This document was developed to provide educators with background information on bullying to help prepare to teach lessons and lead activities related to bullying.

Contents

WHAT IS BULLYING?

In Ontario, the Education Act defines bullying as

"aggressive and typically repeated behaviour by a pupil where,

(a) the behaviour is intended by the pupil to have the effect of, or the pupil ought to know that the behaviour would be likely to have the effect of,

(i) causing harm, fear, or distress to another individual, including physical, psychological, social, or academic harm, harm to the individual's reputation, or harm to the individual's property, or

(ii) creating a negative environment at a school for another individual, and

(b) the behaviour occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the pupil and the individual based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education." (Government of Ontario, Education Act, 2018)

WHAT TYPES OF BULLYING ARE THERE?

There are four types of bullying:

- Physical bullying includes hitting, slapping, tripping, shoving, pinching/poking, chasing, unwanted sexual touching, coercion, and stealing or destroying belongings.
- Verbal bullying includes name-calling, rumor-spreading, threats, mocking, insults, negative references based on race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, and unwanted sexual comments.
- Social/emotional bullying includes excluding others from groups, scapegoating, shunning, ignoring, and humiliation via public gestures or graffiti.
- Electronic/cyberbullying includes using technology (i.e. cellphones, computers, social media, email, etc.) to spread rumors or hurtful comments (Ministry of Education Ontario, 2022). Cyberbullying occurs when someone uses technology and/or online media to bully someone else. It can take place through social network sites, websites, email and text messages, instant messages, to intimidate or harass another person (Government of Canada, R.C.M.P., 2012).

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS AND PREVALENCE OF BULLYING?

The 2019 school climate surveys conducted in schools within Windsor-Essex County have revealed a widespread prevalence of verbal, physical, and social bullying. The 2021-22 COMPASS survey conducted in Windsor-Essex County revealed that within past month of survey being completed that 20% of students had been bullied and 8% have been victims of social bullying (i.e. being purposely excluded from a group). 15% of students were victims of verbal attacks and 3% were victims of physical attacks. According to self-reported gender, girls reported higher rates of bullying (23%) compared to boys (16%), and other gender responses were not reported to maintain student privacy.

About one-in-five (21.3%) of students reported being bullied at school per the 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). The most prevalent form of bullying reported was verbal. Females reported more bullying than males.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (2020), completed a cross-national study of Canadian youth in grades 6 through 10 and it revealed that approximately one in three girls reported being bullied and in general more girls report being bullied than boys in all grades. In contrast, more boys report that they have bullied others compared to girls. This study also supported trends that have occurred in other studies, with verbal bullying being reported more often than physical bullying.

Students who understand what a healthy relationship is, how to engage in a healthy relationship and how to develop strategies for seeking support if they are bullied in their romantic relationships tend to experience less bullying (Craig & Pepler, 2014).

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BULLYING AND TEASING?

It is important to distinguish bullying from teasing. Teasing can be positive or negative.

- Positive teasing occurs in strong relationships, can indicate affection or closeness between peers is mutual, and does not cause distress in the individual being teased.
- Negative teasing occurs in weak relationships, can alienate or embarrass the student being teased, and causes distress.

Teasing can be a precursor to aggressive behavior, particularly negative teasing. Aggressive behaviour, or conflict, can be intentional or unintentional and direct or indirect. If aggressive behaviour is repeated, and there is an imbalance in power it can lead to bullying.

WHY IS BULLYING A CONCERN?

Bullying has an effect on those that bully, those that are victims of bullying as well as those that are witnesses of bullying; all susceptible to long-term, social and emotional problems. "No longer considered a "normal" childhood behaviour, bullying is now recognized as a very painful, damaging, and sometimes even life-threatening experience" (Safe@School, 2013).

There are also many negative impacts linked to bullying others (Farrington, D.P. & Toffi, M. M., 2011):

- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Aggression and anti-social behaviour
- Sexual harassment and dating aggression
- Academic problems and increased school dropout rate
- Delinquency and criminal behaviour

As well as negative impacts linked to being bullied (Bowes, L., Maughan, B., Ball, H., Shakoor, S., Ouellet-Morin, I., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T.E., and Arseneault, L., 2013):

- Depression, anxiety, mood disorders
- Substance abuse
- Low self-esteem and social confidence
- Isolation and loneliness
- Poor peer relationships
- Stomach aches, headaches
- "Toxic stress" or enduring low grade systemic inflammation which is linked to disease
- School absenteeism and learning problems
- Contemplating, attempting, or committing suicide

These feelings of depression and poor self-esteem can carry through into adulthood (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999; Hawker & Boulton, 2000).

- Negative impacts linked to witnessing bullying
- Feeling of sadness, anxiety
- Ability to concentre and learn
- Negative impacts linked to power and aggression

In about 85-88% of bullying incidents observed on the school playground, peers were present and were watching the bullying happen. Yet, when peers had the confidence and courage to intervene, the bullying ended within 10 seconds in the majority of playground episodes (Craig & Pepler, 2007).

Important Note: Bullying in all forms can be a traumatic experience and can even be considered illegal. These can include criminal harassment, child pornography, uttering threats and extortion, and assault. Students need to be made aware of the legal risks that come along with online acts which they may perceive as harmless (e.g., sharing or posting an inappropriate, sexually explicit picture that they receive via text or email).

HOW TO PREVENT BULLYING?

Bullying is a relationship problem. Students who understand what a healthy relationship is; how to engage in a healthy relationship and how to develop strategies for seeking support if they are bullied in their romantic relationships tend to experience less bullying (Craig & Pepler, 2014).

Bullying prevention promotes the development of healthy relationships that involve respectful interactions between people, face-to-face and online. The goal is to help ensure that all students have healthy, safe, respectful, and caring relationships with everyone in their lives. Children and youth who are able to have healthy relationships will be less likely to engage in bullying and also be more likely to support children and youth who are bullied. Promoting healthy relationships is a key way to prevent bullying and create a safe and accepting school climate. (Ministry of Education Ontario, 2019).

The following practices are effective and age appropriate for students and should be part of a whole school approach as described in Bullying Prevention in Schools by Public Safety Canada (2018).

- Primary grades (ages 4-9) activities such as *circle time and cooperative activities* creates a positive classroom climate by emphasizing communication, self-esteem and relationship development.
- Middle grades (ages 10-13) continue to emphasize the development of social skills such as cooperation, respect and empathy. The students can become more involved in the delivery of the program. *Peer support programs* become important at this age as children are turning more towards their peer group for support and approval.
- Secondary grade (ages 14-18) initiatives on the school's policy on bullying behaviour, the consequences and how to report. Bullying at this age has the added aggressive behaviours of dating violence, sexual harassment and homophobia. Awareness sessions on the impact of social exclusion, sexual harassment and homophobia can help reduce incidents. *Whole school interventions* involving youth and in-depth problem solving are most effective at this age group. *Peer counselling*, services such as hot-lines and tutoring services are examples of problem solving approaches that work.

Note that zero tolerance policies including school expulsion have limited effectiveness and may actually increase or exacerbate the problem as opposed to the whole school interventions.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN BULLYING PREVENTION?

As per Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 144, school communities are well positioned to respond to all forms of bullying, educate students on bullying prevention, promote healthy relationships, notice troubling changes in behaviour, address instances of bullying, and connect with students (Ministry of Education Ontario, 2021).

Bullying prevention and intervention strategies intersect with the PPMs listed below as well as strategies that promote mental health, wellbeing and equity and parental outreach.

PPM 144 also requires that all school boards establish a comprehensive and achievable plan and the board must require that all schools implement the plan.

Boards must ensure that schools have in place a Safe and Accepting Schools Team responsible for fostering a safe, inclusive and accepting school climate. This team should include the principal, a least one parent, teacher, and non-teaching staff member or community partner. It should also include one student.

WHAT POLICIES ARE CURRENTLY IN PLACE IN SCHOOLS?

There are PPMs related to the topic of bullying from the Ministry of Education Ontario:

- PPM 119: Developing and implementing equity and inclusive education policies in Ontario schools

- o School boards must create a safe learning and teaching environment, and foster a positive school climate by implementing evidence based solutions and interventions. School boards must enforce standards of behaviour and safety.
- PPM 128: The provincial code of conduct and school board codes of conduct
- PPM 120: Reporting Violent Incidents to the Ministry of Education
- PPM 144: Bullying prevention and intervention
  - o Provides students with an opportunity to learn and develop in a safe, inclusive, and accepting school climate. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. School boards must implement programs, interventions and other supports within schools to students who been bullied, witness bullying or have engaged in bullying. Teachers must attend annual training to receive additional support, resources and strategies to respond to bullying.
- PPM 145: Progressive discipline and promoting positive student behaviour

CYBERBULLYING AND ITS IMPACT?

With the rise in social media, it is easier than ever to partake in, or be a victim of, cyberbullying. Online sources are always "on", and people around the world can access items shared online at all hours of the day.

Cyberbullying can include any of the following:

- Sending mean or threatening messages
- Posting or sharing embarrassing or inappropriate photos of someone
- Creating a website to make fun of others
- Getting someone to reveal personal information and posting it or sharing it with others who weren't intended to know it
- Pretending to be someone else online

Unlike other forms of bullying, the harassment, humiliation, intimidation and threatening of others through cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, even following a student home. There is no safe zone or way to escape.

It's important for youth to understand that things which get posted or shared online are there to stay and can follow a person for many years.

HOW COMMON IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is a widespread issue, especially among youth. A Canadian survey found that 23% of Canadian students from grades 4-11 have said or done something mean or cruel to someone online, while 37% reported that someone has said or done mean or cruel things to them online that made them feel badly (Steeves, 2014). For a large majority of students that have been cyberbullied, it has been happening for over a year.

The Public Health Agency of Canada (2020), completed a cross-national study of Canadian youth in grades 6 through 10 and revealed that there is a higher prevalence of cyberbullying than being physically bullied and girls report instances of cyberbullying at higher rates than boys.

The OSDUHS survey (2021) reported that about one-third (29.90%) of Grades 7-12 students reported being cyberbullied at least once in the past year, and about one-in-seven (13.8%) students report cyberbullying others at least once in the past year. The incidences of being cyberbullied have increased from 22.1% in 2019 to 29.9% in 2021. The 2021-2022 COMPASS conducted in Windsor-Essex County reported that within past month of survey completion that 6% of students reported that they had been victims of cyber-attacks.

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