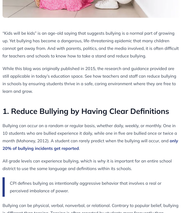

We will be performing updates to our website beginning at 7:00 a.m. CDT on Saturday, April 19th. You may be unable to register for training and order products during this time. We apologize for any inconvenience.

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Reducing Bullying in Schools: 10 Effective Tips

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Erin Hellwig

“Kids will be kids” is an age-old saying that suggests bullying is a normal part of growing up. Yet bullying has become a dangerous, life-threatening epidemic that many children cannot get away from. And with parents, politics, and the media involved, it is often difficult for teachers and schools to know how to take a stand and reduce bullying.

While this blog was originally published in 2015, the research and guidance provided are still applicable in today’s education space. See how teachers and staff can reduce bullying in schools by ensuring students thrive in a safe, caring environment where they are free to learn and grow.

1. Reduce Bullying by Having Clear Definitions

Bullying can occur on a random or regular basis, whether daily, weekly, or monthly. One in 10 students who are bullied experience it daily, while one in five are bullied once or twice a month (Mahoney, 2012). A student can rarely predict when the bullying will occur, and **only 20% of bullying incidents get reported**.

All grade levels can experience bullying, which is why it is important for an entire school district to use the same language and definitions within its schools.

> CPI defines bullying as intentionally aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, nonverbal, or relational. Contrary to popular belief, bullying is different than teasing. Teasing is often reported by students more frequently than bullying since it is done to irritate or provoke (Sweeting and West, 2001). Bullying, on the other hand, involves the real or perceived imbalance of power.

Bullying can take the form of:

- Threats
- Teasing
- Name calling
- Pushing
- Hitting
- Cyberbullying

Bullying can also include relational incidents like gossiping and purposeful exclusion from events. While physical bullying can leave noticeable marks, relational bullying can leave hidden wounds that are often harder for teachers to notice. And with the rise of cellphone usage in school, relational cyberbullying has become an even bigger challenge.

Cyberbullying is the use of digital technology to bully someone else. **Approximately 15% of students** between the ages of 12 and 18 have reported being bullied via text or via social media platforms. Schools should ensure that bullying prevention efforts are stressed when it comes to cyberbullying.

By having a clear definition of bullying, staff can know what to look out for to better support students.

2. Reduce Bullying by Removing Labels and Addressing Behavior

Teachers and staff can unintentionally place judgement on a student when they use labels like “bully” or “victim.” This is why it is vital for staff to address student behavior in a nonjudgemental way.

To do this, first find out what happened before deciding whether the incident qualifies as bullying. Looking at the specific behaviors that occurred is important so they can be addressed at a later time.

> Keep in mind that each student involved in a situation comes from different circumstances. Everyone has baggage. **There may be** a reason why the child who engages in bullying behavior is acting this way.

When addressing an incident, it is best to **involve the student who is doing the bullying**. They need to know how their actions and behaviors negatively impact the student they are bullying. If the behavior continues, parents or guardians will need to be involved.

When teachers address the negative consequences of specific behaviors, such as disrupting the classroom or harassing other students, students can recognize what behaviors need to stop.

3. Reduce Bullying by Setting Clear, Enforceable Rules and Expectations

Age-appropriate rules allow students to know what behavior is expected. When students are younger, for instance, it is best to keep the rules simple. When they are older, shape the rules to help them meet their maturity level.

Scheuermann and Hall (2008) have created a list of suggestions for writing rules within a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) framework:

- State the rules in positive terms.
- Keep the number of rules to a minimum (3 to 5, depending on age).
- Set rules that cover multiple situations.
- Make sure the rules are age appropriate.
- Teach students the rules.
- Set an example for rule-following behavior.
- Be consistent in enforcing the rules.

These guidelines help set a tone for the classroom. Rules and consequences should be clearly stated as students need to know what will happen if they engage in certain negative behavior. By establishing clear rules and reinforcing why behaviors are unacceptable, teachers and staff can help prevent and reduce incidents of bullying.

4. Reduce Bullying by Rewarding Positive Behavior

When a student does something bad, it is easy to point it out. At the same time, not many people choose to reinforce good behavior, simply because it is expected. This is one area where staff can make a noticeable impact. When a child is getting into trouble frequently, “catching them being good” can reinforce the behavior (Mahoney, 2012).

> **Reinforcing good behavior** will give students clear expectations about what you want in a positive way.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that schools:

- Affirm good behavior four to five times for every one criticism.
- Use one-on-one feedback.
- Do not publicly reprimand students.

- Help students see how to correct their behaviors.
- Help students understand that violating the rules will result in consequences.

Following these suggestions can help reduce bullying by helping students become more receptive of positive behaviors and less likely to engage in negative behaviors.

Proactive Approaches to Address School Bullying

Gain a deeper understanding of bullying, its impact on students, and how you can create a classroom that stops bullying from starting in the first place.

Download

5. Reduce Bullying by Encouraging Open Communication

Communication is key to building trust. When teachers employ an open communication policy in the classroom, students will feel more open to talking to their teachers about their problems—including bullying. Having classroom meetings and one-on-one conversations are a couple of effective ways to build that communication.

Classroom meetings provide a way for students to talk about school-related issues beyond academics. These meetings can help teachers and parents stay informed about what is going on at school and in the student's life.

For these meetings to be the most impactful, staff will need to use empathetic listening. Students want to know they're truly being listened to, and they want to feel supported. They also need to feel welcome and comfortable to speak with their teachers one-on-one, especially if they feel they are being bullied.

A student who is being bullied might not feel comfortable saying something in front of the whole class. They also may feel uneasy or worried if the student who is doing the bullying is also in the classroom meeting.

For this reason, schools need to use adequate reporting systems that are easy to use and confidential. They need to encourage teachers and staff to report any incidents that occur. This way, the school can do a better job of protecting students and prevent bullying incidents from reoccurring. Reporting also helps track individual incidents and responses to **detect trends**. By applying this system, future incidents can potentially be prevented.

As staff and teachers work to reduce and prevent bullying, keep in mind that communication is not just verbal. Nonverbal cues may include decorations, signs, and the school's physical interior and exterior. These nonverbal cues can send a strong message to students and parents about whether the school fosters a positive environment. If it does not send a good message, bullying is more likely to occur.

6. Reduce Bullying by Engaging Parents

Many people are involved in children's lives. When these people work together, a significant difference can be made in a child's life. But it can be tricky for teachers to know how to best communicate with parents about their child's behavior. Thus, teachers and staff need to build a strong rapport with parents.

> Staff can help build rapport with parents by sending invitations to participate in different events or by having parents play a specific role in their child's activities (Mahoney 2012).

Keeping parents informed about their child's grades, friends, behavior, and attitude in school is an important way to include them. Together, parents and teachers can provide a consistent approach to introduce more productive and appropriate behavior. It also helps a message sink in with a child. By having open conversations with students about the harms of bullying, it can when someone else is being bullied and what they can do to help.

7. Reduce Bullying by Looking for Warning Signs

When bullying occurs, there may be **warning signs** that teachers and staff can be aware of. Ask these questions:

- Are you constantly breaking up behavior/incidents between the same kids?
- Do you ever find the underlying cause of what is really going on?

- Have there been any significant changes in a student's attitude and/or behavior?

When a student is being bullied, their behavior may communicate their distress. A student experiencing bullying may:

- Have unexplainable injuries
- Frequently have headaches or stomachaches
- Experience changes in eating habits
- Have difficulty sleeping
- See declining grades
- Loose an interest in school and friends

If a student is bullying someone, you may see their behavior may include:

- An increase in fights with other students
- More aggressive actions, which require them to be sent to the principal
- Blaming others for their situation
- Refusing to take responsibility for their own actions

8. Reduce Bullying by Clearing the Scene When Bullying Occurs

Most times, teachers and staff are the ones who break up incidents when they occur at school. It is important to separate all students involved so you can gather the facts individually.

Remember that there are often bystanders when incidents happen. These students may encourage and reinforce the behavior of bullies (Mahoney, 2012). It is often easier to first remove the bystanders and then chat with the students involved in the incident.

Once you have calmed down the scene, interview the bystanders. When you listen, be sure to show empathy and remember you do not know all the circumstances. Then, hear the story from the students involved in the incident.

Bullying will rarely end right away. **Be persistent and consistent about stopping it,** follow through with consequences, and follow up with students after incidents. Doing this shows students that you genuinely care about their safety and well-being.

9. Reduce Bullying by Monitoring Hot Spots

There are certain places where bullying is more likely to occur. **According to Stopbullying.gov** are where bullying is most likely to take place:

- Hallway or stairwell (43.4%)
- Classroom (42.1%)
- Cafeteria (26.8%)
- Outside on school grounds (21.9%)
- Online or text (15.3%)
- Bathroom or locker room (12.1%)
- Somewhere else in the school building (2.1%)

Staff and teachers can help reduce bullying by knowing where it often happens and what signs to look out for. When there are straightforward ways to report bullying, students can feel safe coming forward if they see or experience it.

10. Reduce Bullying by Knowing Your State Laws and District Policies

All 50 states now have bullying laws in place. Staff should be familiar with their state laws and regulations regarding bullying. They should also know their school district's policy.

Schools need to ensure their policies match state laws and that all staff and teachers are aware of any legal responsibilities. This allows everyone to be on the same page and helps students feel safe.

CPI Training can help provide teachers and staff with the training needed to address incidents of bullying in a trauma-informed manner. Schedule a conversation with us to learn how CPI can support your school or district.

Schedule a Consultation

Additional resources you may be interested in:

- **Understanding Bullying and How to Recognize It in the Classroom**
- **The Connection Between Trauma and Bullying**
- **5 Ways Educators Can Address Bullying in the Classroom**

References

- Mahoney, M. (2012). *Part I—An overview of bullying and guidance for its prevention.*
- Mahoney, M. (2012). *Part II—Cyber-bullying.*

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