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Bullying Prevention Programs

This Research to Practice Brief summarizes current evidence about school-based programs for preventing and reducing bullying and victimization.

Bullying, by definition, is a form of youth violence that is defined as "unwanted aggressive behaviour(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" (1).

The main findings presented in this Brief are from the following recent, pre-appraised, high quality systematic reviews:

- Jimenez Barbero, J. A., Ruiz Hernandez, J. A., Esteban, B. L., & Garcia, M. P. (2012). Effectiveness of antibullying school programmes: A systematic review by evidence levels. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *34*(9), 1646-1658.
  Quality appraisal by Healthevidence.org: 8/10 (strong)

- Ttofi MM, & Farrington DP. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *7*(1), 27-56.
  Quality appraisal by: Healthevidence.org: 8/10 (strong)

The evidence from these two reviews is supplemented with information from other sources to expand on and provide more detail about some of the key findings.

Key Messages

- Recent systematic reviews found that school-based anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing bullying and victimization (2,3).

- School programs aimed at reducing violence, including bullying, can benefit the overall social setting of schools (3).
  - The most effective programs plan to improve social and interpersonal skills of students and to modify their attitudes and beliefs (3).

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- The key features of programs that decrease bullying are: parent meetings, playground supervision, disciplinary techniques, teacher training, classroom rules and school policies (2,3).
  - Meetings with parents and teachers allow parents to be involved and aware of bullying (3)
  - Playground supervision is strongly linked to program effectiveness as most school bullying occurs during recess (3).
  - Disciplinary methods include having serious talks with bullies, keeping bullies close to a teacher during recess, sending bullies to the principal, and taking away bullies' privileges (3).

- It is important to teach coping strategies and social skills when responding to bullies such as building positive relationships with peers (4,5,6). This is more effective than teaching students how to respond to provoking situations (1).

- Programs that included youth working with their peers in the form of peer mediation and peer mentoring were deemed <ins>ineffective</ins> and actually did harm by increasing bullying and victimization (3). Targeting delinquent peers is associated with an increase in offending (3).

- Establishing a "whole-school anti-bullying policy" was significantly related to decreasing bullying (3). Such policies usually include the responsibilities of both students and staff in preventing and addressing bullying (3).

Considerations for Implementation

- The success of a program is increased when parents and all appropriate professional disciplines within a school are included (2).
  - Parents should be educated about the issue of school bullying through presentations and parent-teacher meetings (3).

- Adapting programs to the social and cultural characteristics of the school population is important (2).
  - Programs should offer age-appropriate materials that are easily understood by students (7).

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- To ensure long-term effectiveness of a program, it is important to have reminder sessions or integrate interventions within the academic curriculum (3). Programs that last throughout the academic year are more effective than single session programs (3).

Evidence-Based Programs

The **Canadian Best Practices Portal** highlights several school-based anti-bullying programs that have been evaluated and show positive results:

1. **Olweus Bullying Prevention Program** (8)
   - Program Design: The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is school-based and operates at multiple levels (individual, class, school) and uses multiple components (e.g. recreational activities, counselling, information sessions, after-school programs) in order to restructure the school environment. The program can operate from 6 months to a year.
   - Program Objectives: The goal is to prevent or reduce bullying in schools by restructuring the school environment, reducing opportunities and rewards for bullying, and improving peer relations (8).
   - Target Audience: Students in elementary, middle and high school (ages 6 to 17 years).
   - Delivered by: Teachers, with support from community members and parents.

2. **Steps to Respect** (9)
   - Program Design: Steps to Respect is a school-based program that provides strategies to reduce bullying at multiple levels (individual child, peer-group and school-wide). The program is primarily delivered through classroom lessons, augmented with ideas to support school wide anti-bullying policies.
   - Program Objectives: The objectives of the program are to reduce bullying and destructive bystander bahaviours, increase prosocial beliefs and increase social and emotional skills (9).
   - Target Audience: Students in elementary school (ages 6 to 12 years).
   - Delivered By: Teachers, school psychologists, counselors and school administrators.

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3. **WITS Primary Program** (10)

- Program Design: This program brings together schools, families, children, and communities to prevent bullying and peer victimization by creating a safe and supportive school environment. The acronym WITS stands for Walk away, Ignore, Talk it out, and Seek help. This is meant to provide a common language so children and adults can talk about and respond to peer victimization. There are different versions for schools, community leaders, families and children.
- Program Objectives: The objective of this program is to create a responsive community for the prevention of peer victimization.
- Target Audience: children in Kindergarten to Grade 3.
- Delivered By: Community members, para-professionals, volunteers, school administrators, playground supervisors, police, librarians, parents and older students.
- Free resources are available on the program website: http://www.witsprogram.ca/

Additional Resources to Support Bullying Prevention and Intervention Efforts

Bullying Trends in Peel Data Fact Sheet
Provides current statistics on bullying among Peel youth from a 2013 survey.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
The CDC offers a wide range of information, research and tools to support parents, educators and other professionals in the community with bullying prevention and intervention tactics.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board
The Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board has a range of supports in place, to prevent, intervene and respond to bullying in accordance with the provincial Safe Schools Act and in alignment to Catholic education values.

Ontario Ministry of Education
The Ontario Ministry of Education ensures the provision of the Safe and Accepting Schools Acts and provides resources, policies and supports for educators and parents on how to keep children safe and respected at school.

Peel District School Board
The Peel District School Board has a range of supports in place, including school Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans and parent resources to proactively address and respond to bullying in accordance with the provincial Safe Schools Act.

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Peel Public Health

Peel Public Health has resources and supports for parents and children with respect to bullying. It also offers a suite of resources for teachers with respect to bullying prevention.

Peel Regional Police

Peel Regional Police provides effective policies to ensure a safe environment within Peel, including resources and supports for bullying and cyber-bullying.

PREVNet

PREVNet is a network of leading researchers and organizations across Canada, working together to stop bullying. It provides education, research and training for parents, educators, and organizations that play a role in bullying prevention across communities.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013). Understanding Bullying: Fact Sheet. Retrieved From [December 1, 2014]: www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying_factsheet.pdf

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5. Jenson, J. M., & Dieterich, W. A. (2007). Effects of a skills-based prevention program on bullying and bully victimization among elementary school children. *Prevention Science, 8,* 285-296.

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PeelThinkShare Research to Practice Briefs

This is one in a series of Briefs prepared by the Community Health Initiatives Team, Region of Peel, Health Services in order to support community-based organizations in the Peel Region with accessing and using high quality research evidence.

The intent of these Briefs is to present the key evidence-based findings, considerations for implementation and links to more resources to support evidence-based practices and actions in the community.

These Briefs and other resources can be found at: www.peelthinkshare.ca

Is there a topic that you are interested in, that has not been covered in our *Research to Practice Seri*es yet? Let us know by emailing peelthinkshare@peelregion.ca.

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