

Bullying, Violence, And Abuse Prevention In Schools ~ Recommended Actions And Policies

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Bullying in schools is a problem that can grow without adult attention and proactive guidance. To create a safer school community, you can:

1. Make a commitment

Most violence, abuse, and bullying in schools can be prevented or stopped quickly if school communities make a strong commitment that all people in their schools have the right to feel safe from physical and emotional attack. This means that the school makes and enforces a clear policy that behavior that is threatening, harassing, bullying or dangerous is against the rules. People who feel threatened, upset, or endangered by someone's behavior have both the right and the responsibility to speak up. Mechanisms that are clearly understood by everyone are put into place to deal with problems that come up in a fair, open, and effective fashion.

2. Make sure everyone understands what the rules are

Post rules and send them home. For example, at the beginning of each school year, a letter can go home to parents telling them to talk with their children about the school's Violence and Abuse Prevention Policy. Even younger children can be told, "We expect you to be safe at school. If anything ever happens that makes you feel unsafe or unhappy, we want you to go to a teacher for help right away and to tell us as soon as you can. We also expect you to act in ways that are safe and respectful to other people. If you or the school tell us that you have been mean to someone, we will work together to help you figure out how to solve problems with people in ways that don't hurt or scare anybody."

3. Have a safety plan about weapons

Because weapons create an extra risk of harm, everyone needs to clearly understand what to do if a weapon is present. Tell students to get up and leave a situation right away if they see a weapon. Tell them to get help immediately from an adult at the school and to tell their parents. If they are being threatened with a weapon, tell them to give the person threatening them whatever property that person wants, and to calm the situation down by saying whatever the person wants them to say, even if it's very upsetting and untrue. Once they are safely out of the situation, tell children to go to an adult they can trust to protect them and to stay with that adult until they are with their parents. There must be clear enforced penalties for students who bring weapons to school or who make threats.

4. Provide supervision

Ensure that students are supervised in ways that uphold the school's commitment to stop violence and abuse and that enforce clear consequences for unsafe behavior. Bullying in schools can escalate without adequate adult supervision.

5. Protect students who ask for help dealing with violence or bullying in schools

If a serious incident occurs, it is the school's responsibility to make sure that the student who came for help is protected from any threats or other repercussions. All parties involved in the incident and their friends should be closely supervised to ensure that no threats are made to student who reports a problem.

6. Be proactive in addressing violence or bullying in schools

The principal should contact the parents of all students involved and meet with all parties separately or together. Sometimes a counselor might be asked to facilitate a meeting to create a safe place to air feelings and then figure out how to use this incident as an opportunity to learn and grow. All of the people in the school community should be informed about what happened and about what steps are being taken to address the situation.

7. Treat Incidents as Learning Opportunities

When situations involving bullying in schools occur, teachers should be given guidance in how to discuss what happened in their classrooms in ways that are clear and educational rather than scary. They can use this as an opportunity to discuss the school's Violence and Abuse Prevention Policy.

8. Provide training

Teach students, teachers, and parents skills on how to set boundaries and handle conflict and ventilate upset feelings without using threatening or abusive language and without using physical violence. The most effective programs are like Kidpower and Teenpower because they give students the chance to be successful in rehearsing effective strategies for dealing with violence, bullying, abuse, and harassment. Upbeat effective programs that incorporate age-appropriate practice should be part of every school's program.

Sample School Violence and Harassment Prevention Policy For Students

Our commitment is to ensure an emotionally and physically safe environment in our school community. We will do our best to stop any behavior that is threatening, harassing, bullying, or dangerous. If any student, parent, or staff member feels threatened, upset, or endangered by someone's behavior, that person has both the right and the responsibility to speak up.

Our goal is to prevent problems whenever possible. We offer conflict resolution training and self-protection and boundary-setting training through our school community. We ask parents to discuss our expectations with their children. Even though we cannot make children feel happy and safe all the time, it is important that they get in the habit of talking problems over with their parents and teachers. If children feel unhappy or unsafe, we don't want them to feel alone and we do want them to have adult help in figuring out what to do.

If a problem occurs, our focus is on addressing situations in ways that seek solutions rather than blame. We will do our best to deal with problems in a fair and effective fashion. Most concerns about student behavior can be resolved at the classroom level by talking with the teacher or by speaking directly with the individuals involved. If this doesn't work or if a serious incident occurs, the following process will take place.

1. The teacher and the parents of the child or children involved will meet with the principal and school counselor. A plan will be made so that students will understand what happened and will get the counseling or other support they need to deal with whatever happened and to prevent future problems. The goal will be to resolve the situation in a solution-oriented, fair, and respectful fashion for everyone involved. Every effort will be made to protect students raising concerns from retaliation.

2. A letter will go home to other parents without naming the families involved. The letter will describe what happened and what steps were taken. The letter will suggest how parents might talk with their children about what happened in an age appropriate positive way.

3. For a severe situation, a meeting will be held so parents can discuss their concerns and get help in how to talk to their children.

4. Where appropriate, training and/or counseling will be offered to the parents, teachers, and students involved in the incident.

Finally, school staff also deserve to have a safe, respectful environment in which to work. Schools should develop a separate policy for staff to address threats or harassment from other staff, from students, from parents or from others.

Bullying in schools, in addition to other forms of violence and abuse, affects the safety, well-being, and academic success of all the students. By working together to address the problem, adults can create a safer, more positive learning environment.