullying prevention practices, all free of charge. The website also features a series of "webisodes," animated stories involving a cast of middle-school characters confronting bullying situations at school. With the help of teachers and parents, the characters find support from their fellow students, who make it clear that "bullying is not cool." **Q**