BULLYING 101

Each morning during the school week, Adam woke up with a knot in the pit of his stomach. He knew he would, once again, be bullied at school by three boys in his class. Yesterday, they told him they would beat him up if he showed up for school today. Adam was so nervous he pretended to be sick so he could stay home. Adam has does this a lot over the past three months, and his grades are suffering because of it.

Adam isn't alone. Every day there are more school absences due to bullying than any other issue or illness. Bullying affects not only students' well-being and academic achievement, it can negatively affect a school's climate and culture and it can put a school at risk for liability issues.

Dr. Dan Olweus, pioneering researcher on bullying and the creator of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, defines bullying this way: "Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has a hard time defending himself or herself."

According to Olweus, this definition includes three important components:

- Bullying is aggressive behavior involving unwanted, negative actions.
- Bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time.
- Bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength.

This imbalance of power or strength could involve a larger or older student bullying smaller or younger students. It could involve a group of students bullying one student or a student with more "social power" bullying a less popular student.

Bullying doesn't involve only those doing the bullying and those being bullied. Bullying involves and affects the entire school community. The three main groups affected by bullying are the students who are bullied, the students who bully others and bystanders. A single student who bullies can have a wide-ranging impact on both the students being bullied and the bystanders, as well as the overall climate of the school and community.

Students deserve to feel safe at school. But when they experience bullying, these types of effects can last long into their future. Students who are bullied can experience depression, low self-esteem, health problems, poor grades, and suicidal thoughts.

Students who intentionally bully others should be held accountable for their actions. Those who bully their peers are also more likely than those students who do not bully others to get into frequent fights, steal and vandalize property, drink alcohol and smoke, report poor grades, perceive a negative climate at school, and carry a weapon.

It's important to note that not all students who bully others have obvious behavior problems or are engaged in rule-breaking activities. Some of them are highly skilled socially and good at ingratiating themselves with their teacher and other adults. This is true of some boys who bully but is perhaps even more common among bullying girls. For this reason it is often difficult for adults to discover or even imagine that these students engage in bullying behavior.

Students who see bullying happen also may feel that they are in an unsafe environment. Some of the effects they feel can include feeling fearful, powerless to act, guilty for not acting, and tempted to participate.

When bullying continues and a school does not take action, the entire school climate can be affected. The school develops an environment of fear and disrespect. In this environment, students have difficulty learning, feel insecure, dislike school, and they perceive that teachers and staff have little control and don't care about them.

Bullying is a serious issue. The very existence of it at school can affect the ability to learn of all children involved. This is why it must be taken seriously and effective measures to prevent it must be put into place.

A recent U.S. study shows that 17 percent of all students reported having been bullied "sometimes" or more often. This amounts to almost one in five students. Nineteen percent had bullied others "sometimes" or more often.

Not only is bullying prevalent, but children and youth report being extremely concerned about it. In a 2003 Harris poll of more than 2,200 girls between the ages of 8 and 17 commissioned by the Girl Scouts of America, bullying topped girls' lists of concerns. When asked what they worried about the most, the most common response was being socially ostracized, being teased or made fun of.

In fact, among tweens (ages 8–13), 41 percent admitted this was a major worry. It was cited:

- Two times as often as fears about terrorist attacks, war or natural disasters
- 15 times as often as dying or the death of a loved one
- 30 times as often as they cited fears or worries about school or grades.

When you consider the many different forms bullying can take and how prevalent it has become, educators can no longer consider bullying a rite of passage or something children just need to learn to deal with. Bullying is a form of peer abuse, and every child has a fundamental human right to feel safe at school and be spared the humiliation that happens with bullying.

**10 Tips to Limit Bullying**

Although research into bullying prevention is still relatively new, a review of existing bullying prevention programs and feedback from educators in the field have identified 10 strategies that represent best practices in bullying prevention and intervention.

1. Focus on the school environment. To reduce bullying, it is important to change the climate of the school and the social norms with regard to bullying. It must become "uncool" to bully, "cool" to help out students who are bullied and normal for staff and students to notice when a child is bullied or left out.

2. Assess bullying at your school. Often, adults aren't accurate when estimating the nature and extent of bullying at their school. For this reason, it is most helpful to administer an anonymous survey to the students in your school. This will show you how prevalent bullying and its forms are at your school.

3. Garner staff and parent support for bullying prevention. Bullying prevention is most effective when the entire school community, from the bus drivers to the teachers to the parents, is on board.

4. Form a group to coordinate the school's bullying prevention activities. Bullying prevention efforts work best if they are coordinated by a representative group from the school. This team, which might include an administrator, a teacher from each grade, a member of the non-teaching staff, a school counselor or other school-based mental health professional, a school nurse and a parent, should meet regularly to discuss data from the school survey.

5. Train your staff in bullying prevention. All administrators, faculty and staff at your school should be trained in bullying prevention and intervention. In-service training can help staff to better understand the nature of bullying and its effects, how to respond if they observe bullying and how to work with others at the school to help prevent bullying from occurring.

6. Establish and enforce school rules and policies related to bullying. Although many school policies and procedures prohibit bullying, they don't clarify expectations for bullying behavior. Developing simple, clear rules about bullying can help ensure students are aware of adults' expectations that they refrain from bullying and help students who are bullied.

7. Increase adult supervision in hot spots where bullying occurs. Bullying tends to thrive in locations where adults are not present or are not attentive. Once school personnel have identified hot spots for bullying from the student surveys, look for creative ways to increase adults' presence in these locations.

8. Intervene consistently and appropriately in bullying situations. All staff should be able to intervene effectively on the spot to stop bullying. Designated staff should also hold separate sensitive follow-up meetings for the child who is bullied and the child who bullies.

9. Focus class time on bullying prevention. It is important that bullying prevention programs include a classroom component. Teachers should set aside 20–30 minutes each week to discuss bullying and peer relations with students. Bullying prevention is most effective with students when it is integrated into their classroom time.

10. Continue these efforts over time. There should be no end date for bullying prevention efforts. Bullying prevention should be woven into the entire school environment.

By following these 10 best practice strategies, you will be well on your way to reducing bullying at your school and providing a save, supportive learning environment for your students.

*Innovation in the Schools*

**The Power of the PA**
At Bishop O'Connell High School in Fairfax, Va., the staff put their daily announcements to work to help tackle the bullying issue. During the week of May 1–5, in conjunction with Stand4Change day on May 5, 2012, the school counselors and staff read announcements each morning, highlighting statistics about bullying, types of bullying and what bystanders should do if they witness bullying. At the end of the week, at noon on Friday, the entire school stood up for five minutes to take a stand against bullying while listening to some readings and reflections, followed by a minute of silence.

**Focus on Friendship**
At elementary schools in North Sanpete School District, Mt. Pleasant, Utah, Friendship Teams help limit bullying behavior. "At each school we have a sixth-grade Friendship Team," said Elise Hanson. "We've made commercials that teach about being a good friend and what to do in bullying situations. We've done classroom presentations, put on plays and puppet shows. We made posters promoting friendship, good sportsmanship, bully prevention and social skills. At one school team members were assigned to an autistic student to help promote appropriate social skills during recess."

**Document the Drama**
At Washington Irving Middle School in Springfield, Va., the school counseling department created a documentary-style movie about bullying, starring our students and staff. The school counselors interviewed students and staff to  showcase the prevalence and types of bullying in the school and then had students comment on ways to help stop the bullying. School counselors set the 20-minute video to music and then worked with teachers to have it presented, in conjunction with other school bullying data collected, during students' study period. "Students, staff and other stakeholders were blown away by the presentation," said Brooke Samuelson, school counselor, Washington Irving Middle School.

**Educate Electronically**
The Laurel Springs School chapter of the National Honor Society raised awareness about cyberbullying by creating and hosting a schoolwide webinar. NHS members worked with school counselor Michelle Morgan to create and host the event. After conducting research, the students created a presentation that included statistics, warning signs and ways to prevent cyberbullying. Because young people are usually the targets and perpetrators of cyberbullying, the discussion included personal stories from some students. Each person who spoke had a unique story to share, which showed the many different forms and impacts of cyberbullying. Chapter members also shared ways to get help in what is often a challenging and stressful situation.