

THE TOP TEN FACTS ABOUT BULLYING

This research-based section provides a broad, general overview of what bullying is, who is affected by bullying, and why it's important for adults—including you—to get involved in prevention and intervention. You might read this before you jump into the main sections of this book, then refer to it periodically for answers, insights, and inspiration as you work with your students to create a bully free classroom.

1. BULLYING IS MORE THAN JUST TEASING

In their article entitled "Overcoming Bullying Behavior," Ellen R. Clore, R.N., and Judith A. Hibel, R.N., describe bullying as "one or more individuals inflicting physical, verbal, or emotional abuse on another—includes threats of bodily harm, weapon possession, extortion, civil rights violation, assault and battery, gang activity, attempted murder, and murder." Other experts add sexual harassment to the list of bullying behaviors.

For both girls and boys in elementary and middle school, the most common form of bullying is, in fact, teasing. However, physical abuse (for boys) and social ostracism (for girls) are in second place.* Most researchers believe that bullying involves an imbalance of physical or psychological power, with the bully being stronger (or perceived to be stronger) than the victim.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), approximately one in seven schoolchildren is a bully or a victim, and the problem directly affects about five million elementary and junior high students in the United States. For fourth through eighth graders, 22 percent report academic difficulties resulting from peer abuse.

* SOURCE: *The Bullying Prevention Handbook* by John H. Hoover and Ronald Oliver (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1996).

2. ANYONE CAN BE A BULLY

Bullies are kids who need to feel powerful, and they have learned that bullying works. What distinguishes them from someone who teases occasionally is a pattern of *repeated* physical or psychological intimidation.

There is no one reason why a child may become a bully, but environmental factors can lead to the development of bullying behaviors. Because this behavior is learned, it can also be unlearned. The pattern of behavior can begin as early as age two; the older the child becomes, the more difficult change will be. Child bullies are at a greater risk for problems in the future. For example, by age thirty, 25 percent of the adults who had been identified as bullies as children had a criminal record, as opposed to 5 percent of the adults who hadn't been bullies.* Early intervention is essential.

Some environmental factors that contribute to the development of bullying behavior include the following:**

- *Too little supervision of children and adolescents.* Children need to get the message that bullying behavior is not okay.

* SOURCE: *Bullies and Victims* by SuEllen Fried, A.D.T.R., and Paula Fried, Ph.D. (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1994).

** SOURCE: "Bullying Fact Sheet" by George Batsche and Benjamin Moore, in *Helping Children Grow Up in the '90s: A Resource Book for Parents and Teachers* (Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists, 1992). Used with permission.

- A “*payoff*.” When parents or other adults give in to an obnoxious or aggressive child, the child learns to use bullying to get what he or she wants.
- *Aggressive behavior in the home.* Some children are more likely than others to imitate aggressive behavior. Watching adults bully each other gives children the tools they need to become bullies themselves.
- *Harsh physical punishment.* Bullies often attack smaller, weaker children to model what happens to them in their homes. The worst possible punishment for bullies is physical.
- *Abusive peers.* Children may be bullied by their “friends” or may be encouraged to bully to be part of the group.
- *Constant negative feedback.* Bullies feel that the world around them is more negative than positive. As a result, they use negative behavior to feel important and get attention.
- *Expecting hostility.* In many ways, the bully’s philosophy is “the best defense is offense.” They attack before they are attacked, and assume hostility where none may exist.

The school environment also influences the development of bullying behaviors. Environmental factors can include the following:*

- Larger schools report a greater percentage of violence.
- Schools with clear rules of conduct enforced by the principal report less violence.
- Schools with students that report fair discipline practices report less violence.
- Small class size relates to less violence.

* SOURCE: “Bullying Fact Sheet” by George Batsche and Benjamin Moore, in *Helping Children Grow Up in the ‘90s: A Resource Book for Parents and Teachers* (Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists, 1992). Used with permission.

- Schools where students mention that they are in control of their lives report less violence.
- A principal who appears to be ineffective or invisible to students reports more violence in school.
- Schools with principals who provide opportunities for teachers and students to participate in decision-making report less violence.
- Cohesiveness among the teaching staff and the principal relates to less violence.

3. ANYONE CAN BE A VICTIM

In general, less is known about victims than about bullies. Children are victimized because of their physical appearance, mannerisms, or just because they don’t fit in. In fact, one survey shows that “not fitting in” is the most common reason why a child is abused by peers.* Children who have a disability or a chronic illness are common targets. Other victims are the children of overly protective or domineering parents.

Most victims are either *passive* (anxious, insecure, etc.) or *provocative* (hot-tempered, restless, etc.). Provocative victims are also at risk of becoming bullies themselves. A few children who are victimized don’t fit either category—talented or popular children are also victimized. Some students see high achievers as “sucking up” to teachers and decide to torment them into changing their behaviors. Of course, this kind of bullying may be based on jealousy.

Research shows that children who are frequently victimized are more likely to “reward” bullies physically or emotionally (by giving up their lunch money or bursting into tears, for example) and less likely to fight back.

* SOURCE: *The Bullying Prevention Handbook* by John H. Hoover and Ronald Oliver (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1996).

In the short term, victims may feel afraid and lonely and often attempt to avoid situations in which they may be bullied. In the long term, children who are victimized begin to see themselves as unworthy or inferior, and their academic performance suffers. Some children eventually believe that they deserve the abuse; this phenomenon is also common in victims of domestic abuse. Over time, a victimized person can develop a victim mentality as a permanent part of his or her psyche. This type of victim needs help from a professional therapist or counselor.

Victimized children are also at a greater risk for depression and suicide than their non-bullied peers. They may see suicide as their only way to escape.

4. BULLYING ISN'T A MODERN PROBLEM

Bullying in schools is nothing new. In the 1850s English novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, author Thomas Hughes vividly described how a younger boy at an English boarding school was forced by a group of older bullies to undergo a painful and sadistic roasting in front of an open fire.*

Unfortunately, adults have been relatively slow to protect the rights of children. The role of child as obedient servant without rights was unquestioned in America until the case of Mary Ellen McCormack came to light in 1874. The ten-year-old, who was beaten almost daily, was discovered in ragged clothes, imprisoned in an apartment, and allowed outside only at night. Unable to save Mary Ellen by herself, the woman who found her turned to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), which had been founded in 1868 to protect abused animals from their cruel owners. Because there were no laws in place to protect children at the time, Mary Ellen was tried as a

* SOURCE: *Set Straight on Bullies* by Stuart Greenbaum with Brenda Turner and Ronald D. Stephens (Malibu, CA: National School Safety Center, 1989).

member of the animal kingdom, under ASPCA legislation. She was removed from the home in less than twenty-four hours and placed in an orphanage.*

After this case, interest in children's rights ebbed and flowed. A major modern step in child protection was the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, passed by Congress in 1973.

Some people may claim that with all the violence in our culture today, "peer abuse" is the least of a child's worries. However, bullying can be put to rest only when it is recognized and steps are taken to prevent it. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away.

5. BULLYING AFFECTS EVERYONE

Children who watch other children being bullied are often afraid to speak out, perhaps thinking "That could be me!" A child who is victimized may be rejected by his or her peers as if the victim had some sort of disease. (One common variation of this is the childhood game in which one child has "cooties" that he or she attempts to pass on to others.) Some children who witness a great deal of bullying react as many victims do—they attempt to avoid the situation and may even develop headaches, stomachaches, or other physical symptoms to handle the stress. An atmosphere where children worry "who will be next" encourages absences, truancy, and dropping out of school.

Studies with English and Australian schoolchildren and adolescents showed that most students were opposed to bullying and tended to be supportive of victims. Half tried to help victims, and nearly one third regretted not helping.

However, children become less sympathetic to victims as they grow older; almost one third of the adolescents surveyed said they could understand why the bully chose the victim.

* SOURCE: *Bullies and Victims* by SuEllen Fried, A.D.T.R., and Paula Fried, Ph.D. (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1994).

In an American study, children in grades four through seven were asked to imagine aggressive acts against victims and nonvictims. In their minds, hurting the victims was less upsetting than hurting the nonvictims.*

Blaming the victim is a common reaction among children. Like many adults, children may believe that bad things don't happen to good people, so the victim must be doing something wrong to deserve the abuse. They may also feel that the abuse makes the victim "tougher." These attitudes help them justify their inaction.

Not every child, of course, ignores the mistreatment of their peers, but intervention can have a high cost. In England, a sixteen-year-old girl who went to the police and identified one of a group of twenty boys who had severely beaten a Pakistani student was both praised and vilified. In the year after the incident, she received death threats, was verbally abused by total strangers, was bullied at school, and suffered a concussion and minor injuries when she was attacked by another student.**

6. BULLYING IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM

The law protects adults against crimes like theft, extortion, slander, and assault and battery. An adult who throws rocks and shouts obscenities at another adult will probably be arrested. This protection should extend equally to children, who generally are considered more vulnerable and less able to defend themselves. Unfortunately, this isn't the case. It's estimated that only about one third of all violent crimes against youths are ever reported to authorities, so it's difficult to determine the true scope of the problem.***

* SOURCE: *Childhood Bullying and Teasing* by Dorothea M. Ross, Ph.D. (Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 1996).

** Ibid.

*** SOURCE: *Set Straight on Bullies* by Stuart Greenbaum with Brenda Turner and Ronald D. Stephens (Malibu, CA: National School Safety Center, 1989).

8 THE BULLY FREE CLASSROOM

According to Dr. Dan Olweus, one of the world's leading authorities on bullying, "a person is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more persons." This *repeated* nature is most disturbing to some researchers. Bullying is a consistent pattern of disrespect for others, accepted and even created by the environment.

This might explain the popularity of television shows in which children watch people falling down, getting hit by baseballs or bitten by dogs, and the laughter of others convinces them that these things are funny. Students who become bullies don't see other people as people and can't see the consequences of their own actions.

Many bullies often object to being disciplined, claiming "We were just having fun." The difference between playful teasing, hurtful teasing, bullying, and abuse isn't always clear. Because much of the pain of being victimized is emotional or social, it is less evident than a cut or a bruise. A student can be in a great deal of pain without having a visible injury. Words can hurt, and verbal abuse can lead to physical abuse with frightening ease. Experts suggest watching our language for violent metaphors ("The thought struck me," "I'll take a shot at that," etc.) and eliminating them from everyday use. "Think before you speak" is a useful phrase. Calm words may lead to calm actions.

Turning the trend of violence around isn't easy. As one New York City student said:

Violence has been a problem in our city for a long time, and in recent years it has spread to our schools. Some schools have even installed metal detectors hoping to stop violence. But weapons aren't the only problem. No metal detector on earth can stop people from bringing fear, prejudice, and conflict to school, and no metal detector can prevent students from bringing that fear, prejudice, and conflict back to the street at 3 P.M.*

* SOURCE: *Waging Peace in Our Schools* by Linda Lantieri and Janet Patti (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

7. WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO FIND SOLUTIONS

Simply enrolling a victim in karate classes is not the answer. Because bullying has a variety of causes, we need to find a variety of ways to deal with it.

Obviously, many situations in which bullying occurs involve some sort of conflict. Young people (and their adult role models) need to learn conflict management and resolution skills, which can help stop these bullying problems from developing.

Schools can create an atmosphere where healthy choice-making is encouraged. "The new three R's" can make a difference in the school environment:*

- **Rules.** Parents and school personnel must demonstrate that they are in charge and won't tolerate any student hurting another student, either physically or psychologically.
- **Rights.** Every student has the right not to be hurt and the right to learn in a safe environment.
- **Responsibilities.** Educators must be responsible for better supervision and more observant monitoring. By eliminating fear from the lives of students, teachers are able to do their jobs more effectively. Also, students must be responsible for respecting the rights of their classmates and themselves.

The involvement of parents, teachers, administrators, students, and the community is essential in stopping bullying in schools. Research on school climate suggests that the principal is the single most important person to have involved in the program. School staff will follow the lead of an effective, motivated principal.** The larger

* SOURCE: *Set Straight on Bullies* by Stuart Greenbaum with Brenda Turner and Ronald D. Stephens (Malibu, CA: National School Safety Center, 1989) (www.nssc1.org). Used with permission.

** SOURCE: *The Bullying Prevention Handbook* by John H. Hoover and Ronald Oliver (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1996).

the group of concerned parents, teachers, and community members, the better off the school will be.

In peer mediation, all students (or just a few, depending on the model) are trained to help students work out their differences by leading them through a series of steps or an outline. Here's one example of a series of mediation steps:

- **Relax.** Take a step back from the problem and admit how you feel.
- **Choose to solve the problem.** Let the other person know that you are ready to talk things through. Stay calm and don't make the problem worse.
- **Share your feelings.** Talk about the situation using "I statements." Be honest and specific about your feelings. Answer any questions the other person may have.
- **Listen.** Without interrupting, listen to the other person's point of view. When the other person is finished, you can ask a few simple questions to find out more.
- **Find a solution.** Together, agree on a way to solve the problem. Then put the plan into action.
- **Make a plan for the future.** Think of some better ways to handle the situation if it happens again. Agree to try one of these ideas next time.

Many modern conflict resolution programs stress peer mediation, a concept found in many cultures. In ancient China, people practiced the Confucian way of resolving disputes by using moral persuasion and agreement. In Japan, the village leader was expected to use mediation and conciliation to help community members

settle their disputes. In parts of Africa, a neighborhood meeting, or "moot," assembled, and a respected member helped disputants resolve their conflict without involving a judge.*

Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl saw the importance of taking responsibility for our own actions when he said, "Everything can be taken from us but one thing, which is the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

People who solve problems without resorting to violence seldom make the evening news. Getting along just isn't that exciting. But learning conflict resolution skills can increase a child's EQ ("emotional quotient"), which some experts claim is as essential to success as IQ. Assertiveness training, character education, and a consistent, organized approach to discipline are other important aspects that should be included in a bully prevention plan. Concerned adults *can* make a difference.

8. A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WILL PRODUCE THE BEST RESULTS

An effective bullying prevention program will include short-term actions and activities that relate to long-term goals. Identifying specific areas for action helps educators recognize and address overlapping goals, conflicting messages, and missed opportunities. It can also suggest community partners that schools want or need to enlist.

Some state education departments have built plans around several key areas of the school environment that affect safety. These areas may include:

- school climate
- student monitoring and discipline

* SOURCE: *Reducing School Violence Through Conflict Resolution* by David W. Johnson and Robert T. Johnson (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1995).

- policies and planning
- prevention and intervention programs
- leadership and staff development
- communications
- facilities
- transportation
- partnerships
- school neighborhood and community

The National Crime Prevention Council suggests building a program using these guidelines:*

- Establish Zero Tolerance policies for weapons and violence. Spell out penalties in advance. Adopt the motto "If it's illegal outside school, it's illegal inside." Educate students, parents, and staff about policies and penalties. Include a way for students to report crime-related information that does not expose them to retaliation.
- Establish a committee to develop a safe school plan. Include students, if you feel it's appropriate, and invite law enforcement officers to be part of your team. Policies and procedures for both day-to-day operations and crisis handling should cover such subjects as identifying who belongs in the building, avoiding accidents and incidents in corridors and on school grounds, reporting weapons or concerns about them, working in partnership with police, and following up to ensure that troubled students get help.
- Work with juvenile justice authorities and law enforcement officers on how violence, threats, potentially violent situations, and other crimes will be handled. Meet regularly to review problems and concerns. Develop a memorandum of understanding with law enforcement on access to the school building, reporting of crimes, arrests, and other key issues.

* For a copy of the National Crime Prevention Council's *Safer Schools*, write or call: National Crime Prevention Council, 1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 13th Floor, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 466-6272; toll-free telephone (orders only) 1-800-627-2911. On the Web, go to: www.ncpc.org

- Offer training in anger management, stress relief, mediation, and related violence prevention skills to staff and teachers. Help them identify ways to pass these skills along to students. Make sure students are getting training.
- Involve every group within the school community—faculty, professional staff, custodial staff, students, and others—in setting up solutions to violence. Keep lines of communication open to all kinds of student groups and cliques.
- Develop ways to make it easier for parents to be involved. Provide lists of volunteer opportunities; ask parents to organize phone trees; hold events on weekends as well as weeknights. Offer child care for younger children.
- Work with community groups and law enforcement officials to create safe corridors for travel to and from school. Help with efforts to identify and eliminate neighborhood trouble spots.
- Reward good behavior. Acknowledging students who do the right thing—whether it's settling an argument without violence, helping another student, or apologizing for bumping into someone—helps raise the tone for the whole school.
- Insist that your faculty and staff treat each other and students the way they want to be treated—with respect, courtesy, and thoughtfulness. Be the chief role model.
- Develop relationships with health care, mental health, counseling, and social work resources in your community. Make sure that teachers, counselors, coaches, and other adults in the school know how to connect a needy student with available resources.
- Ensure that students learn violence prevention techniques throughout their school experience. Don't make it a one-time thing. Include the training in an

array of subjects. Draw from established, tested curricula whenever possible.

- Consider establishing policies such as mandatory storage of outerwear in lockers (to reduce chances of weapons concealment), mesh or clear backpacks and duffel bags (to increase visibility of contraband), and limited entry to the building (to reduce inappropriate visitors).

9. CHILDREN AT RISK CAN BE HELPED

Effective schools recognize the potential in every student to overcome difficult experiences and to control negative emotions. Adults in these school communities use their knowledge of early warning signs to address problems before they escalate into physical or emotional violence. These warning signs (which may be exhibited by bullies or their victims) include:*

- *Social withdrawal.* In some situations, gradual and eventually complete withdrawal from social contacts can be an important indicator of a troubled child. The withdrawal often stems from feelings of depression, rejection, persecution, unworthiness, and lack of confidence.
- *Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone.* Research has shown that the majority of children who are isolated and appear to be friendless are not violent. In fact, these feelings are sometimes characteristic of children and youth who may be troubled, withdrawn, or have internal issues that hinder development of social affiliations. However, research also has shown that in some cases feelings of isolation and not having friends are associated with children who behave aggressively and violently.
- *Being a victim of violence.* Children who are victims of violence—including physical

* SOURCE: *Early Warning, Timely Response* by K. Dwyer, D. Osher, and C. Warger (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

or sexual abuse—in the community, at school, or at home are sometimes at risk of becoming violent toward themselves or others.

- *Feelings of being picked on and persecuted.* The youth who feels constantly picked on, teased, bullied, singled out for ridicule, and humiliated at home or at school may initially withdraw socially. If not given adequate support in addressing these feelings, some children may vent them in inappropriate ways—including possible aggression or violence.
- *Excessive feelings of rejection.* In the process of growing up and in the course of adolescent development, many young people experience emotionally painful rejection. Children who are troubled often are isolated from their mentally healthy peers. Their responses to rejection will depend on many background factors. Without support, they may be at risk of expressing their emotional distress in negative ways—including violence. Some aggressive children who are rejected by nonaggressive peers seek out aggressive friends who, in turn, reinforce their violent tendencies.
- *Low school interest and poor academic performance.* Poor school achievement can be the result of many factors. It is important to consider if a drastic change in performance and/or poor performance becomes a chronic condition that limits the child's capacity to learn. In some situations—such as when the low achiever feels frustrated, unworthy, chastised, and denigrated—acting out and aggressive behaviors may occur. It is important to determine the emotional and cognitive reasons for the academic performance change to understand the true nature of the problem.
- *Expression of violence in writings and drawings.* Children and youth often express themselves in their drawings and in stories, poetry, and other written expressive forms. Many children produce work about violent themes that for the most part is harmless

when taken in context. However, an overrepresentation of violence in writings and drawings that is directed at specific individuals (family members, peers, other adults) consistently over time may signal emotional problems and the potential for violence. Because there is a real danger in misdiagnosing such a sign, it is important to seek the guidance of a qualified professional—such as a school psychologist, counselor, or other mental health specialist—to determine its meaning.

- *Uncontrolled anger.* Everyone gets angry; anger is a natural emotion. However, anger that is expressed frequently and intensely in response to minor irritants may signal potential violent behavior.
- *Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors.* Children often engage in acts of shoving and mild aggression. However, some mildly aggressive behaviors such as constant hitting and bullying of others that occur early in children's lives, if left unattended, might later escalate into more serious behaviors.
- *History of discipline problems.* Chronic behavior and disciplinary problems both in school and at home may suggest that underlying emotional needs are not being met. These unmet needs may be shown in acting out and aggressive behaviors. These problems may set the stage for the child to violate norms and rules, defy authority, disengage from school, and engage in aggressive behaviors with other children and adults.
- *History of violent and aggressive behavior.* Unless provided with support and counseling, a youth who has a history of aggressive or violent behavior is likely to repeat those behaviors. Aggressive and violent acts may be directed toward other individuals, be expressed in cruelty to animals, or include fire setting. Young people who show an early pattern of antisocial behavior frequently and across multiple settings are

particularly at risk for future aggressive and antisocial behavior. Similarly, youth who engage in overt behaviors such as bullying, generalized aggression and defiance, and covert behaviors such as stealing, vandalism, lying, cheating, and fire setting also are at risk for more serious aggressive behavior. Research suggests that age of onset may be a key factor in interpreting early warning signs. For example, children who engage in aggression and drug abuse at an early age (before age twelve) are more likely to show violence later on than are children who begin such behavior at an older age. In the presence of such signs it is important to review the child's history with behavioral experts and seek parents' observations and insights.

- *Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes.* All children have likes and dislikes. However, an intense prejudice toward others based on racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and physical appearance—when coupled with other factors—may lead to violent assaults against those who are perceived to be different. Membership in hate groups or the willingness to victimize individuals with disabilities or health problems also should be treated as early warning signs.
- *Drug use and alcohol use.* Apart from being unhealthy behaviors, drug use and alcohol use reduces self-control and exposes children and youth to violence, either as perpetrators, as victims, or both.
- *Affiliation with gangs.* Gangs that support antisocial values and behaviors—including extortion, intimidation, and acts of violence toward other students—cause fear and stress among other students. Youth who are influenced by these groups—those who emulate and copy their behavior, as well as those who become affiliated with them—may adopt these values and act in violent or aggressive ways in certain situations. Gang-related violence and turf battles are common occurrences tied to the

use of drugs that often result in injury and/or death.

- *Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms.* Children and youth who inappropriately possess or have access to firearms can have an increased risk for violence. Research shows that such youngsters also have a higher probability of becoming victims. Families can reduce inappropriate access and use by restricting, monitoring, and supervising children's access to firearms and other weapons. Children who have a history of aggression, impulsiveness, or other emotional problems should not have access to firearms and other weapons.
- *Serious threats of violence.* Idle threats are a common response to frustration. Alternatively, one of the most reliable indicators that a young person is likely to commit a dangerous act toward self or others is a detailed and specific threat to use violence. Recent incidents across the country clearly indicate that threats to commit violence against oneself or others should be taken very seriously. Steps must be taken to understand the nature of these threats and to prevent them from being carried out.

When warning signs indicate that danger is imminent, safety must always be the first and foremost consideration. Take action immediately. Emergency intervention by school authorities and possibly law enforcement officers is needed when a child:

- has presented a detailed plan (time, place, method) to harm or kill others—particularly if the child has a history of aggression or has attempted to carry out threats in the past
- is carrying a weapon, particularly a firearm, and has threatened to use it.*

* SOURCE: *Early Warning, Timely Response* by K. Dwyer, D. Osher, and C. Warger (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

10. SCHOOLS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR PROTECTING STUDENTS

In situations where students present other threatening behaviors, parents should be informed of the concerns immediately. School communities also have the responsibility to seek assistance from appropriate agencies, such as child and family services and community mental health. These responses should reflect school board policies and be consistent with the violence prevention and response plan.

Effective school communities support staff, students, and families in understanding the early warning signs. Support strategies include having:

- school board policies in place that support training and ongoing consultation. The entire school community knows how to identify early warning signs, and understands the principles that support them.
- school leaders who encourage others to raise concerns about observed early warning signs and to report all observations of imminent warning signs immediately. This is in addition to school district policies that sanction and promote the identification of early warning signs.
- easy access to a team of specialists trained in evaluating and addressing serious behavioral and academic concerns.

Each school community should develop a procedure that students and staff can follow when reporting their concerns about a child who exhibits early warning signs. For example, in many schools the principal is the first point of contact. In cases that do not pose immediate danger, the principal contacts a school psychologist or other qualified professional, who takes responsibility for addressing the concern immediately. If the concern is determined to be serious—but poses no immediate danger—the child's family should be contacted.

The family should be consulted before implementing any interventions with the child. In cases where school-based factors are determined to be causing or worsening the child's troubling behavior, the school should act quickly to modify them.

Children cannot learn effectively if they fear for their safety. Troubled young people—both bullies and victims—need a supportive environment to learn and grow. In the words of Dr. Dan Olweus, "Every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in school and in society at large."

Federal and state legislation is helping to support the idea of bully free schools. Some experts have suggested that prevention of bullying may become a legal obligation of schools.* Part of President Clinton's "Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century" (delivered to Congress on February 4, 1997, as part of the State of the Union address) calls for "strong, safe schools with clear standards of achievement and discipline." The Clinton administration strongly encourages a Zero Tolerance policy for classroom violence and weapons in school.

The Gun Free Schools Act requires that each state receiving federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must have put in effect, by October 1995, a state law requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than one year a student who is determined to have brought a firearm to school.

Each state's law also must allow the chief administering officer of the local educational agency to modify the expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis. All local educational agencies receiving ESEA funds must have a policy that requires the referral of any student who brings a firearm to school to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system.

* SOURCE: *The Bullying Prevention Handbook* by John H. Hoover and Ronald Oliver (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1996).