Bullying Prevention

At the core of all bullying prevention efforts, children must see and experience the values of kindness, cooperation, working together, and standing up for what is right.

Bullying behavior occurs when a person (or a group of people) repeatedly harms another person, emotionally and/or physically. Bullying is a widespread problem that has serious and lasting impact on everyone involved: the person engaged in bullying behavior, the person who is bullied, and the bystander who witnesses bullying behavior. Bullying is not a phase children go through or a rite of passage. Bullying is not "kids being kids" or an unavoidable part of childhood.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BULLYING

- **Imbalance of Power:** People who engage in bullying behavior use their power to control. Those being bullied may have a hard time defending themselves.

- **Intent to Cause Harm:** Accidental actions are not considered bullying. The person or group engaging in bullying behavior has a goal to cause harm.

- **Repetition:** A person experiences bullying behavior over and over by the same person or group.

TYPES OF BULLYING

- **Verbal:** name-calling, teasing, remarks that threaten

- **Social:** spreading rumors, purposefully excluding a person or group, breaking up friendships

- **Physical:** hitting, punching, shoving, threatening gestures or faces

- **Cyberbullying:** using the Internet, mobile phones, or other technologies to harm others

It is clear that bullying is a serious and growing problem that demands the attention of schools, parents, and youth alike. While there are countless ways to address this issue and make our schools safer, the most effective strategy is prevention. Through prevention efforts, the entire climate of a school can be changed — bullying can be stopped before it takes root. At the core of all efforts, children must see and experience the values of kindness,
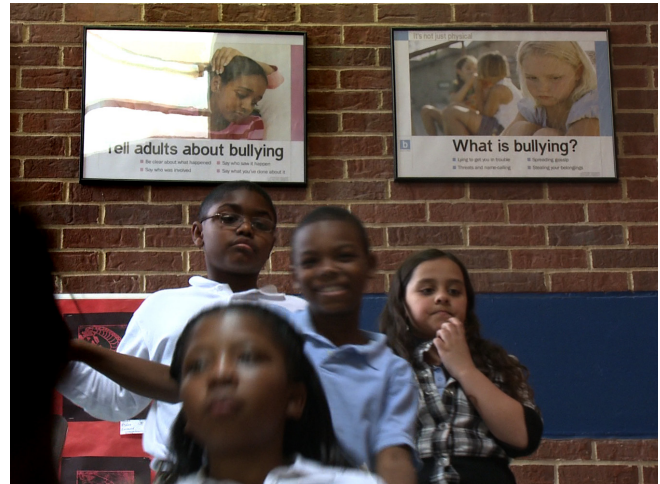
Students at Armstrong Elementary School in Hazelwood, MO, walk past anti-bullying posters in the stairwell.

A 2005 survey, conducted by Harris Interactive, reported:

▶ **53% of teachers** see bullying as a serious problem at their schools.

▶ **65% of teens** were verbally or physically harassed or assaulted because of their appearance, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion.

cooperation, working together, and standing up for what is right. A deep commitment to and understanding of the age-old Golden Rule — *treat others as you would want to be treated* — is at the heart of all bullying prevention.

APPROACHES TO BULLYING PREVENTION

- **Focus on the social environment of the school.** It must become "uncool" to bully, "cool" to help out students who are bullied, and normal for staff and students to acknowledge when a child is bullied or left out.

POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF BULLYING BY GROUP

The chart below summarizes the wide-reaching impact bullying has on those who engage in bullying behavior, are bullied, and witness bullying behavior.

Students Who Are Bullied	Students Who Engage in Bullying Behavior	Students Witnessing Bullying Behavior
• Decline in academic achievement	• Decline in academic achievement	• Increased rates of tobacco, alcohol and other drug use
• Increased rates of skipping school and dropping out	• Increased rates of skipping school and dropping out	• Increased rates of skipping school
• Higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts	• Higher rates of future domestic violence and criminal behavior	• Increased rates of mental health issues, including anxiety and depression
• More likely to retaliate through extremely violent measures	• Higher risk of abusing alcohol and other drugs	

• **Evaluate bullying in your school.** Determine where and when bullying occurs.

• **Increase adult supervision in bullying "hot spots"** (e.g. cafeteria, hallways, playground).

• **Train staff in bullying prevention strategies** (see "Sources" below).

• **Create and enforce clear school rules related to bullying.**

• **Develop a team to coordinate bullying prevention efforts.**

• **Intervene consistently and appropriately when bullying occurs.**

• **Make bullying prevention part of classroom and school activities.** Curriculum should help students and teachers understand what bullying looks like, what to do before and after bullying occurs, and set a vision for what a positive bully-free school looks and feels like.

• **Use PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports) principles to guide bullying prevention efforts.** "PBIS Steps to Addressing Bullying" is a great resource, offering a five-step process for addressing bullying behavior in school.

There are many resources available to educators, youth, and parents who are interested in preventing bullying. The PACER's National Prevention Center (www.pacer.org/bullying/) provides creative and interactive resources that are designed to benefit all students, including students with disabilities. National Bullying Prevention Month (October) is organized by the PACER Center. The federal government's bullying prevention clearinghouse, www.stopbullying.gov, provides extensive resources, research, and tools.

SOURCES

● Engel, S., & Sandstrom, M. (2010). *"There's Only One Way to Stop a Bully." New York Times.* 22 July 2010: A23.

● The federal government's bullying prevention clearinghouse, www.stopbullying.gov

● National Association of School Psychologists. (2009). *Positive School Climate, Student Wellness, and Improved Academic Outcomes: Bringing Out the Best in Students and Schools*

Key Concepts. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

● PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. www.pacer.org/bullying

● Sugai, G., Horner, R., & Algozzine, B. (2010). *Reducing the Effectiveness of Bullying Behavior in Schools.* Washington, D.C.: OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

[ ] NCIE National Center on Inclusive Education
At the Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire