

# Strategies for Principals: How to Prevent Bullying

13 October

Bullying and harassment is a not a new problem that school communities face, but it is one whose long-term effects are drawing public attention and encouraging real efforts towards improving the lives of all students. Many education professionals are more and more concerned with how to prevent bullying.

According to StopBullying.gov, the official definition of bullying is: "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems." A similar definition and application also can apply to adults who work in the schools or community members who visit schools for different reasons.

Bullying includes "making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose." Bullying can occur during or after school, in the school building or in places like the playground or the bus. School-related bullying can also occur at non-academic events associated with the school. Bullying is becoming more prevalent via social media. It can be direct in email conversations as well as more indirect such as postings on Facebook and Twitter.

School administrators, such as principals, assistant principals and others, play a key role in helping create an environment that reduces and prevents bullying – in conjunction with efforts of teachers, staff, students and community members. We can all try out the different ways to stop bullying.

**Understand, follow, and support state and local policies and procedures.** Every school leader must be aware of, support and uphold all policies and procedures regarding bullying. Responses should be consistent and appropriate to the transgression, without being overly harsh. Increase adult supervision in "high-bullying" areas.

**Create a positive school climate.** Focus on creating a safe and connected social climate in which all staff and students feel welcomed and valued. This proactive approach should be modeled and expected from all. Assess your community. Get the facts about what's bullying and harassment in your community and your school. Collect accurate, local data, and then share that data to motivate the community to take action to prevent bullying. Local data will help people realize it's a problem that's reaching their community, too.

**Provide training & seek community buy-in.** Educate your community on what bullying is and its long-lasting effects, what policies and rules are in place, what is expected of them and how they can help. A community working together is integral to reducing bullying and harassment. Look for support from other school leaders, teachers, staff, students, parents or guardians, and community members. Educated adults can teach and engage students in positive behavior towards other students, how they can intervene when bullying occurs and how to handle being bullied.

**Have a conversation.** Having open dialogue, or the opportunity for it, is important for students to understand the effects of bullying and to encourage them to create a positive environment instead. Provide bullying prevention activities such as assemblies, creative art campaigns or other communications that reinforce the positive messages of community. Focus some class time on a candid discussion of bullying and its effects.

**Changes will not happen overnight.** It's an ongoing effort and responsibility that all members of your community share. As a school administrator, you have the unique opportunity to lead and encourage these efforts and create a safer, more positive learning environment for all students.

Resources on bullying and harassment prevention:

- <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>
- <http://www.apa.org/topics/bullying/index.aspx>
- <http://www.edutopia.org/blogs/tag/bullying-prevention>

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