Position Statement

BULLYING PREVENTION AND STRATEGIES FOR OUR SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

Bullying is not a new phenomenon or superficial characteristic of our nation. In fact, the bully/target, perpetrator/victim, predator/prey experience is deeply entrenched in our nation's subculture. One doesn't have to look far to see examples of this. A bully can easily be found in the cast of characters of almost every book, movie, and television show, portraying instances of bullying to the extent that it seems commonplace. Unfortunately, real-life bullying situations rarely end in the same fashion as the stories in books, movies and television shows where the bullied kids fight back and win. The majority of children being bullied today can't or just don't know how to fight back on their own, resulting in a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. Our schools play an integral role in the prevention of bullying and providing students with the tools and resources necessary in combatting this phenomenon.

KEY TERMS/DEFINITIONS

Assault- a violent physical or verbal attack.

Bully- a person who is habitually cruel or overbearing, especially to smaller or weaker people.

Bully Victim- a person who is the victim of repeated harassment, intimidation, threats or physical harm. A victim may also be a bully.

Bullying- sometimes unintentional, degrading someone, to intimidate, to domineer, to be overbearing.

Bullying Support Group- people who are affected by bullying behavior and dedicated to dealing with it together. This can be made up of a friend, parent and/or family member of the bully victim.

Bystander- someone who is indirectly involved with the bullying but may be contributing by encouraging the behavior or by not acting upon it.

Friend- someone who is loyal and supportive, attached by feeling, emotion and personal regard.

Loner- someone who is left out, avoids the company of others; one who is solitary/isolated.

Mob mentality-a “crowd” opinion that leads to a certain mindset and behavior.

Peer pressure-persuading peers to do things they might not want to do

Teasing- the act of harassing someone playfully or maliciously (especially by ridicule); provoking someone with persistent annoyances.

Unlearning- recognizing systems of oppressive behavior and changing actions accordingly.

Victim blaming-blaming a victim for why they were bullied instead of addressing a bully’s behavior.

TYPES OF BULLYING

- Verbal: hurtful comments by word of mouth, psychological
- Physical: hitting, kicking, stealing things, destruction of property, anything physical
- Intimidation: when a bully threatens someone with the intent to frighten him/her
- Social: spreading rumors, gossip, isolation
- Relational: malicious and persistent teasing within a group
- Cyber: harassment through social media and the internet

EFFECTS ON STUDENTS, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY

Student

- Increased cases of depression and withdrawal; in the worst case scenario, the bullying contributes to suicide.
- Displaying insecurities, anger, frustration, and violent behaviors.
- Develop physical symptoms: headaches, stomach pains, or insomnia.
- Experiences decrease in confidence, self-esteem and interest in school.

School

- Bullying and bystander silence create a toxic culture and increasingly intimidating environment.
- Loss of student focus interferes with school’s ability to provide a quality education for all students, leading to a decrease in academic achievement.

Community

- Impacts entire community.
- Parents taking non-involved students out of school for safety concerns.
- Shift in parental opinions of education system.

- Promotes a cycle of bullying and negative behavior.

SOLUTIONS

In order to create a stable and healthy environment for all students to learn, bullying must be prevented. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) supports the prevention of bullying as they believe that failure to address bullying in the school setting perpetuates an environment that is unsafe and not supportive of academic achievement, social-emotional development, and mental health. The following are strategies and techniques our schools can implement to help prevent bullying:

- **Develop student ambassadors**. One of the rising issues has been cyber bullying or electronic aggression. It is creating unique and difficult challenges for school personnel. Because most cyber bullying occurs hidden from the view of parents, there should be a stronger focus on the role of student witnesses. Students must be taught the specific skills necessary to help prevent and respond to bullying in order to help stop harassment and intimidation.
- **Create positive social media pages.** In response to negativity on social media, some schools take the initiative to create positive pages that post affirmative messages about the students of their school.
- **Train staff.** In order to have adults that are able to step in to help prevent bullying, the staff must be trained. If the entire school staff is trained in developing and implementing positive behavioral interventions, then bullying could be prevented, bystander involvement reduced, and students' social and emotional development could be promoted using discipline-related incidents as potential learning opportunities.
- **Provide resources.** The school also can help the parents/guardians of students who have been bullied by offering them effective resources, supportive interventions, and strategies for managing behavior.
- **Raise awareness.** The entire school staff and student body is made aware of bullying and its consequences.
- **Implement mentoring programs.** Leadership groups can partner up with younger students to provide students with an advocate they can learn from and talk to if there are issues occurring. It is comforting for a student to know that there is an adult or a responsible, caring peer that is available.
- **Create Welcome Wagons.** In order to create a welcoming environment for new students, some student leadership groups have formed *Welcome Wagons,* which are groups of students who are able to show students around and make them feel welcome to their new school.

- **Encourage student reporting.** School staff must encourage students to approach them about bullying-related issues without fear of repercussions. Administration and adults must provide opportunities for students to report bullying.
- **Enrichment classes.** Schools can implement enrichment classes that teach students to be more tolerant of different beliefs and traditions. Teaching the negative consequences of intolerance helps students learn from the mistakes made in the past and realize we are one species that lives and thrives together no matter who we are or what we believe in.
- **Host diversity camp.** School hosts a camp for students to help them learn about different perspectives and viewpoints as well as common characteristics of others.
- **Create open door policy.** School staff provides a comfortable and welcoming environment for all students.
- **Implement IDD programs.** Schools can implement programs that create one-to-one friendships by matching students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) with their typical peers.
- **Implement education-based projects.** Student projects such as "spread the word to end the word" and "unified sports." This is a project that works with state Special Olympics offices.

SUMMARY

We can no longer afford to see bullying as some harmless rite of passage, a normal, unavoidable part of growing up. Bullying behavior can't simply be dismissed as child's play or simply kids being kids. They need help, support, and, most importantly, intervention.
All children have the right to feel safe from bullying, and not one of them should be forced to face it alone.

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