

Components of an Effective Bullying Prevention Approach

Bullying is any repeated, hostile or demeaning behaviour intended to cause harm, fear or distress, including physical or psychological harm.

For an action to be considered bullying it needs to involve:

- Intent: the actions happens on purpose
- Harm: the recipient hurts is hurt by the action
- Repetition: the recipient is repeatedly targeted

Bullying can be:

- Verbal: name calling, put downs, threats
- Social/ relational: exclusion, gossiping, ganging up
- Physical: hitting, pushing, slapping

Bullying creates fear and threatens the safety and well-being of individuals, families and society as a whole. To end bullying, we need to work together to promote healthy relationships by demonstrating trust, empathy, honesty and respect.

An effective bullying prevention approach is based on promoting healthy relationships.

It is positive, planned, and sustained over time. Consider the following as you develop your prevention strategy:

- 1) **Promote Healthy Relationships.**
Healthy relationships can be promoted by engaging people and teaching them skills and strategies to be empathetic, listen, be honest

and treat others with respect. Healthy relationships can give people the tools to resolve conflict appropriately and manage and regulate their emotions.

- 2) **Emphasize a shared responsibility for preventing and dealing with bullying.**
Bullying is everyone's business and it will take an ongoing community effort to stop it.
- 3) **Assess the scope and specific nature of bullying behaviours in your school or community.**
Do an anonymous questionnaire. Findings can help you tailor your strategy and serve as a baseline for future information gathering.
- 4) **Focus on changing the social environment.**
Delete and replace with: Create an environment where bullying is not considered a "normal" part of growing up. When people know that bullying is not tolerated, people feel more comfortable speaking out about experiencing bullying.
- 5) **Build support for bullying prevention.**
Bullying prevention should not be the sole responsibility of one individual. Work with members of the community or school first to ensure buy-in from the majority. Involvement of children and youth is an important part of identifying effective approaches for dealing with bullying.
- 6) **Formalize this approach.**
Form a group to coordinate bullying prevention activities in schools or communities, and meet regularly to sustain momentum.

7) **Increase awareness and education with training.**

Training will help everyone interested to understand prevention and intervention, the nature of bullying and its effects, how to respond if they observe it and how to prevent bullying from occurring.

8) **Use positive and appropriate language.**
Consistent positive language and messaging provides people with examples of how to respond in a given bullying situation.

9) **Establish and enforces rules and policies related to bullying.**
Developing and posting simple, clear rules about bullying can help to ensure that children are aware of the expectation to refrain from bullying and to help those who are bullied.

10) **Increase adult supervision in hot spots where bullying occurs.**
Bullying tends to thrive in locations where adults are not present or are not vigilant. Identify the locations through the questionnaire and then look for effective ways to increase adults' presence in these locations.

11) **Intervene consistently and appropriately in bullying situations.**
Intervene effectively on the spot to stop bullying. Have designated individuals hold sensitive follow-up meetings with children who are bullied, and then separately with children who bully.

12) **Teach and reinforce specific skills in preventing and stopping bullying behaviours.**
Children and youth need to learn how to prevent, stand up to, and stop bullying. As they learn these skills, they gain confidence to deal with bullying situations.

13) **Continue these efforts over time.**

There should be no end date for bullying prevention. Approaches should be regularly reviewed and evaluated for effectiveness in changing behaviours and adjusted accordingly.

Effective assessment of a bullying prevention initiative.

Assessments are the starting point for understanding the nature and extent of bullying problems and must address the following issues:

- **Bullying is a relationship problem.**
Focusing only on the child who is being bullied or only the child who bullies is not sufficient – include other children who may have witnessed the bullying and significant adults. Comprehensive assessments involve peers, parents, other significant adults and communities.
- **Assessment of bullying problems requires a focus on children's development.**
Bullying changes as children grow older and can differ between girls and boys. Assessment tools must be sensitive to children's different developmental needs and capacities.
- **Adult leadership is the foundation for addressing bullying problems.**
Adults need to understand bullying problems and their significance, and all adults leaders are responsible to ensure that the commitment, communications and resources are provided.

Information adapted from "The Heart of the Matter", published by Alberta Education and the Council for Exceptional Children, www.cec.sped.org.