

Second Step® Insights

4 SEL-Based Strategies to Help Students Rise Above Bullying

September 11, 2024 | By: The Second Step® Team



Bullying is harmful to everyone involved—to victims of bullying, to bystanders, and to those who bully. Far from isolated incidents, school bullying is defined as “a damaging social process that is characterized by an imbalance of power driven by social (societal) and institutional norms. It is often repeated and manifests as unwanted interpersonal behaviour among students or school personnel that causes physical, social, and emotional harm to the targeted individuals or groups, and the wider school community.” When bullying goes unaddressed, it can damage entire communities, creating lasting impacts for years to come.

According to a recent survey, [around 19% of secondary students](#) reported being bullied during the school year, with female students experiencing slightly higher rates than male students. Even though bullying rates remain stubbornly consistent, it's not sufficient to say that bullying is inevitable. It's not enough to simply say “kids will be kids” or to keep using the same [ineffective methods](#) and keep expecting different results.

School communities have to be especially vigilant—not just about stopping bullying when it happens but also about preventing bullying before it starts. Educators can play a key role by using proactive strategies that reduce bullying. Thankfully, there's ample research to suggest that [comprehensive social-emotional learning \(SEL\)](#) is [one of the most effective](#), if not the most effective, strategies to help prevent bullying.

[Anti-bullying strategies](#) that apply an SEL framework can help educators take a proactive approach to bullying prevention. Unlike one-off solutions or band-aid disciplinary measures, these SEL strategies help educators understand and address bullying holistically while empowering students with the knowledge and skills to rise above bullying.

1. Prioritize school climate

[Research](#) shows that schools with positive climate foster healthy development, while negative school climate is linked to higher rates of bullying, aggression, and victimization. Growing a positive school climate is a proactive, holistic way to approach bullying prevention because it aims to create an environment where students feel happier, safer, and more connected—and thus less likely to become involved with bullying.

What does a positive school climate look like, and how can you create one? A positive school climate prioritizes healthy relationships, reinforces positive shared norms, and promotes student and staff well-being. The Second Step® team has created a [helpful guide with starter strategies](#) for improving school climate, such as encouraging safety initiatives, family workshops, student clubs, and more.

2. Talk about bullying daily

[One simple way](#) to help kids understand, identify, and rise above bullying is to talk about it with them. You don't need to wait until bullying happens to address it. Kids need the opportunity to ask questions, express their thoughts and feelings, and learn about the causes, signs, and effects of bullying.

These conversations don't have to always revolve around bullying, though. For kids, just knowing that they can share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences—whether positive or negative—with trusted adults can alleviate some of the fear that often prevents them from speaking up about bullying.

3. Bring families into the picture

The best bullying prevention strategies go beyond the classroom and involve families. To get families involved in bullying prevention, you can [provide resources to help them](#) identify signs of bullying, facilitate conversations with their kids at home, and prevent bullying in their communities outside of school.

Since bullying can often happen in the cracks between school and home—on buses, at sports practices, and online—involving families adds another essential layer of support for kids.

4. Implement comprehensive social-emotional learning

In addition to these specific strategies, comprehensive SEL can [help prevent](#) bullying before it starts. SEL helps kids build empathy, social and self-awareness, and emotion management—all of which play a role in a child's ability to understand, respond to, and avoid bullying.

The [ongoing prevalence](#) of bullying in schools shows the need for a holistic, proactive, schoolwide approach to bullying prevention. [Social-emotional learning programs](#) and SEL-based bullying prevention strategies can [help prevent](#) bullying, equipping educators and students with essential skills to rise above bullying in all its forms.

[Explore more resources](#) to help prevent bullying in your school community.

Access My Account

- [My Dashboard](#)
- [Online Order History](#)
- [Community](#)

Get Help

- [Help & Support](#)
- [Purchasing Options](#)
- [Shipping & Returns](#)
- [Copyright Permissions](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Preference Center](#)

Stay Connected

- [Facebook](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [Instagram](#)

