Bullies and Their Victims:
Understanding a Pervasive Problem in Schools

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- http://sss.usf.edu
How Big Is the Problem?

- Nansel (2001), 15,686 students grades 6-10 United States
  - 30% of students involved
    - 13% bully
    - 11% victim
    - 6% both

- Solberg & Olweus (2003) 5,171 students grades 5-9 Norway
  - 6.5% bully
  - 10.1% victim
  - 1.6% both
Crime & Violence in Schools

- Olweus, Norwegian researcher estimates
  - 5 million El/JHS students engaged in or victims of violence in schools
  - 282,000 students physically attacked in US secondary schools monthly
  - 125,000 secondary school teachers (12%) are threatened monthly; 5,200 attacked
  - Burglaries occur 5X more often in schools
  - 8% of Jr/Sr students miss 1 day of school per month because of fear
Definitions

Aggressive behavior
- Behavior that is often less extreme and more normative and is not necessarily limited to physical harm. (Reactive/Instrumental)

Violent behavior
- Serious and extreme behavior that is intended to cause physical harm to another person.
Bullying

- **Repeated Harming** of Others
- Use of Words or Physical Aggression
- On School Grounds or to/from School
- **Unfair Advantage**
- Individual or Group
- KEYS: REPEATED, HARM, UNFAIR

(Hazler, et al., 2001; USDOE, 1998; Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999)
Forms of Bullying

• **Direct**
  - Verbal/Physical Aggression
  - Males more likely to use this type
  - Proactive--goal directed, higher peer status
  - Reactive--less effective, no status change

• **Indirect**
  - Relational
    - Using personal relationship to harm someone
  - Reputational
    - Attempt to harm someone’s social status
How Often Must Bullying Occur to be Considered a Bully or Victim?

- 2 to 3 times/month is lower bound cutoff

(Solbery & Olweus, 2003)

- Negative effects are related to frequency and intensity of the bullying
Development of District Policy

- Distinguish bullying from fighting
  - 4 Factors
    - Harm
    - Repeated
    - Power Imbalance
    - School Related

- Include frequency of occurrence
  - 2-3 X Month
  - Bully or Victim
Roles Involved in Bullying

- Bullies
- Victims
- Bully/Victims
- Bystanders
- Noninvolved
Victims

● Three types
  - “Passive victims” - anxious, insecure, appear to do nothing to invite attacks and fail to defend themselves
  - “Provocative victims” - hot-tempered, restless, create tension by irritating and teasing others and fight back or attempt to when attacked
  - “Bully/Victims”- bullies sometimes, victims sometimes--most negative form
Victims

- View school as unhappy setting
- Avoid places at school, school events
- Will avoid relentless bullying by skipping school, feigning illness
- Drop in grades
- Increase use of weapons for self protection
- Extreme cases result in suicide or homicide
Effects of Bullying

- Related to frequency and intensity of bullying
- Poorer social adjustment for bullies, victims, and bully/victims
- Lower academic achievement
- Loss of friends and loneliness for victims
- Attendance problems for victims
- Loss of trust in school climate/support
- Bystanders
  - Lose confidence in ability to intervene
  - Lose self-respect
  - Become desensitized over time
Myths About Bullying

- “Boys will be boys.”
- Only physical aggression is a concern
- Eliminating bullies is solution
- Bullies have low self-esteem
- Bullies represent greatest threat
- Bullies and violent students come from dysfunctional homes and “bad” neighborhoods
Factors that Contribute to Bullying: Direct Aggression

- **Student**
  - Attributing hostile intent
  - Few social solutions
  - Poor impulse control
  - Lack empathy
  - Think aggression works

- **Peer**
  - Reinforcer of the bully
  - Assistant to the bully
  - Defender of the victim
  - Outsider /bystander
Factors that Contribute to Bullying: Indirect Aggression

- Maintain or improve status in the peer group (relational/reputational)

- Moral Emotions
  - Believe that their motives and goals justify harmful behavior
  - Fear consequences of bullying behavior on themselves
  - Attain their own goals at the expense of others

Factors that Contribute to Bullying

- Family
  - Low levels of supervision
  - Presence of physical violence
  - Inconsistent/harsh discipline
  - Bullying by siblings
  - Parents value aggression
  - Victims-overcontrolling parents
Factors that Discourage Bullying

- **Teacher/Adult**
  - Knowledge of what bullying is and is not
  - Skills to intervene when they see it
  - Adequate supervision
  - Adult respect for students

- **Classroom/School**
  - Rules that prohibit bullying and discourage bystanding
  - Cooperative learning
  - Inclusive curriculum
Characteristics of Safe Schools

- Focus on academic achievement
- Involve families in meaningful ways
- Develop links to the community
- Emphasize positive relationships among students and staff
- Discuss safety issues openly
- Treat students with equal respect
More Characteristics

- Create ways for students to share concerns
- Help students feel safe expressing their feelings
- Have a system for referring students suspected of abuse/neglect
- Offer extended day programs
- Use problem-solving model
Early Warning Signs

- Social withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of isolation and rejection
- Victim of violence
- Feelings of being picked on and persecuted
- Low school interest and poor academic performance

From Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide for Safe Schools
Other Warning Signs

- Expression of violence in writing/drawings/speech
- Uncontrolled anger
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic bullying behaviors
- History of discipline problems
- Intolerance of differences/prejudicial attitudes
Intervention Outcomes

- Greatest impact will be with Universal Interventions
  - Mild levels of bullying and victimization

- Long-term bully/victim problems are resistant to prevention only efforts

- Most recent research on effects of comprehensive bully prevention/intervention programs yielded **nonsignificant outcomes**

  (Smith, et al, 2004)
What’s the Problem?

● Positive outcomes were related to levels of implementation fidelity
  (Smith, et al., 2004; Samivalli, et al., 2005)

● Positive outcomes were related to levels of interactive program techniques such as role play and class meetings
  (Frey, et al., 2000)

● Teachers implementing bully prevention programs report much lower use of role plays
  (Kallestad & Olweus, 2003)

● VERY POOR Generalizing Skill Use
  (Huesmann & Guerra, 1997; CPPRG, 1999)
Critical Components of Intervention Design

- Increase adult awareness and monitoring
- Teach social-emotional skills to support positive peer relationships and counter bullying
- Enhance support for prosocial behavior
Critical Components of Intervention Design

- **Whole School Component**
  - Antibullying policies and procedures
  - Staff training in bullying prevention
  - Parent training and involvement

- **Classroom Lessons**

- **Individual Interventions**
  - Coaching
Recent Research
(Hirschstein, et al., 2007)

- Adherence to antibully curriculum predicted greater teacher-rated interpersonal skills BUT NOT observed behavior or self-reported perceptions

- Lesson quality predicted GREATER perceived difficulty responding to bullying and more self-reported victimization but no rise in actual behavior was observed
Recent Research
(Hirschstein, et al., 2007)

- Support for specific bullying prevention skills was associated with less observed aggression among older students.

- Support for specific bullying prevention skills was associated with less victimization.

- Coaching was related to less observed encouragement of bullying, a lower rate of victimization and less destructive bystander behavior.
Recent Research
(Hirschstein, et al., 2007)

- Conclusions
  - Talking the Talk is necessary but insufficient
  - Providing school personnel with empirical findings about bullying at their school is a useful Initial First Step
  - Most school children are involved in some type of bully activity
  - Support for bully prevention skills and coaching behavior by teachers is critical to the success of any bully prevention/intervention program
  - Teachers need ongoing consultation and support to “walk the walk.”
Three Tiered Intervention Model

- Tier I
  - Policies/Practices School Wide
  - Building-level assessment
  - Building-wide initiatives re: awareness and prevention
  - Data monitoring system
  - Student/staff awareness training
  - Bully Prevention Program

- Tier II
  - Bully prevention support from staff
  - Coaching
  - Increased supervision
  - Peer monitoring/support programs

- Tier III
  - Individual/Group targeted interventions
  - Social Skills/Anger Control Training
  - Individual behavior plans
  - Alternative Education
The Challenges Ahead

- Bullying is all about climate
- How we treat each other matters
- Bullying cannot be ignored
- Prevention is not very successful when treated through a didactic curriculum
- Adult supervision, involvement and coaching is critical
- Consultation support for teachers must be a priority
- When bullying persists unchecked, violence is always a possibility