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Reducing Bullying and Contributing Peer Behaviors
Addressing Transactional Relationships within the School Social Ecology

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Abstract

This chapter summarizes research on the Steps to Respect bullying prevention program, showing reductions in bullying, retaliatory aggression, and contributing bystander behavior. Grounded in a transactional-ecological approach and informed by educators’ awareness that a focus on bullying behavior provides too narrow a frame for the aggression in their schools, the authors argue that evaluation research can provide insight into how bystander behavior and retaliatory aggression contribute to the perpetuation of school bullying. The chapter also examines educational practices associated with reductions in attitudes and behaviors that contribute to bullying.

Bullying, repeated aggression aimed at individuals of lesser power, is a harmful yet common form of school violence, with most children between the ages of 8 and 11 observed to perpetrate (61%) or encourage its perpetration (48%) on playgrounds (Frey, Hirschstein, Snell, Edstrom, MacKenzie, & Broderick, 2005). Approximately 30% of American children report that they are chronically bullied at school (Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Swearer & Cary, 2003). Ample evidence shows that bullying negatively impacts targets (Card, Isaacs, & Hodges, 2007), bullies (Pepler, Jiang, Craig, & Connolly, 2008), and bystanders (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). Bullying can also encourage other types of aggression and school violence, either in retaliation (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003) or when malicious gossip fosters peer conflicts. A poll of more than 1,000 U.S. adults found that 74% considered school bullying and victimization to be serious or very serious problems (Public Agenda, 2010).

Without efforts to address bullying problems, rates of problem behavior increase during the school year (Frey et al., 2005). As students enter adolescence, they are increasingly accepting of
bullying (Hymel, Bonanno, Henderson, & McCreith, 2002) and retaliation (Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, & Snell, 2009; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997). Unfortunately, adults often feel unprepared to deal with bullying problems (Boulton, 1997) and rarely intervene (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Xie, Swift, Cairns, & Cairns, 2002). To combat the seemingly intractable nature of bullying, systemic and multifaceted interventions are required.

School bullying is a dynamic process situated within relationships among students, educators, and other school community members (Frey & Nolen, 2010; Newman, Frey, & Jones, 2010). Changes in any one of those relationships have the potential to ripple through the social ecology, exacerbating or ameliorating the problem. Appreciation of this has led to consensus in the field that schoolwide bullying prevention programs must target multiple levels and mechanisms of aggression (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1993; Pepler, Craig, & O’Connell, 1999).

Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program (Committee for Children, 2001) is a schoolwide plan designed to reduce ecological supports for bullying and promote prosocial interactions. The program provides specific steps for intervention at the individual, classroom, and school community levels. This chapter provides a brief review of the knowledge base regarding harmful outcomes associated with bullying, and then describes theoretical foundations and specific practices found in the Steps to Respect program. This is followed by a summary of evidence of program effectiveness, as well as a review of findings and issues related to classroom implementation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of program and research limitations, as well as implications for practice.

Potential for Harm

Bullying involvement is associated with such harmful outcomes as aggression, depression, and self-inflicted violence (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Longitudinal studies show declines in adjustment (Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997) and increased alcohol use (Rusby, Forrester, Biglan, & Metzler, 2005) among those chronically victimized. Fearful of school (Card et al., 2007), victims sometimes escape through absenteeism (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000) or by dropping out (Slee, 1994). Many suffer declines in academic achievement (e.g., Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006; Nishina, Juvenon, & Witkow, 2005; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005). Victimization may be most harmful for children from low economic backgrounds (Due, Damsgaard, Lund, & Holstein, 2009), or for those that are both victimized and aggressive (Graham, Bellmore, & Mize, 2006).

Repeated involvement as a bully is also associated with numerous risks to well-being. Those who bully are more likely than others to become victims of street violence (Andershed, Kerr, & Stattin, 2001), abuse drugs (Pepler, Craig, Connolly, & Henderson, 2002), be involved in dating violence (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000), and exhibit low academic achievement (Ma, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2009). Over time, students who bully may become reliant on coercive methods and fail to develop positive relationship skills (Pepler et al., 2008).

Witnessing 85% of bullying episodes (Craig & Pepler, 1995), bystanders are arguably the largest group of students affected. Bystander intervention efforts tend to halt bullying quickly, but occur infrequently (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000), perhaps due to fear or the belief that bullying is “none of my business.” Repeated inaction may lead children to disengage morally (Hymel, Schonert-Reichl, Bonanno, Vaillancourt, & Henderson, 2010) and passively accept injustice (Jeffrey, Miller, & Linn, 2001). Moreover, researchers speculate that seeing bullying succeed may prompt imitation (O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Negative emotions can also arise. Anxiety and dislike of school increase on days in which bullying is witnessed (Nishina & Juvonen, 2005). Finally, bystanders may get caught in the crossfire when bullying contributes to school shootings.
Both self- and other-directed violence have prompted a variety of legislative and programmatic responses to school bullying. However, initiatives not grounded in theory and rigorous empirical evidence may miss the mark (Furlong, Morrison, & Grief, 2003).

Theoretical Foundation of the Steps to Respect Program

Bullying behavior occurs within a multilevel transactional-ecological context (Frey & Nolen, 2010; Newman et al., 2010). This idea is firmly grounded in social-cognitive models of aggression (e.g., Coie & Dodge, 1998; Huesmann, 1988), and socio-ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and transactional (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003) developmental theories. Individual students and educators, peer groups within classrooms, and the whole school community interact to support or prevent bullying. For example, aggressive victims may enable more socially adept bullies by providing a ready ear for gossip (Frey & Hawley, 2010). Compounding the problem, educators tend to view social aggression as less serious than overt aggression, and therefore less worthy of intervention (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Mishna, Scarcello, Pepler, & Wiener, 2005; Yoon & Kerber, 2003), even though 22% of such episodes lead to overt aggression between the target and a third party (Xie et al., 2002).

Interventions that focus on the bully or the target belie the social complexity of the situation. Commonly employed zero-tolerance policies against bullying are unlikely to be effective (Skiba, Ritter, Simmons, Peterson, & Miller, 2006) because suspending the bully ignores the broader influences of the social ecology. A further impediment to the success of narrowly focused approaches is that teachers often have trouble identifying the most socially skilled perpetrators (Frey et al., 2005). Instead, they discern the effects of bullying in terms of increasingly dysregulated and disruptive behavior (McLaughlin, Hatzenbueler, & Hilt, 2009; Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, & Flynn, 2009) among their most vulnerable students. Consequently, the manipulative student who successfully prods an aggressive target into an outburst gleefully watches the victim get punished for disorderly behavior. Bullying prevention efforts must address the needs of individual students, and the peer relationships among students, while fostering a pro-social school community.

Description of Specific Program Components

Steps to Respect (Committee for Children, 2001) is a comprehensive elementary school program designed to address the transactional-ecology of bullying at the school, classroom, and individual levels (Frey & Nolen, 2010; Newman et al., 2010).

School Community

The Steps to Respect program is designed to counter the belief that children can bully with impunity by creating a high profile, schoolwide, anti-bullying effort. The program aims to reduce bullying by increasing children’s expectations that all adults in the school community will be responsive to bullying situations. In addition, the program seeks to increase children’s reporting and active defense of those targeted for abuse. Finally, Steps to Respect seeks to limit student opportunities to benefit from bullying (Snell, MacKenzie, & Frey, 2002). Specific program components at the school community level include: (a) developing clear schoolwide anti-bullying policies and procedures; (b) increasing adult awareness, responsiveness, and guidance in relation to bullying events (e.g., improved playground monitoring); and (c) increasing systemic supports for prosocial behavior. These components are clearly communicated to all members of the school community via letters, posters, and assemblies. Staff training, a detailed program manual, and ongoing support are provided to facilitate schoolwide program implementation.
**Classroom Curriculum**

The Steps to Respect curriculum is grounded in social cognitive models (e.g., Coie & Dodge, 1998), and therefore provides multiple pathways to influence behavior: building specific bullying prevention skills, fostering general social-emotional skills, and addressing beliefs and peer group norms related to bullying. In line with Huesmann and Guerra’s (1997) model of normative beliefs development, the curriculum also outlines teacher practices at the classroom level to promote prosocial values.

**Bullying Prevention Skills**

Specific bullying prevention skills include identifying bullying behaviors, assertively responding to coercive behaviors, and engaging in problem-solving and risk assessment related to bullying. As suggested by Newman, Murray, and Lussier (2001), students practice reporting bullying incidents and identify adults in the school they would seek out for help. Lessons also distinguish “tattling” (trying to get people into trouble) from “reporting” (telling an adult to keep people safe), which parents and teachers report is a morally empowering distinction.

**General Social-Emotional Skills**

Friendship often serves as a buffer against bullying, and its negative effects (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997). However, friends sometimes encourage victims to retaliate (Terranova, 2009) and friends who engage in deviant talk are at an increased risk of engaging in problem behaviors (Piehler & Dishion, 2007). These findings suggest that relationship skills training should be accompanied by clear guidance for friends and bystanders. Therefore, the Steps to Respect curriculum teaches social problem-solving strategies as a way to enhance peer acceptance and support from friends; e.g., discovering shared interests, conflict resolution, and forgiveness.

Emotion regulation skills are also critical to forming and maintaining social bonds. Students who have difficulty regulating themselves often face rejection and victimization (Perry, Hodges, & Egan, 2001)—experiences that further impair emotion and behavior self-regulation. Using “self talk” to cool down, and practicing calm, assertive responses to others may help children avoid the helpless or exaggerated responses of easy targets (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1997; Schwartz, Dodge, & Coie, 1993). Improved regulatory skills, in conjunction with intervention scripts (e.g., “Stop. That’s bullying.”), may also enable bystanders to channel their concern into helping others rather than ameliorating their own distress (Eisenberg, Wentzel, & Harris, 1998; Snell et al., 2002). Finally, training in emotion regulation may reduce some bullying, particularly among pervasively aggressive children who display self-regulatory deficits (Schwartz, 2000).

**Beliefs and Norms**

Training in bullying prevention and general social-emotional skills are likely insufficient to deter bullying behavior. Many socially skilled, emotionally savvy children perpetuate or encourage bullying (Kaukianen, Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Tamminen, Vauras, & Postkiparta, 2002) due to low levels of empathy for victims (Endresen & Olweus, 2001) and a belief that victims deserve to be bullied (Rigby, 2005; Swearer & Cary, 2003). Research shows that empathetic children are less aggressive (Kaukianen et al., 1999) and more prosocial than other children (Eisenberg, Fabes, Karbon, Murphy, Carlo, & Wosinski, 1996). For these reasons, Steps to Respect lessons aim to foster children’s empathy with activities to recognize feelings, consider perspectives of children in hypothetical situations, and practice empathetic behaviors. In addition, lessons attempt to
counter negative stereotypes of victims, as well as the belief that personal characteristics justify bullying. The curriculum places bullying squarely within the moral realm (Gianluca, 2006; Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003) by describing the harm to victims.

**Teacher Practices**

First, classroom teachers present 10 skill lessons that include discussion, activities, and skill practice. After completion of the skill lessons, teachers implement a grade-appropriate literature unit based on existing children’s novels. Literature lessons integrate social-emotional learning objectives (e.g., empathy) with language arts content, providing further opportunities to discuss issues related to healthy relationships and bullying. Because generalization is the ultimate goal of prevention, program materials and training offer numerous activities and suggestions to generalize skills and beliefs to real life. Teachers are also encouraged to model program skills, for example by using self-talk to cool down, as well as to use rehearsal, coaching, and feedback in the context of classroom social dynamics (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000).

**Individual Coaching**

Steps to Respect coaching models are intended to provide a safety-focused response to immediate and long-term student needs via one-on-one discussions between educators and students involved in bullying. Each model (one for students experiencing bullying, the other for those who bully) establishes details and the historical context, asks students to generate solutions to avoid future problems, and includes follow up.

Based in an educational rather than judicial or punitive approach, the coaching model enables educators to foster student problem-solving, perspective-taking, and assertiveness skills. Without high-stakes punishment and the consequent need to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, educators can address low-level behaviors before they escalate. While not ignoring the need to determine facts and apply consequences, this approach places equal emphasis on helping children practice relational and problem-solving skills, enabling educators to discuss norms (e.g., “Is that fair?”) and collective responsibility for school safety (see Frey, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2010, for a discussion of the advantages of coaching over judicial/punitive approaches).

**Empirical Evidence Supporting Steps to Respect**

To examine program effectiveness, constructs were examined based on social-cognitive (Coie & Dodge, 1998), social-ecological (Swearer & Espelage, 2004; Salmivalli, 1999), and transactional (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003) models of aggression and change. The following have been examined: (a) intervention effects on teacher attitudes and behavior; (b) intervention effects on student behavior, attitudes and skills; and (c) links between teaching practices and student outcomes. For the studies described below, six elementary schools were matched for district and demographic data, then randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group.

**Intervention Effects on Teacher Attitudes and Behavior**

Following staff training, intervention teachers (n = 34) reported feeling significantly more prepared to deal with bullying (e.g., “I feel prepared to assess the seriousness of a bullying report”) than did control teachers (n = 35). Monthly self-reports assessed teachers’ support for student social-emotional and bullying prevention skill use in teachable moments outside of lesson
instruction. Another scale, measuring teacher coaching of individual students involved in bullying incidents, was completed by intervention teachers only. No group differences were found in teacher support for student general social-emotional skills (“I prompted students involved in a conflict to problem-solve”). However, support for student use of bullying prevention skills (e.g., “I prompted student(s) to stand up for someone being picked on”) was higher among intervention teachers, as a consequence of a decline in support among control group teachers.

**Intervention Effects on Student Behaviors and Beliefs**

The small number of schools enabled in-depth behavior observations on school playgrounds, where aggression occurs most frequently (Grossman et al., 1997). Trained observers made second-by-second entries of all behavior displayed by or directed to focal children. Conclusions are based on 554 students for the 6-month posttest, and a subsample of 360 students for the 18-month posttest. Beliefs were assessed via self-report survey.

**Bullying, Victimization, and Retaliatory Aggression**

The six-month posttest showed predicted declines in bullying in the intervention group (Frey et al., 2005). Neither victimization nor retaliatory aggression showed significant improvement unless intervention students were in classes where teachers provided brief individual coaching once a week in addition to the classroom lessons (Hirschstein, Edstrom, Frey, Snell, & MacKenzie, 2007). However, at the 18-month posttest, bullying, victimization, and retaliatory aggression all declined in the intervention group, while the same problems increased in the control group (Frey et al., 2009). Analyzing outcomes by risk status, large intervention effects were found for students involved in problem behaviors at pretest. By the end of the second year, they evinced no more problems than non-involved students. Effect sizes were very large, ranging from .83 to 2.26 (Cohen’s $D$). Problem behaviors among non-involved students in the intervention group did not increase over the two years.

**Intervention Effects on Related Behaviors and Beliefs**

As predicted, posttest levels of bystander reinforcement, argumentative behavior, and norms supporting retaliation were lower in the intervention group than in the control group at both posttests. Self-efficacy for responding assertively to bullying was higher among intervention group students (Frey et al., 2005; 2009). In addition, students of teachers who provided individual coaching showed greater-than-average increases in assertive self-efficacy and decreases in bystander reinforcement (Hirschstein et al., 2007). Bystander reinforcement nearly disappeared among intervention schools in the second year.

**Playground Gossip**

Because social aggression appears to play a unique role in fostering overt aggression (Xie et al., 2002), group differences in gossip were examined after six months (Low, Frey, & Brockman, 2010). We also examined whether having supportive friends or beliefs supporting retaliation in the fall would predict gossip perpetration and victimization the following spring. Previous research indicates that supportive friends may encourage aggressive retaliation on the part of victims (Terranova, 2009) and may even share targets of aggression (Card & Hodges, 2006). Although supportive friends have often appeared to buffer students from overt aggression, this relationship has not been tested specifically with respect to gossip.
The Steps to Respect program teaches students how to constructively support victims. Bystander behavior that encourages bullying or aggressive retaliation is considered part of the problem. In contrast, assertive defense and private support of victims is encouraged via discussion and role plays. At the six-month posttest, intervention-group students who had been involved in gossip at pretest showed moderately large decreases in gossip relative to those in the control group, while uninvolved students did not change (Low et al., 2010). Fall beliefs supporting retaliatory aggression were strongly related to increases in gossip and relational victimization in the control group, but not in the intervention group. Furthermore, believing that one had supportive friends was associated with significant declines in spring victimization only in the intervention group. Exploratory analyses were completed to examine changes in gossip perpetration among the 143 students who were targets of gossip during baseline observations. As predicted, having supportive friends in the fall was associated with declines in gossip among previously victimized students in the intervention group but not in the control group. The intervention may have reduced tit-for-tat exchanges between aggressors and victims’ friends by suggesting more constructive avenues of support. These data illustrate the often complex relationships between the peer ecology and school aggression.

Teaching Practices Linked to Classroom Levels of Problem Behaviors

Both intervention and control-group teachers reported monthly how often they provided in-class support for empathy, assertiveness, and emotion regulation (Frey, Jones, Hirschstein, & Edstrom, 2010). Support of assertiveness predicted later declines in playground victimization. Empathy support predicted later declines in aggressive norms and bystander reinforcement of aggression. Based on these findings and the dramatic reductions in bystander behavior seen following intervention (by 72%), we suggest that aggressive “followers” may be especially responsive to intervention. Such outcomes become extremely important if, as we suspect, bystander reinforcement predicts later aggression.

Thus, the evaluation studies provide evidence that the program reduced bullying, retaliatory aggression, and proximal indicators such as bystander reinforcement, beliefs supporting retaliation, and argumentative interactions; while assertion self-efficacy increased. Recommended teaching practices were linked to improvements in retaliatory aggression, bystander reinforcement, assertion self-efficacy, and norms about aggression.

Limitations

Changes Within the School Community

A number of promising changes in adult behavior and the school community were observed, including development of policy and procedures, training for all staff, improved teacher sense of preparedness to deal with bullying, and teacher support for student skill generalization. Notably, teacher support “in the moment” predicted improvements in students’ beliefs and behaviors with surprising specificity.

Despite these promising signs, we were unable to test whether the program promoted true systemic change. Due to the small number of participating schools, school community level effects on program outcomes—factors deemed critical to bullying prevention (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999; Pepler et al., 1999; Smith & Sharp, 1994)—were not empirically examined. A cautionary note is that adult intervention in playground bullying and aggression was observed too infrequently to measure. The ratio of students to adults on playgrounds (as much as 120 to 1) may have presented logistical problems for adults to monitor and intervene effectively. Coders
on the playground, however, also observed supervisory adults brushing off student complaints of victimization. It is possible that this minimization of student distress reflected a “code of silence,” taught and maintained by adults, which may have far-reaching implications for program effectiveness and school safety.

To be fair, there appeared to be considerable variation in levels of playground supervision and infrastructure among schools in our study. Some supervisors communicated via walkie-talkies, wore orange vests, and monitored identified regions of the playground. Others clustered close to the school building and were non-responsive to students. Advancements in measurement related to playground conditions (e.g., Leff, Power, Costigan, & Manz, 2003) may enable researchers to further examine the roles of systemic support, training, and adult responsiveness, in effective responding to bullying problems. Examining contributions of administrators and structural supports to maintaining school safety and staff motivation may be particularly fruitful when viewed over time.

Specific Effects of the Classroom Curriculum

The extent to which student development of self-regulation was influenced by the program is unclear. Although we view emotion regulation as a foundation for performing specific skills (e.g., staying calm and responding assertively to bullying behavior), we did not directly test changes in this area. Reductions in argumentative playground behavior, however, may indicate a decline in anger among intervention students or an increase in behavioral self-regulation. This interpretation awaits empirical validation.

Future research conducted with a larger school sample may help to further differentiate the impact of systemic school change, classroom practices, peer influences, and individual risk factors. Our initial examination suggesting that friends can buffer students from victimization when the larger school context is supportive indicates the potential of evaluation research to provide basic information on school social dynamics.

Implications for Practice

We have already touched on a number of issues regarding implementation of the Steps to Respect program in this chapter. The following briefly summarizes four particularly important ones in the following section. Additionally, implications and recommended activities to support program goals can be found in Table 28.1.

First, adult myths about bullying may hinder prevention efforts. For example, the belief that children who bully are disliked and disruptive may blind teachers to coercive acts and dynamics involving students who succeed in the classroom (Frey et al., 2005). There is evidence that popular students may wield considerable influence through bullying (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003), perhaps because their behaviors go undetected by adults. This suggests that adult training should provide information about the “democratic” nature of bullying within a school population, as well as helpful hints for discerning problems that may not be readily apparent.

Second, there is evidence that teachers’ support and coaching for student skill use, outside of lesson instruction, may pay off handsomely. This suggests administrators should create opportunities for staff to discuss and brainstorm strategies to provide this kind of support. Specifically, this may involve increasing adult availability to help coach students in the throes of peer conflict and bullying events.

Third, it is important to maintain adult awareness and motivation related to the program. Good practice includes ongoing training and use of strategies to keep a program visible and
### Table 28.1 Implications for Practice: Activities to Support Steps to Respect Program Goals

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Teachers and Staff</th>
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| **Develop and disseminate clear anti-bullying policy and procedures** | • Post policy throughout school  
• Send policy to families  
• Visit classrooms to explain policy and school commitment to student safety  
• Identify “point people” to carry out specific procedures (e.g., follow up) with students involved in bullying. | • Participate in formulating policy  
• Post policy in class rooms  
• Counselors and other staff support anti-bullying procedures (e.g., coaching) |
| **Increase adult awareness, monitoring, and guidance** | • Enable all staff to attend initial trainings  
• Enable staff to attend booster trainings  
• Provide support and resources for effective playground and lunchroom supervision  
• Present family introduction materials | • Attend to disruptive behaviors of all students  
• Respond to gossip, on-line and physical aggression  
• Use the reporting and follow-up model  
• Provide student support via coaching and reinforcement |
| **Support staff and student motivation to prevent bullying** | • Acknowledge responsible citizenship  
• Make program visible (e.g., posters)  
• Discuss program implementation at staff meetings  
• Publicize program effects (e.g., reductions in disciplinary incidents) | • Integrate program content with academic areas  
• Show that gossip leads to more serious problems  
• Recognize good citizenship |
| **Support implementation integrity** | • Use staff meetings to check in with teachers about how lessons are going  
• Check in regularly with other staff (playground monitors, bus drivers) about bullying and prevention efforts  
• During teacher evaluations, observe Steps to Respect lessons | • Teach lessons regularly  
• Model program skills  
• Support student skill use “in the moment” |
| **Insure student safety during survey administration** | • Monitor student activity and communication  
• Use visual boundaries to insure privacy  
• Separate students as necessary  
• Communicate that participation is voluntary | • Use knowledge of your class to anticipate potential problems  
• Make sure students have privacy and room  
• Communicate that honesty is valued |
| **Support evaluation needs** | • Identify point person to coordinate evaluation activities  
• Schedule opportunities for staff and students to complete evaluation materials  
• Prepare yearly or semi-yearly report on areas for improvement related to program use | • Complete checklists about program implementation  
• Complete surveys about program |
“acting proud” (Elias et al., 1997). One example we observed was a school reader board that read, “Ask us about the Steps to Respect program.”

Fourth, motivation is strongly influenced by adult perceptions of program effectiveness. The Steps to Respect program was shown to be effective by virtue of having a control group. Many of our first year findings contrasted deterioration of attitudes and behavior in schools not using the program to the maintenance of attitudes and behaviors in intervention schools. School staff members who do not have access to this kind of comparative data may miss important feedback that their efforts are worthwhile. For this reason, it is important that administrators actively sustain staff motivation. One principal used records of previous springtime increases in disciplinary referrals to demonstrate to her staff that a new intervention was working.

Conclusion

Given increased concerns about school violence and the damage associated with bullying, there is growing consensus that schools must actively protect students. Less obvious types of bullying, including gossip and electronic harassment, appear to be just as destructive as physical types and may contribute to later school violence. Because bullying unfolds in the context of peer groups and often goes undetected by adults, intervention poses challenges that require a universal approach that engages students and staff at the level of the individual, the classroom, and the entire school community.

Active adult involvement can correct the power imbalances inherent in bullying and bring about school-level changes to decrease bullying. Effective policy and procedures are the structural guideposts for making this occur. In addition, program elements should address student social skills, beliefs, and bystander processes, as these appear to be important loci for change. Classroom-based lessons can provide practice in specific bullying prevention skills as well as general social-emotional skills such as emotion regulation, assertiveness, and empathy. They also provide models of positive leadership and courage, and convey powerful messages about respect and shared responsibility for school safety. As our results indicate, commitment to effective programs and best practices can yield dramatic improvements in student social behavior.

References


Reducing Bullying and Contributing Peer Behaviors


