

Bullying Prevention: Parents and Educators Working Together

Research supports the positive outcomes of engaging parents in their children's education, yet this aspect of education remains significantly limited across the nation. Bullying is a common topic raised by parents and educators so a quality bullying-prevention program will have a strong component of parent engagement. One bullying-prevention program (Olweus Bullying Prevention Program) offers the following as examples of the roles parents should play:

- **Reinforcing** the same anti-bullying messages and social rules about caring for others at home, providing a consistent message for students in all areas of their lives
- **Talking** with administrators, teachers, and staff about bullying problems
- **Teaching** your children to tell you or another adult if they or someone else is being bullied
- **Understanding** how the program will work in your school and in the classroom
- **Learning** how to intervene when you witness a bullying situation
- **Accessing** program resources and strategies to help prevent and reduce possible bullying problems
- **Helping** to refine and implement the bullying prevention program in your children's school by serving on the Bullying Prevention Coordination Committee and/or helping in individual classrooms, or community events
- **Attending** school wide and class meetings

If parents or caregivers do not have opportunities to shape activities, reinforce a shared commitment with school personnel and develop a "shared vocabulary," they will not be able to reinforce the antibullying messages that students are learning in school.

Falcetta, E. (2012) Bullying Prevention: Ways for Parents and Educators to Work Together.

<https://www.nclb.org/archives/blog/bullying-prevention-ways-for-parents-and-educators-to-work-together>

Early Childhood

Involving parents and seeking their cooperation and support for bullying prevention initiatives in their children's early childhood setting will help widen the reach of these initiatives and reinforce what their children are learning in the classroom. Parent and caregivers can adapt and apply the bullying prevention lessons to their daily routines at home.

Parents may need help from educators to understand what bullying behaviors look like in early childhood, and why it's important to intervene. Parents can benefit from hearing educators explain that bullying behavior is learned from other children and has a variety of harmful consequences for the victimized child, the child with bullying behavior, and bystander children who observe it.

Educators can be proactive and host parent workshops on child development and social emotional skill development. Information about the early childhood program's stance on bullying can be shared at workshops, as well as embedded in the materials distributed to parents and caregivers when they enroll their child. *Educators and parents can create a school culture that values kindness, inclusion, and*

positive discipline approaches that support all children in their development. Parents should not hear the word bullying only when it pertains to their child.

Three areas of support for bullying prevention initiatives at the early childhood level include:

- Parents can help their children develop the important social skills needed to prevent bullying.
- Educators can support parents of children with social-emotional challenges to obtain appropriate services.
- Parents need to know that the early childhood staff take bullying and its prevention seriously and that parent cooperation and support are welcome.

(2013) Education Development Center, Inc. <http://preventingbullying.promoteprevent.org/13-involving-parents>

Middle School & Adolescence

Middle school can be a tough transition for many students – classes become more challenging, homework loads increase and students are more accountable for their performance. But things can also get rough outside of the classroom with demanding social pressures and more extreme bullying among students. All of these factors effect students’ mental health.

A University of Maryland study supports the idea that parents’ involvement can also help their children outside the classroom as well as inside. This research comes at a time when schools are increasing social-emotional learning into their efforts to promote a healthy and positive school climate. This serves as a reminder for school leaders that boosting parent engagement is also a way to support students’ SEL skills and that family-school connection continues to be important as students reach adolescence.

A few ways schools can demonstrate that they want to work in partnership with parents to support their children/adolescence through a more challenging phase are:

- 1) Opening lines of communication between educators and parents or caregivers
- 2) Notifying families of new initiatives, and
- 3) Creating opportunities for parents to network with each other

An education brief demonstrating that parental involvement lessens effects of bullying on middle schoolers found these three insights:

- Middle school students who feel their parents are more involved in their education have fewer mental health struggles – along with fewer suicidal thoughts and behaviors – in response to being bullied. (Journal of School Psychology)
- The research, conducted by the University of Maryland’s College of Education, also revealed a reverse effect: Middle schoolers who think their parents are less involved had more mental health problems and more suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
- Parental involvement seemed to be more of a “protective factor” for white students than students of color, for girls more than boys, and for 8th-graders more than for 6th and 7th graders. The research only applies to parental involvement’s effects on face-to-face bullying – not cyberbullying.

Campisi, J. (2019). Study: Parental involvement lessens effects of bullying on middle schoolers.
<https://www.educationdive.com/news/study-parental-involvement-lessens-effects-of-bullying-on-middle-schoolers/551447/>

Results

The logic of involving parents in school-based bullying prevention programs is that this increases the likelihood of parents first, telling schools that their child is being bullied, which in turn enables the school to act appropriately, and second, being able to address bullying-related issues effectively at home.

Parent involvement is associated with a reduction in bullying but further research is needed to determine if it is a causal factor. Programs tend not to include a parenting education and support element, despite negative parent behavior being associated with children being a victim or a bully/victim.

Axford, N., Farrington, D., Clarkson, S., Bjornstad, G., Wrigley, Z., Hutchings, J. (2015). Involving parents in school-based programs to prevent and reduce bullying: what effect does it have?
<https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/JCS-05-2015-0019>

Implications

Comprehensive whole-school programs that include capacity building and parental involvement appear to reduce bullying behavior more than programs without these components.

Cross, D. Waters, S., Pearce, N., Shaw, T., Hall M., Erceg, E., Burns, S., Roberts, C., Hamilton, G. (2012). The Friendly Schools Friendly Families program: Three -year bullying behavior outcomes in primary school children.