stopbullying.gov

This resource is tailored for Youth Professionals and Youth Mentors as a guide to the StopBullying.gov training module.

For more information on bullying prevention, including the definition, statistics, best practices, and common myths or misdirections, please consult the StopBullying.gov training module at www.stopbullying. gov/communityguide*.*

Understanding the Roles of Youth Professionals and Youth Mentors in Community-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts

Youth Professionals' and Mentors' Unique Role in Addressing Bullying

How can youth professionals and mentors help to prevent bullying?

Because of their unique relationship working alongside children in the community, youth professionals and mentors at all levels – such as coaches, arts instructors, academic or extracurricular advisors, or mentors – have a unique role to play in bullying prevention. Children and youth who are struggling with this issue may be more comfortable with approaching these trusted adults. In addition, youth professionals and mentors know the importance of setting clear, reasonable, and developmentally appropriate expectations for children and youth. This also applies to the attainment of new skills and in learning how to positively relate with peers.

Bullying can be prevented when youth professionals and youth mentors:

- **Learn about bullying, its warning signs, and effects** through the training modules or other partner resources.

- **Commit to making programs safe for kids, free from physical and emotional harm.** Encourage children to relate to one another in a spirit of inclusivity, respect, and caring (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005).

- **Assess bullying behaviors and attitudes**, through short surveys, interviews, or focus groups, to gain valuable insights into the extent to which kids experience and witness bullying in community settings; the types of bullying and particular settings that are most problematic; and their responses to and attitudes about bullying.

- **Educate kids and their parents or caregivers about bullying.** This includes the many direct and indirect forms it takes and the harm it may cause. Dispel any myths and share ideas about ways to protect children from bullying. This education may take many forms, including age-appropriate discussions and activities for children and youth, and printed or online resources, trainings or informational sessions for adults.

- **Establish clear rules that apply to bullying and continually reinforce the message that bullying is not acceptable.** Consider working directly with youth in developing, monitoring, and enforcing rules. These rules and policies should provide children and youth with clear guidance about appropriate behavior. Harsh, inflexible discipline strategies should be avoided. Such policies have been found to harm student-adult relationships and discourage children from reporting bullying when seen or experienced (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Instead, graduated sanctions should be used for rule violations, which are appropriate for the developmental level of the child and the nature and severity of the bullying.

- **Supervise** areas where groups of children and youth gather for free time, to be dropped off or picked up, and on playgrounds or athletic fields.

- **Investigate thoroughly** when bullying is suspected or reported.

- **Step in to stop bullying** immediately wherever it occurs or when it is reported.

- **Follow up with the children, youth, and parents who are involved, as appropriate, to ensure that the bullying stops.** Take steps to ensure that bullied kids feel safe; educate aggressors about why their behavior was inappropriate; and determine if additional resources or referrals might be helpful.

- **Adopt evidence-based practices.** Whenever possible, use evidence-based approaches to effectively prevent bullying, protect children who are victimized, and help those who bully to deal with their counterproductive behaviors.

Challenges & Opportunities for Youth Professionals and Youth Mentors

Youth Professionals and mentors may face the following challenges in addressing bullying in their community:

- **Bullying thrives where supervision is not enough or when responsible adults choose to overlook it.** When staff and volunteers supervise large numbers of youth, bullying can go unnoticed. Supervising adults may even know of bullying but do nothing because they are uncertain of agency support or the best ways to intervene. Relational bullying (such as spreading rumors, excluding others) may be particularly difficult to detect, even when adults are watching.

- **Adults who do not interact with kids regularly are often unfamiliar with their personalities, patterns of behavior, and friendships.** This makes it difficult to tell the difference between bullying, and rough play or conflicts between youth. Kids may also find it harder to trust and confide in adults about their fears and bullying experiences if they do not know them well.

- **Time limitations.** Educating children, volunteers, and staff about bullying and effective prevention may be challenging if there are very limited hours.

- **Bullying may continue into after-school activities.** Staff with extended-day programs may find that bullying during the school day carries over into before- and after-school activities.

- **Wide age ranges may increase prevalence.** Children and youth usually bully peers who are their same age or younger. The risk of bullying may increase in after-school or community programs in which there are wide age ranges.

There are also important opportunities for youth professionals and mentors to make a difference:

- **Some children and youth learn best from less structured, hands-on experiences, without the pressure and competition typical in the classroom setting.** Extracurricular and out-of-school programs can integrate lessons that develop positive social skills and improve one's self-control, confidence, and even resilience to bullying (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010).

- **Programs may provide an opportunity to involve older, more mature youth to participate in prevention efforts.** When children of different ages attend out-of-school programs, there is an opportunity for teenagers and more mature youth to mentor or befriend those who may be particularly vulnerable to bullying, such as those who are new to the community, appear to have few friends, or have special needs. These activities allow them to pursue their interests, discover their talents, and develop friendships with peers who share these interests. Doing so can increase their self-assurance and self-esteem. They may also benefit from having a chance to make friends with peers other than their classmates, and it can sometimes be a relief for them to interact with peers who don't go to their school and who don't view them as a victim of bullying.

- **Children and youth who bully may benefit from community programs that separate them from their classmates.** Those who bully others in school tend to spend time with peers who support their bullying and who have positive attitudes toward violence. In closely supervised and structured settings, it is possible to challenge those who bully to use their social skills in constructive and appropriate ways.

How Youth Professionals and Youth Mentors Can Engage Others in Community Bullying Prevention Strategies

- **Support comprehensive bullying prevention efforts in schools and communities.** Out-of-school programs are well-suited to raise awareness as well as reduce and prevent bullying. Most youth organizations have long-standing alliances that bring together critical partners such as children and youth, parents, schools, faith communities, businesses, and community leaders.

- **Encourage young people to speak out to stop bullying.** Support children and youth who are willing to take leadership roles in bullying prevention efforts in their schools and communities. Encourage them to participate on anti-bullying committees to assess and plan bullying prevention strategies; inform school personnel and parent/community groups about bullying; lead discussion groups with peers about how they can help prevent and stop bullying, and become a mentor to younger children. Engaging youth in these ways may give them confidence to speak about and solve a problem that is familiar and important to them. Offering children and youth opportunities to apply their talents and skills to take leadership and pride in their accomplishments can help change their lives and the community for the better (Spooner, 2011).

Ideas for Next Steps

- Learn more about bullying prevention through StopBullying.gov and the resources listed below. Review the research presented in the modules and how it is best communicated to fellow youth professionals or mentors, children and youth themselves, and other community stakeholders.

- Talk with children about bullying, their peer relationships, and school environment. Involve them in bullying response efforts such as mentoring or assisting in community events.

- Review any existing data about bullying within the community. Consult the Community Action Toolkit and perform a landscape assessment that will help you identify relevant information, as well as ways to address the broader needs of the community.

- Plan a bullying prevention event that will inform a broader network of youth professionals and mentors, children and youth, or members of the community to help dispel common myths and misdirections. This will also shed light on the importance of a holistic, community-based effort — ideally one that applies a public health approach in prevention.

Resources and References

Sample of Resources Available

Afterschool Alliance – Founded to raise awareness and advocate for quality, affordable after-school programs for all children as an outgrowth of the 21st CCLC Initiative of the U.S. Department of Education and the Mott Foundation. For more information, visit www.afterschoolalliance.org.

Girl Scouts – The Girl Scouts provide a variety of anti-bullying resources on the web site for young girls and teens to inform them about bullying and how to *Be A Friend First*. For more information, visit www.girlscouts.org.

Harvard Family Research Project – Conducts research and evaluations in support of system changes that promote child well-being and learning, including quality out-of-school programming. For more information, visit www.hfrp.org.

National Crime Prevention Council – This has bullying prevention campaign resources for adults and kids. McGruff, the Crime Dog, helps young children in *Friendship Beats Bullies Every Time* and in how to *Spot the Clues* when someone is being bullied. Teens are informed about cyberbullying and involved in creating PSA messages. For more information, visit www.ncpc.org.

National 4-H Conference Teens Tackle Bullying – Teens from 4-H helped to develop a strategy for raising awareness and preventing bullying in their community through social media and local events. For more information, visit the StopBullying.gov blog.

PACER National Bullying Prevention Center – PACER's interactive web site with videos and games for *Teens Against Bullying and Kids Against Bullying*, aims to inspire youth to learn about bullying and actions they can take to prevent it. Includes a toolkit for planning *A Unite Against Bullying* school event. For more information, visit www.pacer.org/bullying.

StopBullying.gov Youth Leaders' Toolkit – This resource was developed for teens who want to help younger children launch a bullying prevention project. It outlines clear strategies, action steps and template materials for planning bullying prevention activities with youth. For more information, visit www.stopbullying.gov/resources-files/youth-leader-toolkit.pdf

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) *Take 15* – This resource helps parents, caregivers, and anyone involved with children and youth start meaningful conversations about bullying and bullying prevention. The questions are designed to generate open and honest discussions with children to help ensure a healthy and safe environment for their development. For more information, visit store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA08-4321/SMA08-4321.pdf

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