

School Culture Can Factor Into Bullying

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New research examines the complexity of bullying behavior and finds that the school climate plays a central role in its development, or elimination.

University of California - Riverside researchers believe school administrators must understand the importance of fostering an environment that promotes empathy and encourages appropriate interactions among and between teachers and students.

Researchers also comment on the necessity to develop reliable measures to evaluate the school climate.

Their findings are discussed in an article published in the journal *Theory Into Practice*. "Bullying is a very complex problem," said Cixin Wang, Ph.D., a co-author of the article.

"With this research, we're really trying to provide school personnel with some proven steps to address the problem."

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in reducing bullying behavior by school personnel, parents and students. But educators have had difficulty determining how to assess the factors that cause bullying and select evidence-based prevention and intervention programs.

Wang and her colleagues sought to address these issues by highlighting the importance of school climate in bullying prevention and reviewing school climate evaluations and intervention programs.

They found that positive relationships among students and teachers, and negative attitudes toward inappropriate behavior such as bullying are key elements of a positive school climate.

To create a positive school climate, school personnel need to promote and model appropriate attitudes and behaviors, such as caring, empathy, and appropriate interactions among and between teachers and students.

To foster attitudes against bullying, in addition to promoting knowledge and awareness of bullying, teachers need to take reports of any bullying incident seriously and intervene consistently according to school rules instead of ignoring or minimizing bullying behavior.

Adult behavior is also critical foundation for a healthy school climate. Adults should refrain from bullying students and other adults at school.

In addition, teachers need to incorporate school climate interventions into the curriculum and use teachable moments to openly discuss topics related to bullying, such as popularity, power and social ostracism.

Finally, bullying is not only a behavior problem, but also a mental health problem.

Research has shown that students involved in bullying experience more mental health difficulties and display higher levels of [cognitive distortions](#).

As a result, experts suggest educators should seek professional help from mental health practitioners for students involved in bullying and experiencing mental health difficulties.

Source: [University of California - Riverside](#)