
BULLYING AFFECTS EVERYONE IN A SCHOOL COMMUNITY:

Protect Your Students, Safeguard Your School



In Canadian schools, bullying occurs every 7.5 minutes in the playgrounds and every 25 minutes in the classroom.¹

34% per cent of those surveyed in a 2008 national poll knew of students in their community who had been targeted by cyber-bullying in the previous year. 20% were aware of teachers who had been cyber bullied.²

In 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO) ranked Canada a worrisome 26th and 27th out of 35 countries on measures of bullying and victimization, respectively.³

Bullying: a severe and escalating problem

While a number of provinces have introduced tougher anti-bullying measures into the public school system and many independent schools have taken stronger preventative measures, bullying in Canadian schools continues to grow at an alarming rate. According to a 2003 Safe School Study conducted by the Canadian Public Health Association, 25-30% of students reported involvement in monthly physical bullying and 10-15% of all students reported involvement in weekly verbal bullying.⁴

Bullying behaviour takes many forms

According to the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Policy Statement, "bullying is a problem in relationships in which power is used to cause distress to another. It may be physical, verbal, nonverbal, or social, and may include racial, religious, homophobic or gender-based harassment. Bullying may occur in many ways, including face-to-face, in writing form, and through electronic media."⁵

Cyber-bullying is a relatively recent phenomenon and growing at cyber speed. With web-based

According to a Canadian survey of 10 – 14 year olds, conducted by the Kids Help Phone:

- **22% visited a website they knew their parents would not give permission for**
- **20% said/did something online they later regretted, and**
- **8% sent hurtful messages to others.**

http://www.b-free.ca/about_cyber.htm

Retrieved May 6, 2010

communication and social networking so heavily entrenched in today's youth culture, cyber space is an open field for young people who are prone to bullying. Since it isn't tied to a physical space, cyber-bullying doesn't 'happen' on school grounds...and it happens 24/7. As a result, incidents are far more difficult for schools to monitor.

A brief overview of bullying:

- Physical bullying includes punching, kicking, slapping, shoving, and pushing.
- Verbal bullying includes teasing, name-calling, threatening, or making humiliating remarks.
- Social bullying includes gossiping, spreading rumors, or intentionally excluding someone from a group or activity.
- Racial/cultural bullying includes using derogatory terms based on race or ethnicity and/or making disparaging remarks about a person's culture or religious beliefs.
- Sexual bullying includes touching or grabbing in a sexual manner, making sexual or homophobic comments or gestures, and spreading rumors about another person's sexuality.
- Cyber-bullying consists of covert, psychological bullying, conveyed through the electronic mediums such as cell-phones, web-logs and web-sites, on-line chat rooms, 'MUD' rooms (multi-user domains where individuals take on different characters) and Xangas (on-line personal profiles where some adolescents create lists of people they do not like). It is verbal (over the telephone or cell phone), or written (flaming, threats, racial, sexual or homophobic harassment) using the various mediums available.⁶

Bullying behaviour takes many forms

Bullying can have a serious, life-long impact on everyone involved. The CPA states that "all children and youth involved in bullying may be negatively affected by it, whether they are engaged in bullying others, being bullied, or witnessing bullying.... [that's why] as the primary institution in children's lives, schools have a key role to play in addressing bullying."⁵

Children who are bullied are at risk for a wide range of physical, social, and psychological problems, many of which may last well into adulthood. Moreover, anxiety and fear caused by repeated incidents may also hinder their ability to focus and learn.

A publication on Bullying Prevention published in 2008 by National Safety Canada, Crime Prevention Centre, refers to studies that link bullying behaviour during childhood with future anti-social behaviour in adolescence and adulthood. These studies maintain that children who bully may become adolescents who sexually harass, demonstrate delinquent or gang-related behaviours, or engage in date violence. As adults, such individuals may display harassment in the workplace or commit spousal, child, or senior abuse.⁴

Flaming is the often deliberate act of posting or writing messages on Internet bulletin boards and message groups that have the intent of insulting or creating dissent within a group. An Internet flame is often filled with coarse language and personal insults.

<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-flaming.htm>

Retrieved June15, 2010

What's at stake for independent schools?

Canadian independent schools report lower rates of bullying than public schools; however, well-publicized incidents continue to occur. While bullying has serious consequences for everyone, in any school system, the ramifications for independent schools are unique:

- Bullying may seriously, even irreparably, damage a school's reputation. A single, serious case of bullying may cause parents to lose faith in a school's ability to provide a safe learning environment for their children. This, in turn, may lead to a decline in enrollment and revenue, and have a negative impact on a school's ability to carry out its mandate. Ultimately, the entire school community stands to lose.
- Bullying may result in significant legal liabilities. Bullying may expose a school to protracted, costly and damaging lawsuits. Allegations that school administrators failed to take effective measures to prevent bullying and to provide a reasonably safe environment are common. Independent schools that have a Board of Directors face additional exposures and should discuss the ramifications with their insurance broker or insurance provider.

Towards a solution: best practices for the prevention of bullying

A number of proactive approaches and formal programs developed over the past two decades have helped schools prevent bullying, institute appropriate codes of conduct, and create a more respectful, caring and inclusive environment. Among them:

- **The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program:** this comprehensive school-wide program which was developed in Norway in the early 90's by Dan Olweus, an international expert in the field, is designed for elementary through junior high schools. The Olweus Program (and others derived from it) has been implemented in over a dozen countries with measurable reductions in bullying and victimization, as well as improvements to the social environment of the schools. Among other things, the program includes the formation of coordinating committees; the use of questionnaires to gather baseline information; teacher discussion groups; regular meetings with students to discuss bullying issues; effective supervision during breaks and activities; and the enforcement of clearly defined rules prohibiting bullying.

Involvement in bullying is linked with numerous health problems including anxiety, depression, and physical complaints, such as headaches and eating problems, for both children who are victimized and those who bully.

Binoculars on bullying: a new solution to protect and connect children

Dr. Debra Pepler, York University and the Hospital for Sick Children and Dr. Wendy Craig, Queen's University, February 2007

<https://www.canadiansafeschools.com/content/documents/fileItemController/Binoculars%20on%20bullying%20-%20Pepler%20and%20Craig.doc>

Retrieved May 31, 2010

- **Together We Light the Way (TWLTW):** originally sponsored by the Durham District School Board in Whitby, Ontario in 1999, the program aims to create safe and caring learning environments by creating a partnership between municipal officials, business leaders, and members of community groups on the one hand, and school administration and faculty, students and parents on the other.

The program was tested over a 3-year period and proved to be so successful—an over 60% reduction in bullying incidents in three out of four schools—that it was approved by the Ontario Ministry of Education to be used in the Ontario Teacher Recertification Process.

Programs that take a ‘whole-school’ approach are the most successful. Their success is due to a number of factors, chief among them the commitment and active support of school administrators, teachers, staff, volunteers, parents and students. To be truly successful, a bullying prevention program must be an integral part of a school’s overall philosophy and code of conduct.

The following recommendations are meant to serve as guidelines for the development and implementation of an anti-bullying initiative in your school.

A school-wide bullying prevention and intervention program

The first task is to appoint a Bullying Prevention Committee whose members represent the entire school community, including students and parents. The committee will be responsible for developing a formal Bullying Prevention Policy and overseeing its implementation. Members should ensure that the Policy—along with attendant procedures and protocols—is consistent with provincial legislation. The Policy should include the following key components:

- A statement of intent
- Definitions and examples of bullying behavior
- Descriptions of signs and symptoms—behaviour that indicates to teachers and parents that a child may be bullied
- Strategies and protocols for intervention
- Clearly articulated rules and responsibilities for teachers, school administrators, and all other staff
- Procedures for responding to complaints or allegations (including protocols for the involvement of parents, police, legal counsel, or other 3rd parties)
- Record keeping procedures

The Bullying Prevention Policy should be communicated to all stakeholders—teachers and non-teaching staff, existing and incoming students, and parents—at the outset of each school year. It should send two clear messages: that bullying in any form will not be tolerated and that successful prevention is only possible if everyone participates.

Bullying does not unfold alone in isolated islands of peers, families, or even schools. It exists in a much larger context. We have come to understand bullying as a community problem because bullying occurs in all contexts where people—not just children—come together to work and play. Bullying can happen at home, at the mall, in the hockey arena, and at the park. As the primary institution and a major socialization force in children’s lives, schools, however, do play a leadership role in addressing bullying problems.

Ibid

Involve school faculty and staff

- Develop policies and procedures in collaboration with teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, administrative staff and other adults who interact with the student body.
- Invite professional resource people to make presentations at staff meetings. Make sure that faculty and support staff have the information they need to take appropriate action when they see bullying. Ideally, teaching staff should be able to participate in professional development opportunities related to bullying prevention and intervention.
- Institute a policy of active vigilance. Children and youth who are bullied are often too frightened or embarrassed to ask for help or make a complaint. Teachers, coaches, support staff, lunch room servers, bus drivers—everyone who has an opportunity to witness student interaction—must be vigilant and report all incidents.
- Determine the location of ‘hot spots’—locations on your school property where bullying may go undetected—and increase supervision in these high risk areas.
- Establish links with appropriate government agencies, professionals and resource groups.

Involve parents and guardians

- Invite input from parents and guardians; ask them to participate in policy development, implementation and review.
- If an incident occurs, notify the parents of both the student doing the bullying and the student being victimized.
- Encourage parents to speak out against bullying and reinforce the principles of healthy, caring and respectful relationships.

Involve your student body

- Invite students to be meaningfully engaged by involving them in program development and delivery. Encourage them to take a personal stand against bullying and become partners in your school’s bullying prevention initiative.
- Teach students about their responsibilities as good ‘student citizens’ and enlist their help in fostering a safe, respectful and inclusive school environment.
- Introduce instruction about bullying and victimization into the curriculum—for example, have teachers schedule regular class discussions about the impact of bullying; have students read and discuss topical books; ask students to incorporate anti-bullying themes in writing assignments and art and drama projects; present videos and documentaries; invite guest speakers, etc.

Seeds University Elementary School in Los Angeles uses “equity guidelines” to target both bullies and bystanders. Parents and students sign contracts at the beginning of the year stipulating that no child may be put down for academic performance, appearance, family composition or gender, among other things. When an incident occurs... bystanders are also sent to after-school mediation.

‘Let Bullies Beware’, April 2001, Time Online

www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,999586-2,00.html#ixzz0qTleSjt4

- Provide clear guidelines to help students identify bullying, and to learn how to respond to bullying both as individuals and as bystanders.

Review your policy on a regular basis

To ensure efficacy, review your Bullying Prevention Policy on a regular basis. Determine what is working and what needs to be amended based on new information, past experiences, and the input of faculty, staff, students and parents.

Conclusion

Bullying is a problem that affects the entire school community. Effective bullying prevention programs require a collaborative effort, as well as clearly defined actions and guidelines for every level: school, class, and individual.

A well communicated and strictly enforced code of conduct—based on care, respect and inclusiveness—helps promote healthy relationships and prevent bullying and abuse. When students feel secure in their school environment, everyone benefits.

The peer group wields considerable power to promote or stop bullying. Most children report that they feel uncomfortable when they observe bullying. When they do intervene, however, peers can be highly effective...[in fact] when a peer has the courage to intervene, bullying stops 57 percent of the time within 10 seconds.⁷

Resources

¹ According to PREVNet, a national network of Canadian researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments committed to stop bullying. www.thespec.com/news/local/article/777903 Retrieved May 31, 2010

² According to a national poll commissioned by the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF) in 2008, <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/news-nouvelles/2008/2008-12-17-cyber-eng.htm> Retrieved April 24, 2010

³ WHO Policy Series: Health policy for children and adolescents Issue 4, WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen; 2004. p. 133-44. <https://www.canadiansafeschools.com/content/documents/fileItemController/Binoculars%20on%20bullying%20-%20Pepler%20and%20Craig.doc> Retrieved April 24, 2010

⁴ Bullying Prevention: Nature and Extent of Bullying in Canada <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/2008-bp-01-eng.aspx#a4> Retrieved May 31, 2010

⁵ Canadian Psychological Association <http://www.cpa.ca/aboutcpa/policystatements/#Bullying> Retrieved April 24, 2010

⁶ Shariff, S. and Gouin, R. (2005). CYBER-DILEMMAS: Gendered Hierarchies, Free Expression and Cyber-Safety in Schools. Paper presented at Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University, U.K. International Conference on Cyber-Safety. Paper available at www.oii.ox.ac.uk/cybersafety Retrieved May 31, 2010

⁷ Pepler, D.J. Craig, W., & O'Connell, P. (1999.) Understanding bullying from a dynamic systems perspective. In A. Slater & D. Muir (Eds.) Developmental Psychology: An Advanced Reader. pp.440-451, Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishers.

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