



## What Do School Anti-Bullying Programs Entail?

Bullying has reached epidemic proportions in our society today. It is especially evident within our schools. In today's schools children and teens experience bullying at all levels. From simple teasing and name calling to physical threats and assaults, bullying can wreak havoc in a young child or teen's life, leaving behind mental and emotional scars that can adversely affect their future.

Bullying is not something that should be ignored nor swept under the rug. Parents need to know that educators will take their school anti bullying responsibility seriously by reacting quickly and decisively to bullying, in conjunction with the policies they have made. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a federal agency responsible for improving public health, has outlined the following guidelines to help schools follow up on bullying incidents that have been reported:

- ◆ **School officials should investigate the incident immediately** and inform the victim's parents on the action they intend to take to rectify the problem
- ◆ **A member of the school's staff or teacher should meet with the victim** to get a firsthand account of the bullying experience
- ◆ **School officials should meet with suspected bullies** to confirm the account and administer appropriate consequences in accordance with school policies
- ◆ **It's helpful for school counselors to talk to both the victim and the bully** to help sort out any misunderstandings that may have caused the incident or provide counseling on unresolved issues to prevent the incident from happening again
- ◆ **Educators should pursue bullying incidents carefully to ensure they hear all sides** of the story, including eyewitness accounts if there are any. By collecting all the facts, school officials can make a more honest and constructive assessment
- ◆ **Schools should be supportive of victims of bullying**, encouraging them to speak up about incidents that arise. Educators and staff should make themselves available and approachable so students feel they have someone to turn to
- ◆ **In the event bullying continues after it has been reported to teachers and staff, students and parents can go directly to the school principal or administrator** with their complaints. Parents and students have a right to see that bullying incidents are investigated and rectified to ensure the protection of their children.

There are many measures schools can put into effect to help prevent bullying in their institutions. Anti-bullying policies establish rules and regulations that deal specifically with bullying cases in an effort to discourage abusive behavior. The consequences for breaking these rules may range from loss of privileges to temporary suspension, attendance in moral education classes, professional counseling or long term or permanent expulsion, depending on the circumstances and severity of the bullying case.

Bullying prevention campaigns that focus on changing adverse behavior patterns can alter a child or teen's life, empowering him to rise above adverse circumstances and lead a more productive life. Some examples of these programs include:

- ◆ Positive Behavior Support Initiatives
- ◆ Character development and education programs
- ◆ Social-emotional development programs
- ◆ School wide initiatives that support positive behavior
- ◆ Early intervention programs and strategies to prevent negative mindsets and attitudes

According to the National Education Association (NEA), educators and parents play a key role in the fight against bullying and the protection of students' rights. By following these steps, teachers and parents can make a marked difference in reducing this abusive behavior within their schools:

1. **Pay attention to warning signs of bullying problems** that include mysterious injuries, change of behavior, loss of property, lack of interest in academics or social events, etc.
2. **Never ignore reports of bullying**, even if the instances seem small. All cases of bullying should be taken seriously and investigated as such.
3. **Intervene quickly** when questionable behavior that could be construed as bullying occurs, making sure students are safe from harm. Stay calm and respectful at all times, but use your authority as an adult within a supervisory capacity to put an end to the harassment on the spot.
4. **Work with students on an individual basis**, away from bystanders and crowds. Talk to the students involved in the incident separately to get all viewpoints and establish a clearer picture of what occurred. Be sure to speak with bystanders who witnessed the event.
5. **Investigate your facts thoroughly and clearly before proceeding** with any consequences. Emphasize the seriousness of bullying to those involved and explain possible repercussions.
6. **Talk with bystanders about their accountability in bullying incidents**. Bystanders sometimes intensify bullying incidents simply by watching, and may even participate by egging bullies on.
7. **Receive training on how to address bullying situations** by researching anti-bullying sites, joining anti bullying programs, etc. The more knowledgeable you are in handling harassment and abusive behavior, the more help you can be to victims and bullies alike.
8. **Last, but not least, make an effort to see students get professional help in bullying situations**. Victims may need professional counseling to alleviate any fears, anxieties or stress in relation to their bullying experience. Bullies may require professional help to change negative attitudes and mindsets that propagate this behavior.

Schools, parents and community leaders all bear responsibility towards making our schools the safe havens they were meant to be. It is in working together that positive social changes in our educational system will occur, resolving negative issues such as bullying and making them a thing of the past.