

Seven Ways Schools Must Address Bullying

by

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The rash of suicides, criminal cases, and lawsuits involving bullying have highlighted the seriousness of bullying and the struggles school personnel and parents experience in addressing the problem. I would like to share the following tips for preventing and stopping bullying in your schools. These tips and more are described in detail in my book, *Bullying Prevention for Schools: A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing a Successful Anti-bullying Program* (visit www.bullyfree.com). This is the guide used to implement the Bully Free Program that has been adopted by Charter schools and other schools.

1. Admit that bullying exists in your schools and enforce the anti-bullying policy.

At least 20% of students in every school are bullied. Since most of it occurs in secret, school personnel underestimate the problem.

2. Provide training for school personnel *in all of the appropriate areas*. Don't just provide an awareness workshop.

School personnel must receive comprehensive training to adequately understand the nature of the problem, the rationale for preventing and stopping it, how to provide quality supervision, and how to respond to bullying they see and hear. For an eight-step response procedure, visit www.bullyfree.com, click on "Bully Free Program."

3. Implement a district-wide and school-wide anti-bullying program, including a curriculum (lesson plans). Positive Behavior Support and Character Education programs are great but are not anti-bullying programs. They do not have all of the necessary components.

All of the teachers must teach anti-bullying lessons once a week. It isn't very effective for the counselor to be the only one teaching the lessons. The book, *Bullying Prevention for Schools: A Step-by-Step Guide for Implementing a Successful Anti-bullying Program*, describes the nineteen steps to implementing an effective program. Lesson Plans must be taught. Examples of such lesson plans (preschool – high school), visit www.bullyfree.com and click on "View Samples of Bully Free Lesson Plans." These lesson plans were tested in 17 Charter schools.

4. Empower students to take a stand against bullying.

Teach students how destructive bullying is and how it puts the people in their school at risk of retaliation. They need to be taught *how* to take a stand. The *Bully Free Lesson Plans* mentioned above teach students how to collectively and safely respond to bullying they see and hear.

5. Encourage victims and bystanders to report bullying and provide an anonymous reporting procedure.

Only about 15 percent of bullying victims tell an adult. Often they keep quiet because they are embarrassed, they are fearful they will be blamed, they are afraid the bully will retaliate, they feel shame because they can't stand up for themselves, and they feel defective. Some times they don't report bullying because some of the adults bully students, some adults have been told and nothing was done, and they are afraid the adults will make it worse for them. It takes time and strategies to convince students to trust the adults in your school. They must see them taking a stand against it, appropriately responding to it, investigating it, and every teacher, counselor and principal needs to be talking about it.

6. Provide adequate monitoring and supervision in high-risk areas (hallways, locker rooms, bathrooms, under stairwells, etc.).

Bully often happens where there is a lack of adult supervision, not enough supervision, poor supervision, and/or a lack of structure. Lack of and the quality supervision has been an issue in almost every lawsuit I've been involved in. Identify these areas and develop a written supervision plan and, where necessary, add structure to unstructured times. Strategies related to each of these are included in the Bully Free Program.

7. Promptly and thoroughly investigate reports of bullying.

Lack of response from school personnel has been a major issue in lawsuits. All reports of bullying must be taken seriously and investigated in a timely manner. Even rumors should be promptly investigated. For an example of a procedure for investigating rumors and bullying situations, visit www.bullyfree.com, click on "Bully Free Program" and then click on "Bully Free Response Plan."