



School Social Work Association of America Position Paper

School Safety: Bullying Prevention and Intervention

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) is intent on stemming the tide of bullying behaviors in schools throughout the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) created and released the first federal definition of bullying in 2014. The CDC defines bullying as any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. [Facts About Bullying | StopBullying.gov](#). Bullying can affect the social and emotional climate of an entire classroom, a school, or even a community when you include those who are bullied, those who bully, and those who witness bullying. [Effects of Bullying | StopBullying.gov](#)

Current statistics on school bullying and cyberbullying indicate that one out of every five (20.2%) students report they are victims of bullying. The National Center for Educational Statistics breaks down the incidence of bullying into an extensive list of categories. [Bullying Statistics-National Bullying Prevention Center](#)

Bullying can result in significant and long-term negative effects on a student's physical and emotional well-being and interfere with positive relationship building and effective learning in the classroom. Victims of bullying are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, and other somatic symptoms such as recurring head and stomach aches, poor school attendance patterns, substance use, death, suicidal ideation, and later adult violence. [Preventing Bullying | CDC](#)

School Social Workers are well-postured and prepared to encourage and implement evidence-based interventions that support students impacted by bullying. Bullying is a serious school issue and a growing public health and social justice issue. Current societal trends throughout our nation have led to increasing and more serious expressions of bullying violence. But never have we had more evidence-based research that informs us that with effective interventions and counseling, children who experience significant trauma can develop the skills and capacity to experience hope, emotional regulation, personal growth, and academic and social competence.

Recommendations

Provide Evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services.

- Bullying prevention and amelioration programs begin with a thorough understanding of what bullying looks like and an accurate assessment of the extent to which bullying behavior occurs nationally and within your local community, local district, and school. [How to Identify Bullying | NEA](#)

- Bullying prevention programs will require knowledge of which categories of students are most at risk of being targets of bullying. The United States government provided website, StopBullying.gov has four main informational tabs: Bullying, Cyberbullying, Prevention, and Resources, along with information designed specifically for children. Disparities in Suicide CDC Article [Disparities in Suicide | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/press-releases/2018/suicide-disparities.html) explains which groups of individuals are most likely to die by suicide and validates that the LGBT community is among the highest at risk. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report on Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, provides additional data regarding LGBTQIA+ youth and other vulnerable groups and categories of students that are more likely to be targeted victims of bullying. [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2019 | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/youthriskbehavior/2019-yrbws/index.html)
- Bullying prevention will require knowledge of what types of programs and interventions are effective, and the antecedents of bullying behavior. The article, Depression in Children (Neff, 2018) addresses the role that depression plays in aggressive children along with assessment strategies, and appropriate interventions to apply when addressing mental health diagnoses, such as disruptive mood dysregulation disorder (DMDD). Additionally, the research article entitled, *Abuse of technology in adolescence and its relation to social and emotional competencies, emotions in online communication, and bullying*, found evidence that prosocial use of technology reduces the risk of bullying behaviors and abuse of technology leads to greater involvement in bullying behavior (Naseascu et al., 2018). A growing number of bullying incidents that occur in schools can be traced back to challenges students are encouraged to complete by popular online social media sites. The Youth Voice Project was the first large-scale research project aimed at letting childrens’ perceptions reveal which bullying interventions were most and least effective (Davis & Nixon, 2010). “Our students report that asking for and getting emotional support and a sense of connection has helped them the most among all the strategies we compared” (Davis & Nixon, 2010, p. 19).
- School personnel and districts will need a collaborative approach toward the development and implementation of agreed-upon bullying protocols that will use a multi-tiered system of support to address bullying that will include schoolwide classroom instruction, small group interventions, and individual counseling when indicated, using an evidence-based curriculum, referral to community resources and intervention when needed to promote the safety and well-being of children. The article, *Addressing school violence and bullying: Evidence review by Dr. Jane White*, reviews worldwide research and evidence-based practices used in formulating a plan of action to reduce bullying behaviors. (White, 2019). [Addressing school violence and bullying: Evidence review](https://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/press-releases/2019/addressing-school-violence-and-bullying-evidence-review.html)

Promote a school climate and culture conducive to increased learning and teaching excellence

- All members of a school community will require knowledge of trauma-informed practices and an ability to recognize and clearly understand their specific role in assisting students at risk. [Research Brief: Building a Positive School Climate Through Restorative Practices](https://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/press-releases/2019/building-a-positive-school-climate-through-restorative-practices.html)
- Students, staff, and parents will have knowledge of behaviors that constitute bullying, and the consequences of those bullying behaviors. Students will have knowledge of expected behaviors and understand the important concept of reporting bullying they or others are experiencing, be it virtual or in person and verbal, physical, social, or sexual. [10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Violence in Your School Community](https://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/press-releases/2019/10-things-you-can-do-to-prevent-violence-in-your-school-community.html)

- Students need to be taught the importance of prosocial behavior and empathy both for their own social-emotional welfare and the benefit of others around them. Focus on the five primary areas of social intelligence provides an effective framework upon which to build. [What Is the CASEL Framework?](#)
- Teaching excellence and the use of effective behavior modification skills will improve the learning atmosphere in schools. As a result of Covid-19, an increasing number of students have fallen behind academically which can impact a student’s sense of competence and well-being, leading to school avoidance, and aggressive and other antisocial behaviors when they do attend school. Remediation efforts that are strength-based and instruction targeted to a child’s level of current competencies will help ameliorate these tendencies. The Department of Education proposed areas of concern and strategies that education shareholders must continue to address. [Elevating Teaching | U.S. Department of Education](#)
- A willingness to address and ameliorate the issues of staffing shortages and trauma-infused school systems within a school district is key. [Addressing Educator Burnout and Demoralization: Actions for Administrators](#)
- A system of compliance that is consistent with Federal Civil Rights Laws, Sexual Orientation, and Gender identity [Executive Order on Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation | The White House](#)

Maximize access to school-based and community-based resources.

- Parental involvement, support, input, and education are vital to any successful bullying prevention program. Here is an example of ideas to share with parents when their child is involved in a bullying situation from authors: Ronald G. Slaby, PhD and Judith Y. Bernstein, PhD Co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Medical Society Alliance. [Bullying Prevention](#)
- Knowledge of school district, community, and government resources and the coordination of efforts between these entities is enhanced under the influence of the school social worker who is well trained to view systems and their strengths and weaknesses. The following is an explanation of a social worker’s responsibility to refer families for additional services per the NASW Code of Ethics. [NASW Code of Ethics](#)
- The sharing of and accessibility to school, district, and community resources are another essential role of coordinated efforts of school and district administration and their social-emotional wellness teams of which the school social worker is a part. Each participant will need a clear understanding of their role and specific responsibilities to improve parent and student access to these resources. Parent emails, phone calls and letters, school and district websites, translation services when indicated, and parent education webinars and classes can increase a parent’s access to necessary resources to secure their student’s safety and well-being. The following is an example of a 2021 Bullying Prevention Plan for Foxboro Public Schools that provides guidance for school administrators when children are involved in bullying which includes the structure needed for evaluation and accountability. [Model Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan](#)

Conclusion

SSWAA supports and encourages professional development for teachers, administration, and staff on the topic of best practices for bullying prevention and intervention. SSWAA believes that all students must be provided with the skills, resources, and support of caring and courageous adults and peers committed to the prevention of bullying. Students and their families need to have knowledge that there are those within their school community who can and will intervene on their behalf when bullying is identified and are committed to establishing a safe and welcoming school culture. All members of the education community must work together to stop this form of violence, which without adequate response, is likely to escalate to even more dangerous levels in our schools. SSWAA also recommends that Congress will continue to address bullying and ensure that any bill or department regulation aimed at addressing this issue must include specific language related to harassment regarding sexual orientation, either real or perceived and that public, charter, and private schools that receive federal or state funds be held to the same standards of accountability by the U.S. Department of Education to protect vulnerable populations from the harm of harassment and effects of bullying.

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