

Fact Sheet

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program: Background and Program Overview

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a multilevel, multicomponent program designed to reduce and prevent bully/victim problems among students at school. School staff are largely responsible for introducing and implementing the program, and their efforts are directed towards improving peer relations and making the school a safe and pleasant environment. The program, which was developed by Professor Dan Olweus (University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway) was identified by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (University of Colorado, Boulder) as one of ten Blueprint Programs for Violence Prevention.

What is Bullying?

A student is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students. In bullying incidents, there is an imbalance in strength or power—a victim of bullying has a difficult time defending himself or herself. Bullying may be carried out through physical, verbal, or indirect means (e.g., excluding students). Thus, bullying is characterized by three criteria:

- It is aggressive behavior or intentional “harm-doing”
- It is carried out repeatedly and over time, and
- It occurs within an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power.

Why Focus On Bully/Victim Problems?

There are several critical reasons for examining and attempting to counteract bully/victim problems in school:

- Bullying may cause short-term problems for the victims (e.g., depression, anxiety, problems with school work).
- Persistent bullying can leave long-term scars on the victims (e.g., low self-esteem, depression).
- Students who bully others are especially likely to engage in other antisocial/delinquent behaviors such as vandalism, shoplifting, truancy and frequent drug use. This antisocial behavior pattern often will continue into young adulthood.
- Bullying may contribute to a negative school social climate that is not conducive to good social relationships or learning.
- Bullying is a widespread problem among school children.

Program Goals

- Reduce (and ideally eliminate) existing bully/victim problems among school children.
- Prevent the development of new bully/victim problems.

- Achieve better peer relations at school.

Target Population

The target age groups are elementary, middle, and junior high school students. Many program elements are targeted to all students in the school. Some program elements are targeted toward specific students who exhibit signs of being involved in bully/victim problems.

Basic Principles of the Program

In order to address the risk factors associated with bully/victim problems, it is critical to have a school environment:

- that is characterized by warmth, positive interest, and involvement from all adults;
- that sets firm limits to unacceptable behavior;
- where non-hostile sanctions are consistently applied; and
- where rules are violated and/or behavior is unacceptable.

Program Content

Core components of the program are implemented at the school, classroom, and individual levels:

School-level components include:

- the formation of a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee to coordinate all aspects of a school's program,
- distribution of an anonymous student questionnaire assessing the nature and prevalence of bullying at each school,
- a school conference day for discussing bullying problems and planning the implementation of the program,
- the development of a coordinated system of supervising students,

- the development of school-wide rules against bullying,
- holding teacher discussion groups, and
- involving parents in anti-bullying efforts,

Classroom-level components include:

- reinforcing school-wide rules against bullying,
- holding regular classroom meetings with students to increase knowledge and empathy and to encourage prosocial norms and behavior,
- holding meetings with parents to foster more active involvement on their part.

Individual-level components include:

- interventions with children identified as bullies and victims, and
- discussions with the parents of involved students.

Evidence of Effectiveness

The Bullying Prevention Program has been shown to result in:

- substantial reductions, up to 50 percent or more, in the frequency with which students report being bullied and bullying others; roughly similar results have been obtained with peer and teacher ratings of bully/victim problems;
- significant reductions in students' reports of general antisocial behavior such as vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy; and
- significant improvements in the "social climate" of the class, as reflected in students' reports of improved order and discipline, more positive social relationships, and a more positive attitude toward schoolwork and school.

Program Resources

Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do by Dan Olweus. ISBN No: 0631192417. Available from Blackwell Publishers, phone: 1-800-216-2522. List price: \$22.95. One book should be purchased for each staff member.

U.S. video, *Bullying* and accompanying *Teacher Guidebook* (1996). Available From South Carolina Educational Television, Marketing Department, P.O.Box 1100, Columbia, SC 29211, phone: 1-800-553-7752. List price: \$69.95. One video should be purchased for every six classes, on average.

Olweus Core Program Against Bullying and Antisocial Behavior: A Teacher Handbook by Dan Olweus. The handbook is available from Professor Dan Olweus at the University of Bergen in Bergen, Norway. An order form (with price information) may be obtained from Darlene Sentell at 864-656-7906; sentell@clemson.edu. One handbook should be purchased for each staff member.

The Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire and a computer program (to be used with Windows 95 or Windows 98) for evaluating the Questionnaire results. Available from Professor Dan Olweus at the University of Bergen in Bergen, Norway. An order form (with price information) may be obtained from Darlene Sentell at 864-656-7906; sentell@clemson.edu

Supplemental Lesson Plans for the Bullying Prevention Program (targeted at middle school children). May be obtained at a cost of \$10 by contacting Darlene Sentell, Institute on Neighborhood and Family Life, 158 Poole Ag. Center Clemson, SC 29634; phone: 864-656-7906; fax: 864-656-6281.

Blueprints for Violence Prevention: Bullying Prevention Program (1999) by Dan Olweus and Susan Limber. May be obtained for \$15 from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado at Boulder, Campus Box 442, Boulder, CO 80309; phone: 303-492-1032.

March 28, 2002