

Mentoring Minds' Research on the Bully Guide

Bullying is not a new issue. A strong interest in bullying began in Scandinavia in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Efforts soon emerged to stop bullying in Scandinavia led by the research of Dan Olweus, a noted authority in the field of bullying. In the 1980's, bullying received much media coverage and became a focus for research. This notoriety of bullying was due to a few incidents of tragic deaths of boys in Norway. Further study of the deaths was shown to directly relate to bullying. The suicides followed persistent bullying by some of their peers. According to national and international studies, data shows a victim of bullying is between 9% and 15% of any student population (Horowitz, Vessey, Carlson, Bradley, Montoya, McCullough, and David, 2004; Malecki, 2003; Olweus, 1993).

"Recent research in the United States and abroad has documented that bullying is a common and potentially damaging form of violence among children" (Limber, Nation, 1998). Sylvia Rimm, the Director of the Family Achievement Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio, a clinical professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, and the author of books on parenting, has worked with and studied numerous children. Rimm (2000) noted one constant among the angry children who displayed violent behavior: they all had been victims of bullies.

"Today, bullying is rightfully being recognized for what it is: an abusive behavior that often leads to greater and prolonged violence," state June Arnette and Marjorie Walsleben (1998) in the OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, *Combating Fear and Restoring Safety in Schools*. "Both bullies and their victims need help in learning new ways to get along in school."

Dan Olweus, a psychology professor at University of Bergen Norway, is credited as a leading expert on bullies and their victims. Olweus (1993) stated that bullying affects the social climate and the learning environment of the classroom. His research discovered that students in schools or classrooms with serious bullying problems reported feeling unsafe and dissatisfied with school. Olweus emphasized that bullying is not a problem that will go away without adult intervention.

Bullying is harmful to the health and academic progress of students. Actions taken by the school and parents can significantly reduce the occurrence of bullying, Dr. Ken Rigby (2000), a Professor at University of South Australia noted. Both those who bully and those who are victims of bullying could suffer physical and mental health problems. As a result, the educational progress could

be limited and life contributions could be negatively affected. Bullying can have negative consequences on the overall school climate and for the right of students to learn in a safe environment without fear.

A study supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2001) reported that bullying is widespread with 16 percent of school children sharing that other students bullied them. After a survey of 15,686 students in grades 6-10 in public and private schools within the United States, Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt (2001) purported that 29.9 % of the sample had been involved in bullying, 13% of the students acknowledged they were bullies, 10.6% reported being victims, and 6.3 % admitted being both a bully and a victim.

While bullying is commonly associated with a bully and a victim, Gross (2002) introduced the idea of a bystander. The bystander appears to be a key element in shaping school culture reported Walser (1998). Studies conducted by Craig and Pelter (1997) concluded that bystanders joined in the bullying, observed in a passive manner, or tried to stop the bullying. Research suggests that to gain a thorough understanding of bullying, schools need to consider the roles of bullying (bully, victim, and bystander). All factors that contribute to a bullying situation must be recognized and understood for schools to develop effective prevention and intervention plans.

Bullying has become a serious public health issue as identified in the Educational Forum on Adolescent Health hosted by the American Medical Association in May 2002. Physicians, psychologists, health educators, and other professionals in attendance met to focus on bullying and how to address this problem. Research presented at the forum found that bullying occurs predominantly on school grounds (Fleming and Towey, 2002). Wessler (2003) reported that some students plan indirect or out of the way travel routes to various locations to maintain safety. On the other hand, many victims will not report any incidences of bullying (Shakeshaft, Mandel, Johnson, Sawyer, Hergenrother, and Barber, 1997). Thus, schools have a responsibility to stop bullying and create a safe learning environment. Initiatives which include parents and community members greatly enhance preventative bullying efforts. Limber (2003) advocates schools involve these audiences to address the bullying problem.

Fuentes and Silva (2004) reported a nationwide investigation initiated by the Department of Secret Service and the Department of Education who sought to understand school-based attacks in response to the school shootings at Columbine and other schools in the United States. These departments explored how future attacks could be prevented. The findings were revealed in a culminating report, *Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*. One key finding that surfaced from the 37 incidents involving 41 school shooters was “many of the attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the

attack.” More specifically, (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002) indicated 71% of the 41 school shooters were victims of bullying. Thus, researchers strongly encouraged schools to launch efforts to prevent bullying.

Unfortunately, bullying is also a common occurrence in elementary and middle schools. An Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention report indicated that one study revealed 25% of fourth through sixth graders admitted to bullying other students several times over the school year (Melton, Limber, Flerx, Cunningham, Osgood, Chambers, Henngler, and Nation, 1998). In a study involving middle school, Bosworth (1999) reported that 80% of the students engaged in some form of bullying for the past 30 days. Students report that bullying takes place during times when the attention of the teacher is focused elsewhere, such as, when a teacher’s back is turned to help another student or perhaps to write on the board

The prevailing research and literature emphatically indicate that schools have a responsibility to address the issue of bullying effectively and ensure that students in their care are safe, healthy, and can achieve. Studies of anti-bullying programs are scarce in the United States; however, research from other countries indicates that the best way to deal with bullying is through a comprehensive bullying program. Research-based practices are a requirement of *No Child Left Behind*. Findings from bullying studies determine the interventions that can lead to success. The evidence indicates that schools must focus on changing the school and classroom climates, forming strong social norms against bullying, and increasing teachers’ willingness to intervene.

As former educators, the Mentoring Minds’ team recognized the need for a product that would contribute to a school’s preventative efforts toward bullying. The Product Development Team at Mentoring Minds studied the research, perused the literature, talked to administrators/teachers/students/parents, and drew upon the team’s myriad of educational experiences to design a product that reflects the research and embraces a whole-school approach to bullying. More specifically, the Mentoring Minds’ team sought to develop a product that focuses on the promotion of healthy interactions among peers and the rejection of bullying. The *Bully Guide* serves as a tool to assist the school community in collectively making informed judgments about how to proceed in addressing the serious problem of bullying.

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