



Arizona Association of School Psychologists
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BEST PRACTICES FOR HELPING TO ADDRESS BULLYING IN THE SCHOOLS

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, a bully is defined as “someone who directs physical, verbal or psychological aggression or harassment toward others, with the goal of gaining power over or dominating another individual”; whereas a victim is defined as “someone who is exposed to aggression from peers in the form of physical attacks, verbal assaults, or psychological abuse”(Cohn & Canter, 2003). There is no shortage of disturbing statistics about the prevalence of bullying. According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, about 20% of high school students reported they were bullied at their school within the last year. A study conducted by the National Institutes of Health (2007) indicated about one-third of students are involved in bullying, either as the bully or the victim of bullying. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007) reports that someone is bullied every seven minutes. Nearly two-thirds of students who are bullied are bullied because of their looks or speech . One-quarter of public schools reported that during the 2007-2008 school year, bullying occurred on a daily or weekly basis. Bullying is most common in middle schools and peaks during sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Bullying creates a climate of fear, and can lead victims of bullying to have negative feelings toward their schools. Additionally, bullying can contribute to absences and dropping out of school altogether and is related to negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and an increased engagement in high-risk behaviors (CDC, 2009).

There are two reasons attributed to the rise in public awareness of bullying (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). First, there has been an increase in media coverage of students who have completed suicide after being bullied. Second, the growth of technology and the accompanying social media has increased both bullying and the awareness of bullying. School psychologists, with a wide range of expertise, are uniquely suited to help school districts address the pervasive problem of bullying.

BULLYING LAWS IN ARIZONA

In recent years many different states have enacted legislation to help prevent bullying in schools. In 2005, the Arizona Legislature passed a bill (HB 2368) requiring all school districts to develop and enforce procedures that prohibit pupils from harassing, bullying and intimidating other students.

In 2011, the Arizona Legislature passed House Bill 2415, which is designed to increase the accountability of school officials and imposes stricter rules regarding how schools address incidents of bullying and harassment on campus and online. The law requires schools to clearly

define what is meant by “bullying,” “harassment,” and “intimidation.” Additionally, the law mandates that school employees report any incidents of bullying and that districts must develop forms for employees, students and parents to use when reporting incidents of bullying. Districts must also describe disciplinary procedures for employees who fail to report suspected incidents of bullying. House Bill 2415 also specifically requires schools to develop procedures to prohibit cyber-bullying, but limits the prohibition to acts that occur on school computers and networks.

Senate Bill 1549, known as the Arizona Safe Schools Act, died in committee in the 2011 legislative session. This bill would have expanded existing laws to include cyber-bullying and specifically prohibit bullying on the basis of sexual orientation. Research indicates that schools with comprehensive anti-bullying policies such as those required under the Arizona Safe Schools Act reduce the incidence of bullying; therefore, it is likely that a version of the Arizona Safe Schools Act will be reintroduced to the legislature in the future.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

School psychologists serve as a liaison to community resources on the local and national level. They assist parents in navigating the task of selecting a mental health provider, be it via private insurance or sliding scale public agencies. School psychologists provide students with information regarding support available outside the school environment, ranging from support groups that meets locally or a national website offering stories of encouragement to young people experiencing bullying.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

Changes in the law mandate that school administrators take steps to prevent bullying, and there is no shortage of anti-bullying programs that advertise themselves as the most effective way to address relational violence in schools. School psychologists have expertise in program evaluation, which is necessary for evaluating the purported efficacy of commercial anti-bullying programs. School psychologists are not only able to critically evaluate the quality of research supporting an anti-bullying curriculum, they can also serve as an invaluable resource for researching and selecting the best available anti-bullying program.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS AS DIRECT SERVICE PROVIDERS AND CHANGE AGENTS

In addition to mandatory reporting of bullying incidents, school psychologists can serve a much broader and more proactive purpose in terms of bullying prevention. Given our skills in counseling, we can serve a therapeutic role for victims, as well as provide guidance for those students at risk for becoming bullies. Research indicates that students with Autism Spectrum Disorders are at an increased risk for being bullies as well as being the victim of bullies (Little, 2001; Montes, 2007). School psychologists’ knowledge and understanding of ASD can help us consult with teachers, provide direct instruction in social skills, and mediate with administration

regarding appropriate consequences for behaviors related to students' disabilities. School psychologists can serve as an invaluable resource and source of support for students most at risk for being bullied - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth (LGBTQ) or those perceived to be LGBTQ - by being the sponsor or leader of the school's Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA). Other possible roles include presenting workshops for faculty and/or parents covering bullying prevention and interventions for those students who are bullying or being bullied and facilitating the implementation of positive behavioral supports in a school setting in order to prevent bullying.

BULLYING AND THE NASP PRACTICE MODEL

In 2010, the National Association of School Psychologists released the NASP Practice Model which encompasses 10 domains of school psychological service delivery, including Preventive and Responsive Services, Family-School Collaboration Services, Research and Program Evaluation, and Interventions and Mental Health Services to Develop Social and Life Skills. When it comes to addressing bullying, school psychologists are in a prime position to serve students and schools across many of these domains.

SUMMARY

Whether it is acting as a community liaison, providing counseling, conducting program evaluations, or advocating for students' rights, Arizona's new bullying legislation provides school psychologists with an opportunity to help create safer schools for all students.

APPENDIX

General Bullying Resources

US Government website managed by Department of Health & Human Services, partnered with Department of Education and Department of Justice

<http://www.stopbullying.gov>

PACER Center's bullying website, includes separate sites for teens and kids.

<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

The It Gets Better Project was created to provide bullied teens with hope that life gets better after high school. Although most of the information is directed toward LGBTQ youth, the message applies to any young person facing adversity in high school.

<http://www.itgetsbetter.org>

Bullyingprevention.org is designed to help communities across the nation take advantage of what has been learned and accomplished over the past 3-1/2 years by the schools, districts and nonprofit organizations participating in The Colorado Trust's Bullying Prevention Initiative.

<http://www.bullyingprevention.org>

Information about Arizona laws

House Bill 2415

<http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/1r/bills/hb2415p.pdf>

Arizona Safe Schools Act (failed Senate Bill 1549)

<http://www.azleg.gov> Search for 1549

<http://www.equalityarizona.org/take-action-2/>

2005 Bullying law HB 2368

<http://www.azleg.gov/ars/15/00341.htm>

Community resources

Arizona Department of Health Services (includes statewide Behavioral Health Authorities and mental health crisis lines by county)

<http://www.azdhs.gov/bhs/>

Arizona PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

<http://www.pflagarizona.org/>

Maricopa County Teen Resource Guide (comprehensive guide to services ranging from counseling to legal services to medical services)

http://www.azchildren.org/MyFiles/PDF/Teen_Resource_Guide.pdf

Program Evaluation

The *What Works Clearinghouse* (WWC) is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). It provides educators with scientific reviews of commercially available educational products. Search for bullying or character education.

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

National Criminal Justice Reference Service (US Department of Justice). Do a site search for bullying for meta-analyses of anti-bullying programs in the school and other anti-bullying program reviews.

<https://www.ncjrs.gov>

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Approved by the AASP Board, December 9, 2011

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