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Understanding Bullying and the Necessity for Prevention and Intervention in Schools

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Abstract

The emotional stability and mental health of a student plays an essential role in his or her academic success. The emotional state of a student can be greatly damaged when he or she is the victim or perpetrator of bullying. Unfortunately, bullying is an active and serious problem that affects millions of students in K-12 classrooms everyday. One could argue that the issue of bullying is becoming more prevalent in present time than it ever was before. In recent years, the rise of technology gave birth to a new form of bullying named cyber bullying. Kids no longer have a safe haven when they leave school. Bullies are able to continue the tormenting of their peers through social media, texting, email, and countless other outlets. Bullying can detrimentally affect students physically, emotionally, and academically. Teachers now have the responsibility to provide a safe and comfortable learning environment for their students. In order to provide that safe environment, there must be a stop to bullying. The objective of this paper is to identify the root causes of bullying, the effects bullying has on students, and the most effective strategies to prevent and intervene with bullying in the classroom.

Understanding Bullying and the Necessity for Prevention and Intervention in Schools

The concept of bullying is not simply defined. There have been numerous portrayals of bullying in entertainment media such as movies, books, and television. In these entertainment depictions, the victims of bullying always find a way to “bounce back”, defeat the bully, and become victorious. Unfortunately, in the real world, the majority of bullying victims are not the ones ending up on top. The reality is that the victims of bullying most often do not receive the help or reconciliation that they deserve. As well as the bullies do not receive the punishment or consequences they deserve. For many years, bullying was not seen as a serious issue. The common ideology of bullying was that bullying was a harmless, normal part of life. It was believed that victims should learn to “just get over it” and move on. In 2010 Helene Guldberg wrote, “Sorry, but it can be GOOD for children to be bullied. Today’s obsession with the long-term effects of bullying means children are growing up without the social skills or toughness to exist and compete in the adult world. To me, that seems far more damaging to their development and their relationships with each other than any fight or insult could ever be” (Smith, 2018, p. 1). Fortunately, today Guldberg’s opinion seems to be the minority. The stigma around bullying is changing in a positive way. Today society acknowledges how serious bullying is and how necessary a solution is. The truth is that bullying is a critical issue with detrimental short and long-term consequences.

Considering the false representations and myths about bullying that circulate the culture, it is imperative to clearly define the truth about bullying. Bullying is a multifaceted behavioral social issue that must be carefully considered. Bullying is “a conscious, willful and repetitive act of aggression and/or manipulation and/or exclusion

by one or more people against another person or people” (Sullivan, 2011, p. 26). To define bullying, it is essential to define the different persons involved in a bullying situation. In a bullying situation, there is always a bully and there is always a victim. It is also possible to have bully allies and bystanders in a bullying situation, but not always. When defining bullying, it is also very important to note that individual students should not be stereotypically labeled “bully” or victim”. Bullying is complex; stating that a victim is always a victim and a bully is always a bully is oversimplifying the problem. In fact, “there is convincing evidence that students do not remain “fixed in the dichotomous roles of “bully” and “victim” (Swearer, 2009, p. 1). Students move in and out of the roles between bully and victim all the time. The bad news about bullying is that all students have the capability of being a bully. However, there is still good news. Just as all students have the capability to harm, they also have the capability to heal. Bullying is a behavior, and behaviors can be changed. All students have the ability to be the solution to the problem of bullying. Action can and needs to be taken in order to change the actions and behaviors of the students who bully. With the right prevention and intervention procedures, the problem of bullying can be solved.

Types of Bullies

As noted earlier, bullying is complex. There is not just one type of bully; there are several different types of bullies who behave in different ways. It is important to identify the different types of bullies in order to identify the best action plan to deal with each type of bully. According to Coloroso (2004) there are seven different types of bullies

(p. 18). The types of bullies include: the confident bully, the social bully, the fully armoured bully, the hyperactive bully, the bullied bully, the bunch of bullies, and the passive bully.

Confident Bully

The confident bully is the stereotypical bully that is often portrayed in movies and shows. This bully asserts power over others in order to feel dominant and in control. Confident bullies feel best when they are putting others down. This confident bully “has a large ego, an inflated sense of self, and a sense of entitlement. He/she has no empathy for the targets of their bullying. This type of bully is often admired by teachers because of his/her powerful personality but does not usually have many friends” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 18). This type of bully is filled with narcissism and is unsympathetic to his or her victims. This bully is easily identifiable because they are dominant outstanding personalities.

Social Bully

The social bully is one who bullies his or her victims by degrading and harming them socially. Social bullies will use tactics such as spreading rumors, ostracizing peers, and starting cruel nicknames to isolate his or her targets by excluding them from social activities. This type of bully is often “envious of the victim’s positive qualities and generally has a poor sense of self, hidden behind exaggerated confidence and charm. This bully is manipulative and may act caring but it is often a deceptive tool used to get what he/she wants” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 18). Often times, the ones who are social bullies use bullying as a defense mechanism. One may feel that that bullying someone else is a way to avoid being the victim. This type of bully is sometimes not as easily identifiable

because the bully is more discreet about his or her actions. Therefore, dealing with this type of bully takes more awareness and involvement from teachers and staff.

Fully Armoured Bully

The fully armoured bully is the bully that is charming enough to always escape punishment. This type of bully knows how to manipulate his or her way into never being caught exhibiting bullying behaviors. This bully knows who, where, and how to bully without facing the consequences. The fully armoured bully is “often cool and detached towards peers but very charming and deceptive, especially in front of adults” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 18). He or she is commonly spiteful and malicious towards his or her victims. This type of bully is difficult to identify because he or she acts differently when adult supervision is present. Therefore, it is important for teachers and staff to be educated to be aware of the fully armoured bully.

Hyperactive Bully

The hyperactive bully is impulsive and obvious with his or her bullying. The hyperactive bully is “one who struggles with academics and has very poor social skills” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 18). As a result of their frustration, the hyperactive bully channels their energy by bullying other children. This type of bully does not just pick one victim to harass, they often punish anyone in his or her way. Coloroso (2003) explains, “their reason for bullying is an inability to read social cues and as a result they often react aggressively, even to the slightest provocation” (p. 18). This type of bully blames everyone else, never taking responsibility for his or her actions. This type of bully is easily identifiable because he or she takes out his or her aggression on others whenever he or she feels frustrated. Teachers and staff can help this type of bullying by catching

early signs of frustration and helping that student to calm down before he or she lets aggression take over.

Bullied Bully

The bullied bully is one that is moving between the roles of bully and victim. The bullied bully is “both a target as well as a bully” (Sullivan, 2004, p. 16). Driven by the feeling of powerlessness and helplessness, as a result of being bullied by others, this person will take his or her aggression out by bullying others. It becomes a vicious cycle of hurt and harm: “This type of bully strikes out at those who have bullied them and at weaker children” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 18). It is often challenging to deal with a bullied bully because he or she is both antagonistic and vulnerable. This type of bully is also more difficult to identify because they are constantly changing roles from victim to bully.

Bunch of Bullies

The bunch of bullies is a clique of students who cause harm to others outside of their group. The bunch of bullies is defined as “the type of bully as a group of friends who collectively behave in a negative way towards a specific target” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 19). Usually, the individual members in the bunch of bullies only act aggressively when they are in the group. The others in the group fuel the dominance and power these bullies feel. Others are often attracted to the bunch of bullies group because of their power and dominance. Bystanders commonly look up to the bunch of bullies and are willing to join in on bullying behavior in order to feel accepted. This type of bully is easy to identify because the formation of the clique is obviously seen. Teachers and staff can help by separating cliques if they are exhibiting bullying behaviors.

Passive Bully

The passive bully is the bystander that sees a bullying situation, but does not do anything about it. The passive bully can be described as the “insecure and anxious students” (Olweus, 1993, p. 34). The peer group becomes “such an important part in this developmental phase, some of the bullies rely heavily on others in their group” (Olweus, 1993, p. 34). Children desire to be accepted by their peers. Passive bullies do not stop bullying situations because they fear becoming the victim. Passive bullies would rather use other victims as scapegoats. This type of bully is not as easily identifiable because he or she usually lays low and lets another student do the bulk of the bullying.

Types of Victims

Just as there are several types of bullies, there are also several types of victims. Each victim is unique; however, each victim shares the commonality that “each of them was singled out to be the object of scorn and thus the recipient of verbal, physical or relationship aggression” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 42). All types of victims do not feel safe in the school environment because of bullying. It is important to remember to not only focus on the bully, but also the victim when dealing with intense bullying situations. The bully may view violence as a way to assert power and control, but the victim may view violence as a way of stopping the bully: “Victims need to be assessed with respect to how they are being affected” (McCann, 2002, p. 116). Victims and bullies both need help.

Innocent Victim

The innocent victim is one is bullied for no specific or apparent reason. Bullies pick innocent victims because they believe them to be vulnerable, easy targets: “This victim has little to do with the causes of bullying but still has choices to make in how to

best deal with the situation” (Hazler, 1996, p. 8). This type of victim is one who tries to avoid conflict, however inevitably is involved in a harmful conflict. The bully picks out the victim for no apparent reason other than susceptibility. Commonly, innocent victims will not speak up about their bully because of fear of making the situation worse. It is especially important for teachers to inform innocent victims that they are safe to report a bullying situation.

Passive Victim

The passive victim is very similar to the innocent victim. However, the passive victim is more identifiable. The passive victim “the most common type of victim and is also clearly recognizable” (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 36). Often, the passive victim tries to please the bully and does not fight back or stand up. The passive victim “has few coping resources and makes for an easy target, finding themselves at the bottom of the pecking order” (Sullivan, 2004, p. 18). Passive victims are usually submissive, nonassertive students. They do not want to cause any trouble and want to please others. Often times, passive victims do not realize they are being bullied. The bullies pretend to be their friend, but take advantage of the passive victim. Therefore, it is important for teachers to inform students of how friendships should work and how peers should treat one another. Students should know what constitutes as a bullying situation.

Provocative Victim

The provocative victim is one who aggravates or encourages the behavior of the bully. Provocative victims are “fewer in number and more difficult to identify than the passive victim” (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 37). This victim feels like the only way to stop bullying is to bully the bully back. This type of victim is frequently “misidentified as a

bully because they often fight back with the bully but are ineffective with bullies because of their poor social skills” (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 37). It is important to note that the victim’s provoking nature does not give the bully an excuse for his or her behavior.

However, with a provocative victim behavior should be addressed and corrected along with the behavior of the bully. Students should be taught how to deal with aggression in a healthy communicative way.

Vicarious Victim

Vicarious victims are not necessarily direct victims of bullying, but they feel anxious from bullying situations of others. The vicarious victim has “either witnessed or heard about incidences of bullying at their school and have become affected by the environment of fear which the bully creates” (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 37). These victims feel vulnerable and frightened that they will become a target of bullying themselves. Vicarious victims feel empathy towards those who are direct victims but are too fearful to stand up to the bully. Vicarious victims “suffer from the physical and emotional consequences of bullying and can be taught the necessary skills to become mobilized and begin standing against bullying” (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 37). Vicarious victims do not feel comfortable in the school environment because of the bullying situations they have witnessed. These students should be taught to deal with their fears in a healthy way with help from a counselor.

Forms of Bullying

There are various forms of bullying that must be understood in order for the problem to be addressed successfully. There are four major forms of bullying that include physical harm, verbal aggression, emotional harassment, and social exclusion. However,

in recent years technology has created a new form of bullying known as cyber bullying. Each form of bullying is unique in nature, but each form is equally important. Some forms of bullying may be more visible than others, but each form of bullying has consequences that can be detrimental to the victim.

Physical

Physical bullying is any action committed by a bully to inflict physical harm on a victim. Physical bullying is more obvious for teachers to detect during school because of the visibility of the physical actions: “Although it is the most visible and therefore the most readily identifiable form of bullying, physical bullying accounts for less than one-third of bullying incidents reported by children” (Larsen, 2005, p. 2). A teacher or staff member can easily see if another student is physically bullying a student if they are present. However, if the bullying situation happens out of a teacher’s sight, physical bullying most likely goes undetected. Physical bullying includes “biting, choking, hair pulling, kicking, hitting, locking in a room, pinching, punching, pushing, scratching, spitting, stalking, or any other form of physical attack and intimidation. It also includes damaging a person’s property” (Sullivan, 2011, p. 27). Physical bullying may not be as common as other types of bullying, but the abolishment of physical bullying is extremely imperative. Students who commit acts of physical bullying are more likely to escalate in their violent behavior and criminal offences. It is vital to find a solution to physical bullying in order to help prevent any future criminal acts by the bully as well as preventing physical harm to potential victims.

Verbal

Verbal bullying is considered one of the most common types of bullying used by both males and females “accounting for 70% of reported cases which can have an immediate impact” (Coloroso, 2003, p. 15). Verbal bullying is more common than physical bullying; however it is less detected. Teachers and staff members cannot be everywhere at once and do not hear every student’s conversations. Verbal bullying includes “abusive telephone calls, extorting money, using sexually suggestive or abusive language, making cruel remarks, name-calling, sending (often anonymous) poisonous notes or messages, spiteful teasing, and spreading false and malicious rumors” (Sullivan, 2011, p. 27). The cliché saying, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”, simply is not true. Words are extremely powerful and can severely damage a person’s spirit. There is a very thin line between light-hearted teasing among friends and vicious verbal bullying. In order to distinguish between the two, the feelings of the recipient are considered. A joke or comment that is harmless to one student may severely hurt another student. It is the opinion of the person receiving the messages that decides whether or not the messages are hurtful.

Emotional

Emotional bullying is also known as psychological bullying. Psychological bullying is “an attack ‘inside’ the targeted person. The intention is to harm the individual under attack, but as there are no physical marks it is often assumed to be less harmful. Goldstein et al. (2007) and others argue that psychological bullying can be just as damaging as physical bullying” (Sullivan, 2011, p. 27). In an emotional bullying situation, the victim’s feelings and sense of self are severely damaged. Emotional

bullying uses the victim's emotions as a tool in order to gain control. Emotional bullying includes criticism, humiliation, and manipulation.

Social

Social bullying is the calculated attack against one's social life. Social bullying is one that includes "deliberate exclusion from a social group of intimidation within the group" (Lee, 2004, p. 10). Social bullying is more difficult to detect than the other forms, especially because social bullying can happen outside of school. Direct social bullying is easier to detect and this includes "exclusion, ignoring, isolating, and shunning" (Lee, 2004, p. 10). Indirect forms "include exclusion carried out away from the victims and is not experienced by them until they are informed of it or they attempt to join the group" (Lee, 2004, p. 10). It is vital to recognize and intervene with social bullying because social bullying greatly affects student self-esteem and success in the future.

Cyber Bullying

Internet and technology have brought many great advantages to our world. However, the rise of technology has brought many problems as well. Before technology, children who were bullied at school could at least escape torment when they came home. Home was a safe haven because the bullies were not around. Today, the bullies infiltrate the victim's homes when they are using Internet technology to cyber bully. Cyber bullying has been defined as "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and electronic devices" (Hinduja & Pathchin, 2013, p. 208). In a cyber bullying situation, the bully intentionally tries to bring harm upon a victim in a repeated pattern. There are several forms in which cyber bullying takes place. Cyber bullies send harassing, derogatory, or physically threatening comments and messages.

Cyber bullying can also take place through private message or public posts for everyone on social media to see. The reason that cyber bullying is so prevalent is because people feel a sense of protection and confidence when they are sitting behind a phone or computer screen. Bullies are more likely to say crueler things to others through the Internet than they are in person. The protection of the screen gives the bullies the false power to express thoughts that they would be too reluctant to say in a face-to-face interaction. Students can type aggressive, harmful insults to other students that they would never say in person.

Roots of Bullying

The imperfectness of human nature that contributes to bullying has always been in existence. The problem of bullying is not a new issue; bullying has been prevalent for centuries. Bullying is a vicious problem that will continue to negatively affect millions of students unless there is deliberate action taken in order to abolish bullying. The very first step to finding a solution to any problem is finding the source of that problem. Finding the roots of bullying will contribute to the success of the prevention strategies that are put in place.

Social-Ecological Influence

An important factor to study as a cause for bullying behavior is the social-ecological influence on the bully. The development of a child “is often conceptualized as emerging, being maintained, and modified as a result of a child’s personality characteristics and how these characteristics interact within the larger subsystems of social contexts (e.g. peers, family, schools)” (Swearer, 2009, p. 7). This perspective has been called a social-ecological theory and includes four interrelated systems:

microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The social-ecological theory studies the multiple social and environmental factors that contribute to a student's bullying behavior.

The first system in the social-ecological theory is the microsystem. This system includes the people whom the student is most frequently in direct contact with such as parents, siblings, peers at school, and teachers. The next system is the mesosystem. The mesosystem encompasses the interactions and relationships in the microsystem. The mesosystem studies the type of relationship that a student has with a member of the microsystem that contributes to that student's behavior. For example, a student who has an unhealthy, abusive relationship with a parent will be more likely to have behavioral issues that lead to bullying. It is true that hurt people hurt people. The next system is the exosystem. The exosystem represents influences from the other systems. The last system is the macrosystem. The macrosystem is the broader societal and cultural influences that impact the student. All of these systems are embedded within one another and contribute to one's behavior in a reciprocal manner.

Individual Factors

The first factor to consider as a cause of bullying behavior is individual factors. Some children are born with "genetic inborn temperaments" that influence the child's development into bullying behavior (Coloroso, 2003, p. 18). Examples of individual factors that influence the act of bullying include depression, anxiety, impulsiveness, and lack of problem solving. In order to make themselves feel better, students who have low self-esteem bully others. There are children who are more prone to become bullies than others just because of the personality and temperament that they are born with: "Children

are born with dispositions which make some of them prone to more aggressive and impulsive behaviours” (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 24). These are the type of bullies who are internally dealing with emotional issues within so they use aggression on others as a coping mechanism.

Family Factors

The second type of factor to consider as a cause of bullying behavior is family factors. Examples of family factors include poor supervision, abuse, aggression in family, lack of parental involvement, and lack of love and care. “Positive and negative attachments to parents have been found to be important in the emergence of bullying perpetration and victimization” (Swearer, 2009, p. 20). The home environment affects how students perceive themselves and others around them. Oaklander (1988) says, “a baby is not born with bad feelings about himself. All babies think they are wonderful. How a child feels about himself after a time, however, is certainly determined to a great extent by the early messages he gets about himself from his parents” (pp. 280-281). If students do not live in a healthy, positive environment, they are more likely to act out in aggressive bullying behavior. The “lack of warmth in the family, the use of physical violence in the family, and no clear guidelines or discipline for behavior” can contribute to bullying behavior (Sharp, 1994, p. 8). Many times students who bully are mimicking what they see in their homes: “Parents of children who develop bullying patterns are frequently unavailable both physically and psychologically” (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 24). Children who do not feel loved in the home tend to become bullies because they do not have foundationally healthy relationships.

Peer Group Factors

The third type of factor to consider as a cause of bullying behavior is peer group factors. Students spend a majority of their time in school surrounded by their peers. Students in school from kindergarten to 12th grade are heavily influenced by their peers' opinions. Examples of peer group factors include acceptance of bullying, group bullying, cliques, and individual bullying: "Emerging research has also shown that peers are integral in supporting and maintaining bullying victimization and perpetration in our schools" (Swearer, 2009, p. 17). Although peers have the capability to negatively influence a student and contribute to bullying, peers can also be used for a positive change: "Peers can model prosocial and caring attitudes and behaviors" (Swearer, 2009, p. 42). Peers are undeniably influential on each other's behaviors.

School Factors

The fourth factor to consider as a cause to bullying behavior is school factors. School climate is extremely influential on the prevalence of bullying. It is important to understand that when a school tolerates, ignores, or dismisses bullying behaviors, they are delivering messages about values that victimized students internalize. School factors include teacher bullying, lack of teacher involvement, lazy punishment, and school climate. Additionally, students who bully others tend to do so when adults are not around. If a school does not closely monitor student's behaviors, students are more likely to be involved in bullying situations. Bullying is more likely to occur in secluded areas where there is no adult supervision.

Community Factors

The fifth type of factor to consider as a cause of bullying behavior is community factors. The type of community that the child is surrounded in is an extremely influential factor for bullying. Examples of community factors include high levels of aggression in the community, access to community resources, and community-school partnerships. The environment that surrounds students contributes to their attitudes, values, and behaviors. Children learn by observing what is around them: “Modeled behavior is many times even observed through television programs/movies and computer games where children are exposed to heroes, villains and those in-between, who all use violence to get what they want (Bonds & Stoker, 2000, p. 25). Not all children will become bullies because of the communities and environments they are exposed to. However, if a child is predisposed to violent and aggressive behavior, the negative influence of violent behavior on screens or in the community can encourage that child to bully other children.

Summary

Students who bully do not have to remain bullies. According to Van der Valk (2014), “bullying is a behavior, not an identity” (p. 39). Students have the ability to change their behavior and become the solution to the problem. There is a reason that children choose to bully their peers. Oftentimes the reason children hurt others by bullying is because they feel hurt inside themselves. Bullies often want others to feel sad because they are sad. Bullies are not controlling their emotions in a healthy way; rather they are channeling their hurt into controlling others.

Effect on Students

The victim of a bullying situation is not the only one who faces negative consequences. There are several negative consequences that bullying has on both its victims and its aggressors. Both bullies and victims are potentially at risk of serious social, physical, and psychological problems. The serious concerns that stem from bullying include anxiety, depression, deliberate self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviors. According to Hinduja & Patchin (2010), “youth who are bullied, or who bully others, are at an elevated risk for suicidal thoughts, attempts, and completed suicides” (p. 207). How can a student succeed in his or her schoolwork when he or she is suffering from anxiety and depression that is causing suicidal thoughts? The effects of bullying are not always as extreme as suicide, however are harmful nonetheless. If a student’s mind is muddled with bullying situations, his or her focus on school will be significantly negatively affected. Students who are the victims of bullying often are afraid to come to school because they want to avoid the torment they receive from their peers. Bullying can cause serious physical, social, emotional, and academic problems for a student.

Physical

There are several harmful consequences on a student’s physical health that are the result of bullying. The obvious physical effects caused by physical bullying include bruises, cuts, sprains, broken bones, etc. In addition, there are several harmful physical effects from any type of bullying that may not be as easily detectable. Students who are the victims of bullying experience “high levels of stress and anxiety, headaches and migraines” (Garrett, 2003, p. 68). If the bullying situation is severe, many times students will have trouble sleeping at night because they are anxious about the next school day.

Sleepless nights lead to “tiredness, exhaustion and constant fatigue” (Garrett, 2003, p. 68). Intense bullying can also cause students to experience “aches and pains in joints and muscles with no obvious cause” as well as “problems with the skin such as eczema, athlete’s foot, and ulcers” (Garrett, 2003, p. 68). No student should be subject to physical harm from a bullying situation.

Social

Bullying causes many harmful effects for victims socially. Students who fall victim to bullying reported feelings of “losing or failing to develop self-esteem, experiencing feelings of isolation or becoming withdrawn or depressed” (Garrett, 2003, p. 69). Students who are victims of bullying can feel inferior to their peers along with feelings that they do not belong. This can significantly affect a victim’s social interactions and desire for new relationships. There can be a vicious cycle of social anxiety that starts because of bullying situations. Having a strong sense of self-esteem and social interactions is an essential tool for students to be successful in the future.

Psychological

There are numerous psychological effects caused by bullying. School aged children are not fully developed emotionally. Students are growing, changing, and maturing everyday. The vulnerability of children is what makes the effects of bullying so detrimental: “The adolescent’s sense of self is often fragile and this is because adolescents want to belong and that belonging is of paramount importance to them” (Karcher, 2004, p. 12). One of the most obvious effects of bullying is the decline of self-esteem of the victims. Students who are frequent victims of bullying tend to become isolated socially. Oftentimes, victims of bullying have few friends. Bullies pick on

students because they do not have friends, and it becomes a vicious cycle. Research has shown that “students who report relatively high levels of being victimized are relatively low in self esteem” (Rigby, 2007, p. 50). Students with a low self-esteem do not have confidence in themselves to succeed. A low self-esteem holds students back from achieving their highest potential in all areas of their lives.

Academic

The effect of bullying on academic performance has been shown to affect both the bully and the victim: “Whereas victimized youth tend to report more internalizing behaviors (e.g. depression, anxiety), students who bully are more likely than their peers to engage in externalizing behaviors such as conduct problems, to report lower levels of school belonging and to engage in delinquent behavior” (Swearer, 2009, p. 39). Often students who bully are not focused on schoolwork for several reasons. Bullies commonly are getting into trouble so they are missing school and class time. Victims of bullies also are negatively affected academically: “Children who are bullied are more likely than non-bullied peers to indicate that they want to avoid attending school, have higher absenteeism rates, dislike school, and say that they receive poorer grades and lower standardized test scores” (Kowalski & Limber, 2013, p. 14). Students who are experiencing bullying will sometimes experience “flashback and replays and obsess about the bullying” (Garrett, 2003, p. 68). Students are so focused on the bullying situation it takes over their whole minds, and they cannot focus on anything else.

Effective Prevention & Intervention Strategies

Based on the research, it is obvious that the problem of bullying is complicated and therefore finding a solution is not a simple task. Although it is hard work, there are

ways to tackle the problem of bullying and change the lives of students forever. With an issue as serious and multifaceted as bullying, it is essential to identify the effective prevention and intervention strategies to then implement them in classrooms and schools: “Well written anti-bullying policies can lay the foundation for clear communication about expectations for appropriate behavior and consequences for bullying behaviors” (Swearer, 2009, p. 39). In order to create prevention and intervention strategies, there are several factors and strategies to consider. The most significant factors to consider are the school’s climate and the school’s policies.

A school’s climate considerably impacts the presence of bullying or lack thereof. A school’s climate is defined as “the quality and frequency of interactions among and between adults and students” (Scarpaci, 2006, p. 170). Teachers and staff should have positive interactions with each other and students in order to demonstrate positivity. The students in the school should feel valued and supported by adults in the school. A positive school environment will contribute to positive interactions between peers and adults.

The policies that a school has in place also substantially contribute to the rates of bullying as well. It is essential for a school to establish a zero tolerance policy for bullying. An established policy helps students know what behaviors are expected as well as help adults know how to take action when a bullying situation arises. Teachers have the ability to provide students with a model of how they should act and behave. There are several different prevention programs and policies that have been implemented into schools throughout the years. Some of those programs include, *Bully Busters*, *Bully-Proofing Your School*, *Creating a Peaceful School Learning Environment (CAPSLE)*, *Cooperative Learning Community (CLC)*, etc. There is not one particular program that is

perfect. Each school is different and unique, so each school's anti-bullying program should be formulated to best suit the school's needs. Each school's anti-bullying policy will differ in the details, but each policy should have the same goal. The goal of each anti-bullying policy should be a changed behavior and attitude for the bully and reconciliation and healing for the victim.

The Whole School

The first step in undertaking the problem of bullying is starting with the school. It is essential for schools to establish a school policy addressing all aspects of bullying. Sullivan (2004) outlines the steps for a school to take in order to work on developing a solution to bullying (p. 94). First, the school must be informed about the newest knowledge and expertise on the subject of bullying. Next, all key groups including the principal, school board, senior management, etc. must be aware of the vital need for an anti-bullying policy. Next, there must be a group formed that will develop a whole-school approach to deal with bullying. Next, that group will develop an action plan. This action plan will help with the guidelines of implementation. The action plan will then be implemented into action. Lastly, there should be a process where the anti-bullying policy is evaluated and changed if needed. All members of the school need to work together in order to bring an end to bullying.

Anti-bullying Policy

Anti-bullying policies are essential for every school to have in place: "It is important for every school to have a written anti-bully policy which is given to everyone in the school community" (Garrett, 2003, p. 94). Policies usually include procedures and actions that outline how to deal with a bullying situation. Having a written document that

outlines an anti-bullying policy provides several significant benefits. First, a written document emphasizes the seriousness of the issue of bullying, so the school community will better understand the weight of a bully-free zone. Second, a written document will provide clear guidelines that teachers and staff members can easily follow. Policies are important for the learning environment as it is maximized if “students feel psychologically and physically safe in the environment and if they feel valued by those around them (their peers and adults)” (Parsons, 2005, p. 67). Without a well-established anti-bullying policy, the fight against bullying becomes nearly impossible.

Teachers

Teachers play a very imperative role in the effort to stop bullying: “Bullying is only one of many things teachers have to deal with, and usually they have no training for doing so” (Sullivan, 2011, p. 32). Teachers are with students 7 hours a day, 5 days a week. Teachers do not just teach academics to students. Teachers can be crucial personalities who help young students to mature, to understand the world around them and to understand themselves. Teachers have the opportunity to significantly influence students in a positive way. A good education consists of much more than facts. A good education teaches the students character. Garrett (2003) outlines the duties of teachers:

- Teachers need to explicitly inform students on the classroom rules so students know what is expected of them.
- There should be both positive and negatives consequences to promote a healthy classroom environment.

- Teachers should frequently address issues in the classroom as well as monitor the progress of the students.
- Teachers should also meet with parents in order to inform them of how each student is behaving, especially those involved in bullying situations. (p. 96)

Peers

Peer support can significantly help with the problem of bullying. The reality is that most bullying incidents go unnoticed by adults because the victims of bullying are reluctant to report. Some students feel more comfortable confiding in a peer with a bullying situation: “Peer involvement in prevention and response to bullying forms a natural part of a school in which children are invited to contribute to decisions at a variety of levels including teaching and learning issues and policy formulation” (DeLara, 2006, p. 343). Peer counseling works on two levels: one is changing the victim’s response and one is changing the bully’s behavior. The peer support program should promote confidentiality among the students, but should also be monitored by adult supervision.

Counselors

School counselors are also a vital contribution to a school’s bullying prevention and intervention: “The counseling of victims or bullies cannot take place until at least some basic level of control is in place” (Hazler, 1996, p. 74). Counselors are usually there to talk about bullying situations after incidents occur. Counselors want to get to the root of the problem, so they want to talk to the students involved in the bullying after emotions are calmed and reasoning can take place. Counselors should work with both the bully and the victim. The parents of the children involved in the bullying situation should

be notified and involved immediately. The initial counseling sessions should be held separately with the individuals in the bullying situation. It is essential for the bully and the victim to have the opportunity to express their emotions in an environment that promotes honesty and safety. A victim will be less likely to tell the truth about a situation when others, especially the bully, are not present.

After the bully and victim have been talked to separately, the next step is reconciliation between the two. The counselor should be there to facilitate the interaction between the bully and victim in order to encourage a positive solution.

The behavior of both the bully and victim should be continued to be monitored throughout the school year. There should be immediate action if they victim or bully does not exhibit appropriate behavior

How to Stop Cyber Bullying

Considering the fact the majority cyber bullying occurs outside of the school, the prevention and intervention strategies are unique. When it comes to cyber bullying, parents have more authority than teachers in discipline. Most cyber bullying incidents occur outside the classroom because most schools do not allow students to be on their phones or computers during the school day. Although parents have more control, teachers still can help with the issue of cyber bullying. First, parents, teachers, and other adult leaders need to explain the importance of using technology in a responsible and respectable way. Children need to be taught that the words and images that they put on the Internet have weighty impact. Once something is posted on the Internet, it is out there forever. It needs to be communicated to students that “content of text messages can be retrieved from cell phone companies, and in most cases anything posted on the web can

be traced to an IP address and, therefore, to their computer” (Swearer, 2009, p. 114).

Even if a post is deleted or taken down, it is too late: “Parents should not purchase their children cell phones until they understand this and the consequences of engaging in Internet or online aggression” (Swearer, 2009, p. 114). Parents have the ability to control the amount of time their children are using technology. Parents should monitor their children’s use of technology and explain to their children that technology use is a privilege, not a right.

It is essential that teachers and parents are educated on what is going on in the online world. Parents, guardians, and teachers should be informed on the websites that children are using. Adults should not be ignorant to the cyber world that children are living in. The Internet is a vast place that can lead children into dark places. Children’s use of technology should be monitored in order to protect them. If parents and teachers are monitoring children’s use of technology a cyber-bullying incident can be prevented or dealt with as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Creating an environment that promotes student learning is the first step to successfully educating students. If students are uncomfortable in the school classroom, they will most likely not find success in learning. Bullying creates a toxic school environment that negatively affects students. Bullying is a serious issue that leads to severe problems both long term and short term. It is essential for schools to implement measures that stop bullying at its roots. It is important for educators to believe that bullying can be stopped. Students need to feel able to speak up and tell someone if they are being bullied. Everyone has the shared responsibility to help stop bullying behavior.

The problem is not the victim who is being bullied. The problem is the bullying behavior conducted by the bully.

It is time for schools to stand up to bullying. Considering the nature of complexity that is bullying, all schools need to educate the teachers and staff. The teachers and staff need to be equipped with the necessary tools to prevent and intervene in bullying situations. The children of this world are too valuable to be left behind. With the right prevention and intervention procedures, a student's life can be forever changed.

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