

2014 BULLYING PREVENTION REPORT

Best Practices, Findings, and
Prevention Resources to
Combat Bullying



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Introduction

Bullying is a serious problem in schools and communities across our country. Today, millions of children encounter bullying both in person and online. About 28% of students in grades 6-12 experience some kind of bullying.ⁱ But alarmingly, 64% of youth who are bullied do not tell an adult.ⁱⁱ

In recent years incidents of bullying have received widespread attention and exposed the detrimental psychological and behavioral effects bullying can have on victims. Many cases of bullying are directly linked to race, religion, disability or sexual orientation. Solving the bullying and harassment problem in our community will require a collaborative effort from national, state and local stakeholders. We must work together to ensure our children grow and learn in an environment that promotes dignity and respect.

Since taking office in January 2013, Representative Maloney has joined the Congressional Anti-Bullying Caucus and been a strong advocate for passage of the comprehensive Safe Schools Improvement Act. Additionally, Rep. Maloney has co-sponsored the Student Non-

Discrimination Act, which prohibits public schools from excluding students from any federally-assisted educational program based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, Rep. Maloney also knows that Congressional action alone will not solve the bullying crisis in our country.

In March 2014, Rep. Maloney held the first annual Hudson Valley Bullying Prevention Summit. Over the course of the day, two courageous students testified about their personal experiences being bullied as well as speakers from the National School Climate Center; Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Hudson Valley; Center for Leadership and Bullying Prevention; Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights; New York State United Teachers (NYSUT); and Anti-Defamation League. The Bullying Prevention Summit galvanized our local conversation about bullying and provided students and teachers with a forum to discuss preventing and combatting bullying and harassment. The following report contains ideas, facts, and figures we gathered from students, parents, teachers, administrators and experts.

What is Bullying?

Bullying has many definitions, varying between research, policy, and common parlance. Differences in definitions can lead to disagreements about the best prevention and intervention strategies. Generally, research defines bullying as aggressive behavior that involves a power imbalance and that is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated over time.ⁱⁱⁱ This definition is highly subjective, however, and may leave out many youth who feel as though they have been bullied. Though definitions are critical, especially in regards to assigning discipline and consequences, it is equally essential to address the experience of all youth who feel bullied regardless of definitions.^{iv}

Bullying takes many forms including physical, verbal and relational bullying. Bullying behavior can include: making threats, name calling, verbal abuse, spreading rumors, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Findings

Who is affected?

All youth are at risk of bullying. About one in five high school students has been a victim of bullying. In some cases, specific groups are targeted for bullying, such as children from religious or ethnic minority groups, LGBT youth, youth with disabilities, and isolated youth.

Effects of Bullying

Victims of bullying often experience depression and anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and a loss of interests in activities they used to enjoy. In some cases, physical health problems such as headaches, backaches, sleeping problems and bad appetite can manifest in victims of bullying. Additionally, bullying has been linked to increases in behavioral problems such as aggression, delinquency, and truancy. Often, victims see decreased academic achievement and interest in school and other activities.^v

Youth who bully others often engage in violent or risky behaviors into adulthood.

State and Federal Laws

New York State Bullying Law

Signed into law in 2010, The *Dignity for All Students Act* (DASA) provides students with a safe school environment by requiring school districts to adopt policies, training programs, and guidelines to combat harassment “based on a person’s actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or sex.” The Dignity for All Students Act seeks to promote a positive school climate through sensitivity training and classroom curricula that embraces diversity. While DASA tries to prevent and combat bullying, the law does not reach beyond conduct that occurs in school or at a school function.^{vi}

New York State Harassment Law

Harassment laws in New York address any course of conduct that is perpetrated repeatedly with the intent to harass, annoy or alarm another person without any legitimate purpose other than to place such person in reasonable fear.^{vii}

Federal Law

No federal law directly addresses bullying. In certain cases, bullying can constitute discriminatory harassment covered under the federal civil rights laws. Therefore, any school receiving federal funds is required to address bullying or harassment that is based on a student’s race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion and creates a hostile environment at school.^{viii}

Best Practices to Address Bullying

Strategies to address the bullying crisis are best developed by our local schools and communities. At the 1st Annual Hudson Valley Bullying Prevention Summit hosted by Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, students and teachers participated in breakout sessions to brainstorm ways to prevent bullying and best practices for responding to bullying.

Prevention & Response

- Assess the situation in your school or community in order to understand the situation and target efforts to combat bullying.
- Educate staff and students about bullying.
- Talk to kids about bullying, teach them to safely stand up to bullying and encourage kids to keep doing what they love.
- Encourage parents to keep open lines of communication with kids about online and cell phone behavior.
- Engage parents to reinforce anti-bullying messages at home and make sure parents are aware of signs that a child is involved in or a victim of bullying.
- Create rules, programs and policies that define expectations, promote community and address the bullying climate in your school.
- Programs like Second Step,^{ix} Safe School Ambassadors,^x Steps to Respect^{xi} and required community service hours can encourage kids to set aside differences and work together to build a positive climate. There is no one-size-fits-all program for schools, however, and schools should work to ensure programs have evidence they work, fit with the school context and community, and are able to be implemented as designed.
- Set up opportunities for students to meet new and different people. Help students expand their circle of concern to include people from many different backgrounds.
- Provide more options for students' extracurricular activities.
- Set up programs for peer support and mentoring.
- Coordinate efforts throughout the K-12 system to incorporate bullying prevention into the curriculum.
- Host school events and activities that promote diversity.^{xii}

Conclusion

Our children deserve to live and learn in safe and supportive environments. Anyone can be a victim of bullying; however, many times individuals target others based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religious practice, or national origin. Bullying negatively affects children's learning, development, and health.

We have to work within our communities to encourage parent and youth involvement in combatting bullying. In our schools, we can assess

the climate, educate our staff and students, and create policies, programs, and rules that promote humanity and ensure school safety.

The Hudson Valley Bullying Prevention Summit was an initial opportunity to examine the bullying trend in the Hudson Valley, but we have to do more. If we use what we have learned from our experiences, the experts, and the discussions, we can put a stop to bullying in our area.

Resources for Bullying Prevention

Federal

- StopBullying.gov – <http://www.stopbullying.gov>

State

- New York State Education Department – www.emsc.nysed.gov/sss/sed/
- New York State Center for School Safety – <http://nyscenterforschoolsafety.org/>

Non-profits

- National School Climate Center – <http://www.schoolclimate.org/>
- Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) – <http://glsen.org>
 - Hudson Valley Chapter – <http://glsen.org/chapters/hudsonvalley>
- Center for Leadership and Bullying Prevention – <http://www.noplaceforbullying.com/>
- Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, Project SEATBELT – <http://bullying.rfkcenter.org/>
- Anti-Defamation League – <http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/bullying-cyberbullying/>
- Safe School Ambassadors – <http://community-matters.org/programs-and-services/safe-school-ambassadors>
- Committee for Children, Steps to Respect – <http://www.cfchildren.org/steps-to-respect.aspx>

ⁱ <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012314.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/591202.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/index.html>

^{iv} http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deborah-temkin/the-impact-of-bullying-an_b_4826279.html

^v <http://www.stopbullying.gov>; <http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/591202.pdf>.

^{vi} http://www.nysenate.gov/files/pdfs/final%20cyberbullying_report_september_2011.pdf

^{vii} http://www.nysenate.gov/files/pdfs/final%20cyberbullying_report_september_2011.pdf

^{viii} <http://www.stopbullying.gov>

^{ix} <http://www.secondstep.org/NewBullyingPreventionUnit.aspx>

^x <http://community-matters.org/programs-and-services/safe-school-ambassadors>

^{xi} <http://www.cfchildren.org/steps-to-respect.aspx>

^{xii} <http://www.stopbullying.gov>; Hudson Valley Bullying Prevention Summit