

National Center Brief

Olweus Bullying Prevention: Strategies for Success

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The Olweus Bullying Prevention program was designed to prevent bullying in elementary, middle, and junior high schools. During the summer of 2006, the National Center sponsored two teleconferences in which certified Olweus Bullying Prevention trainers, National Center staff, and grantees discussed the program. The following is a summary of some of the observations and recommendations made during these teleconferences.

Garnering Support from Teachers and Other School Staff

Olweus cannot succeed without the support of teachers, administrators, and school boards. Teachers set and enforce expectations about classroom behavior and are the most direct, constant, and visible authority figures and role models in the school. Administrators provide leadership and resources. And school boards offer the approval and finances necessary for large scale change. There are a number of strategies and techniques that can help garner the support of these groups.

- Involve teachers in the decision to bring Olweus to a school and in all phases of planning and implementation.
- Conduct a survey about bullying in the schools to show members of the school community how prevalent the problem is in their school and how it affects students.
- Educate teachers, administrators, and the school board about how bullying affects students' academic success and mental health and how preventing bullying improves classroom discipline, reduces the time that teachers spend maintaining order, and expands the time available for teaching.
- Help teachers, administrators, and the school board understand that students who are bullied often stay home from school. This poor attendance affects academic achievement—both for individual students, as well as the entire study body as measured on standardized tests.
- Remind teachers, administrators, and school boards that federal and state aid to education is sometimes based on attendance and academic achievement—and thus bullying not only threatens the emotional health of individual students, but the fiscal health of the school system.
- Use school or district staff as Olweus trainers. Teachers and other staff may learn better from someone who they know has their school's interests in mind than from a stranger who may not be as familiar with their community or school. It is important that trainers (no matter who they are) make it easy for staff to express their concerns and ask questions and to provide support and technical assistance that respond to these concerns during implementation of the program.

Gaining Parent Support

It is also important to gain the support of the parents of all the students. This includes the parents of bullies and victims of bullying as well as the parents of students who are neither bullies nor victims. Experience has revealed a number of useful strategies for gaining parent support, including the following:

- As is the case with school staff, a school survey that shows the extent and consequences of bullying can be useful in generating support among parents for the Olweus program.
- An official public kick-off event for the program will help provide support and momentum.
- Some parents may resist becoming involved because they do not believe that bullying affects their children. Words and phrases such as “teasing,” “picking on others,” or “picking fights” can help parents relate to the issue. Explaining the role of bystanders in bullying—and bullying prevention—can help parents understand why all children need to be involved in Olweus. Marketing the program from this perspective helps gain the support of the parents of bullies and victims who do not see their children in these roles (or do not want their children labeled) as it focuses on problem-solving rather than attributing blame.
- Parents should be educated about how bullying prevention benefits all children by improving the school environment and promoting academic success.

Reaching Every Child

Olweus Bullying Prevention is not just a program for bullies and the victims of bullying. In order to create systemic changes, all students—including bystanders—must be fully involved.

- Some schools encourage students to report acts of courage by their peers who stand up to bullying. These students are given awards, such as a certificate and coupon for a free family dinner at a local restaurant. This has a positive effect on the child, his or her family, and the community.
- Students need to know that they will be supported and protected from retribution if they report bullying. Some schools use a Students Need Assistance Pronto (SNAP) box in which anonymous notes left by students are reviewed twice a day by coordinators. Students will leave anonymous notes if they can be shown that the school will respond to these tips promptly and fairly.
- Research indicates that it is fidelity of implementation, rather than ethnicity or diversity of the target audience, that has the greatest effect on the success of the Olweus program. Staff training on ethnic or racial diversity and on handling conflict can help the program succeed in schools in which ethnic or racial conflict exists.

Reaching Every Adult

Olweus uses individual-level, classroom-level, and school-level program components to restructure the school environment in ways that reduce bullying. An important aspect of Olweus is training for all the adults in the

school who interact with students. This includes not only teachers, counselors, and administrators but also bus drivers, janitors, and cafeteria workers. Training all adults provides children with consistent messages and expectations about how they should treat one another. It also provides all adults with reliable and consistent techniques for identifying and intervening in bullying and similar behaviors.

Bullying Prevention Across the Curriculum

Some schools use classroom discussions of books and movies to reinforce the lessons of Olweus in classes other than health (the subject area in which Olweus classroom components are characteristically implemented). Books useful for teaching about bullying include the following:

- *The One Hundred Dresses*, by Eleanor Estes, Louis Slobodkin, and Helena Estes
- *Touching Spirit Bear*, by Ben Mikaelson
- *Hoot*, by Carl Hiaasen
- *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, by Robert Coles and George Ford
- *The Ant Bully*, by John Nickle

Hoot and *The Ant Bully* have been made into movies.

Additional resources on using fiction to reinforce bullying prevention programs include the following:

- *The Bully in the Book and in the Classroom*, by C. J. Bott, published by Scarecrow Press (<http://www.scarecrowpress.com>). This book provides synopses of 44 books that can be used to address bullying in the classroom. The books are organized by grade level.
- *Selected Bibliography About Teasing and Bullying for Grades K–8: Revised and Expanded Edition*, by Nancy Mullin-Rindler, published by the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (<http://www.wcwonline.org>). This annotated bibliography includes hundreds of titles in children’s literature and other resources.
- Stop Bullying Now! Take a Stand, Lend a Hand. Additional Resources: Books. http://www.ask.hrsa.gov/detail_materials.cfm?ProdID=4706 This section of the popular SAMHSA-sponsored Web site includes juvenile fiction and other books about bullying, organized by grade level.