

# Bullying Prevention in Out-of-School and Afterschool Settings

A companion publication to the Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit

## What is bullying?

Bullying is a form of intentional negative behavior directed at another person who has a difficult time defending himself or herself.<sup>1</sup> The child who bullies may be stronger, more popular or hold some type of power over the child who is bullied.

### Three-component definition of bullying:

- It involves an intentional negative behavior.
- The behavior may be repeated over time.
- It involves an imbalance of power or strength, which can be real or perceived.

Bullying can be physical or verbal and may involve manipulation of social relationships. This latter type of bullying, a form of relational aggression,<sup>3</sup> tends to manifest differently in males and females. Among girls, relational aggression often takes the form of deliberate exclusion or rumors.<sup>4</sup> Among boys, this type of aggression often draws attention to a student's perceived masculinity or sexual orientation.<sup>5, 6</sup>

Cyberbullying is "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones and other electronic devices".<sup>7</sup> While cyberbullying is of increasing concern, face-to-face bullying is much more common and many instances of online bullying include an element of face-to-face aggression.<sup>8</sup> For these reasons, it is important for Out-of-School Time (OST) programs to implement proven strategies to prevent and address face-to-face bullying and supplement those strategies with education related to cyberbullying.



**Afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) programs are in a position to address bullying because they offer activities and relationships that can assist students in developing important life skills. According to the Afterschool Alliance, afterschool programs "provide access to caring adults and offer a more informal environment that is distinct from the school day." Such settings may allow children to feel safe from peer pressure, build confidence and learn how to deal with bullying.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in order for OST programs to effectively prevent and address bullying, OST leaders need to be knowledgeable about the issue and implement specific strategies.**

## Is bullying really a problem?

When it comes to bullying, statistics tell the story. According to the American Psychological Association, 70 percent of middle and high school students have experienced bullying at some point during their school careers. Yet only 20-40 percent of bullying victims actually report being bullied.<sup>9</sup> According to the 2011 Pennsylvania Youth

Survey (PAYS), non-physical forms of bullying – such as rumors, lies, teasing, name calling and exclusion – are most common among Pennsylvania youth. Although not as prevalent, physical bullying was reported by 16 percent of youth who participated in the 2011 PAYS and 20 percent indicated that their property had been damaged or money had been taken. Cyberbullying was less

common, with 12 percent of PAYS respondents reporting sexual harassment through the internet or receiving threats or embarrassing messages.<sup>10</sup>

Studies in health and youth development emphasize the importance of attending to bullying issues. This research suggests that youth who are involved in bullying are more likely to experience mental health symptoms<sup>11, 12</sup> and suicidal ideation<sup>13</sup> than students who are not directly involved. Targets of bullying can suffer socially and academically, due to the potential effects of bullying on self-esteem and school attendance.<sup>14</sup> Children who bully others are more likely to engage in anti-social or risky behaviors than non-bullying peers.<sup>15, 16, 17, 18</sup>

### How should OST programs address bullying?

OST programs can prevent and address bullying by adopting strategies that emphasize the role of these programs in providing safe environments, building healthy relationships and promoting youth development.

Establishing a safe environment for youth involves a combination of strategies grounded in sound policy, staff training and intervention when bullying is suspected. By providing a caring staff that is effective in intervening in bullying situations, OST programs demonstrate to youth that bullying behaviors will not be tolerated. Because bullying resembles other forms of aggression and often goes undetected, it is important that staff be trained in how to recognize bullying, how to support students who are targeted, and how to implement OST policies related to bullying and peer aggression. It is important that OST staff address all forms of peer aggression, even acts that do not meet the definition of bullying.



At its core, bullying prevention is about nurturing healthy relationships among children and youth. Research suggests that children are less likely to become victims of bullying when they have higher perceived levels of social support from teacher, parents, peers and close friends.<sup>12, 19</sup> Out-of-school time programs offer smaller, more intimate settings for building positive relationships among children and youth and with adults. By engaging youth in planned activities that focus on teamwork, identifying each other's strengths and supporting one another, OST programs can play an important role in supporting healthy relationships among youth. Activities that focus on building youth relationships "ensure that students develop a strong network of friends," a protective factor in students' lives.<sup>2</sup>

While safety and positive relationships are important components of students' OST experiences, it is also critical for OST programs to implement youth development strategies that address bystanders'

responses to bullying. According to experts in bullying prevention, the reaction of bystanders to peer aggression can play a critical role in determining if bullying will persist.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it is essential for OST providers to develop expectations for how youth will respond when they witness aggression from others and engage youth in building a climate of support. Children and youth can work together to promote a safe and supportive community through service activities that have an anti-violence or anti-bullying message and through outreach to younger youth. This type of community service "cultivates empathy, improves self-esteem and promotes positive attitudes".<sup>2</sup>

**"Beneficial programs across the country are aiding in the fight against bullying and teaching children that aggressive and detrimental behaviors are not something to be taken lightly".<sup>2</sup>**

## Elements of Bullying Prevention in OST Settings

**1**

Adopt bullying prevention policies that define bullying and cyberbullying; address reporting procedures for students, parents and staff; and identify prevention and interventions strategies that will be consistently used by program staff.

**2**

Train staff on how to recognize bullying, how to have proactive conversations with students about bullying and peer relationships and how to intervene when staff witness any form of peer aggression.

**3**

Use surveys or focus groups to determine the nature, prevalence and location of bullying issues in the out-of-school setting. Implement strategies to address common forms of bullying and ensure that staff are assigned to monitor trouble spots.

**4**

Implement follow-up procedures and supports for students involved in bullying. Follow-up conversations should reinforce adults' concern for students' safety and the program's expectations for student conduct. Programs should seek additional intervention or support for children that are involved in bullying situations when emotional or behavioral problems are persistent or severe.

**5**

Teach social and emotional skills and active bystander skills, relying on evidence-based programs and practices when available.

**6**

Engage students in activities and service projects that reinforce social justice themes and peace-making skills.

**7**

Involve parents proactively and responsively. Parents often look to schools and youth-serving organizations for information about bullying and related issues. Provide this information in a variety of formats. Make sure parents are aware of the program's policy of notifying parents of suspected bullying and available supports for children and families.

**8**

Monitor bullying prevention practices over time to ensure strategies and interventions are having the desired effect.



## Recommended Resources

Dellasega, C., & Nixon, C. (2003). *Girl wars: 12 strategies that will end female bullying*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J.W. (2009). *Bullying: Beyond the schoolyard*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Pollack, W.S. (1998). *Real boys: Rescuing our sons from the myths of boyhood*. New York: Owl Books.

Wiseman, R. (2009). *Queen bees & wannabees: Helping your daughter survive cliques, gossip, boyfriends, and the new realities of girl world*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

### Afterschool Alliance/Bullying Prevention

A nonprofit organization dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of afterschool programs and advocating for quality, affordable programs for all children. [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

### CASEL

CASEL seeks to establish social and emotional learning (SEL) as an essential part of education. Research from CASEL clearly indicates the critical role SEL plays in the prevention of bullying behavior. [http://static.squarespace.com/static/513f79f9e4b05ce7b70e9673/t/5367958ee4b0dbc1364dbb7b/1399297422536/3\\_SEL\\_and\\_Bullying\\_Prevention\\_2009.pdf](http://static.squarespace.com/static/513f79f9e4b05ce7b70e9673/t/5367958ee4b0dbc1364dbb7b/1399297422536/3_SEL_and_Bullying_Prevention_2009.pdf)

### Center for Safe Schools

The Center for Safe Schools is resource center and technical assistance provider committed to helping families, schools and communities create and maintain safe, productive learning environments. The Center and its network of bullying prevention consultants offer training to schools and community-based organizations that seek to address bullying. [www.SafeSchools.info/bullying-prevention](http://www.SafeSchools.info/bullying-prevention)

## About this Guide

**This Guide, produced by the Center for Safe Schools and Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network (PSAYDN), was developed with funding provided by the Highmark Foundation. It was informed by research and the perspectives of youth development and bullying prevention practitioners. It represents the Highmark Foundation's commitment to improve children's health and well-being.**

**For a complete list of source material referenced here, please see the online version of this resource at [www.SafeSchools.info/BP\\_OST](http://www.SafeSchools.info/BP_OST). The Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit, a companion piece to this publication, is available at [www.SafeSchools.info/BP\\_Toolkit](http://www.SafeSchools.info/BP_Toolkit).**

### Find Youth Info

This site provides information, strategies, tools, and resources for youth, families, schools and community organizations related to a variety of cross-cutting topics that affect youth. [www.findyouthinfo.gov](http://www.findyouthinfo.gov)

### Girls on the Run

This nonprofit organization offers programs for pre-teen girls that build self-esteem and encourage healthy relationships through training for a 5K race. [www.girlsontherun.org](http://www.girlsontherun.org)

### Golden Rule Pledge

The Golden Rule, a Christian-based organization, works in partnership with national bullying prevention organizations such as PACER's and StopBullying.gov to teach and support the prevention of bullying behavior. [www.goldenrulepledge.com](http://www.goldenrulepledge.com)

### Ophelia Project

The program is designed to help communities, schools and families recognize and address relational aggression through systemic change in the social culture. [www.opheliaproject.org](http://www.opheliaproject.org)

### PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center

Pacer works to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families, based on the concept of parents helping parents. They have extensive online resources for parents, educators and students on the topic of bullying. [www.pacer.org/bullying](http://www.pacer.org/bullying)

### Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Toolkit

This toolkit was designed by the Center for Safe Schools to inform families, schools and communities about bullying behavior. It provides helpful information including how to recognize bullying, how to prevent and intervene when bullying is suspected and how to support youth. [www.SafeSchools.info/BP\\_ParentGuide.pdf](http://www.SafeSchools.info/BP_ParentGuide.pdf)

### StopBullying.gov

This website provides information from various government agencies on how kids, teens, young adults, parents, educators and others in the community can prevent or stop bullying. [www.StopBullying.gov](http://www.StopBullying.gov)

### StopHazing.org

StopHazing.org is dedicated to eliminating hazing. The site provides the definition of hazing, information on prevention and a summary of current laws. [www.stophazing.org](http://www.stophazing.org)

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