Bullying Prevention: Best Practices and Opportunities for Integration with Suicide Prevention Efforts

Catherine Bradshaw, Ph.D., M.Ed.
Associate Professor, Department of Mental Health
Deputy Director, Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence (CDC)
Co-Director, Johns Hopkins Center for Prevention & Early Intervention (NIMH)
cbradsha@jhsph.edu  April 2012
Topics to Be Covered

• Overview of bullying
  – Definition
  – Prevalence
  – Characteristics and forms
  – Effects

• Prevention efforts
  – Common elements of effective school-based bullying prevention programs
  – Risk and protective factors addressed by both bullying and suicide prevention programs
  – Ways to integrate bullying and suicide prevention into a comprehensive school violence prevention initiative
Defining Bullying

- Aggressive behavior that **Intends** to cause harm or distress
- Usually is **Repeated** over time
- Occurs in a relationship where there is an imbalance of **Power** or strength

(HRSA, 2006; Limber & Alley, 2006; Olweus, 1993)
Why Focus on Bullying?

Growing National & Local Concerns

- High profile cases and specific incidents (Leary et al., 2003; Verlinden et al., 2000)

- Increased awareness of negative effects
  - Social-emotional & mental health (Nansel et al., 2001)
  - Academic performance (Glew et al., 2005)
  - Health (Fekkes et al., 2006)

- 50 states have passed legislation related to bullying (Limber & Alley, 2006; USDOE, 2011)
  - SD was most recent
  - Many emphasize reporting
  - Most outline a model policy
  - Less emphasis on training and evidence-based prevention
  - 80% address cyberbullying
Prevalence of Bullying

- **Being bullied 1 or more times in the last month**
  - Elementary – 48%
  - Middle – 47%
  - High – 39%

- **Frequent involvement in bullying (2+ in last month)**
  - Elementary – 31%
  - Middle – 31%
  - High – 26%

- **Ever bully someone else**
  - Elementary – 24%
  - Middle – 45%
  - High – 54%

- **Witnessing bullying during the last month**
  - Elementary – 58%
  - Middle – 74%
  - High – 79%

N=25,119 (Students grades 4-12; December 2005). Also see: Bradshaw et al., 2007, 2008; Nansel et al., 2001; O’Brennan, Bradshaw & Sawyer, 2009; Spriggs et al., 2007; Finkelhor et al., 2010.
Personal Experiences with Bullying

Think back ...

Were you (or someone you care about) ever a:

- Bully (13%)
- Victim (target) (11%)
- Bully-victim (6%)
- Bystander (85%)

(Nansel et al., 2001; 15,686 grades 6-10)
"Remember this, my child. The world is always in the biggest mess it's ever been in."

Reprinted from Better Homes and Gardens® magazine. Copyright Meredith Corporation, 1974. All rights reserved.
Is Bullying on the Increase?

• Some recent national data suggest a slight decrease in bullying (e.g., Finkelhor et al., 2010; Spriggs et al., 2007, IES, 2012; CDC, 2012)

• However, cyberbullying may be on the increase
  – May be due to greater access to technology (phones, Internet)
  – Issues related to ‘sexting’ also appear to be on the increase (Mitchell et al., 2012)
Percent of Students Ages 12-18 Bullied, by School Type

Private
- 2009: 18.9%
- 2007: 29.1%
- 2005: 22.7%

Public
- 2009: 28.8%
- 2007: 32.0%
- 2005: 28.6%

Location of Bullying

Where were you bullied within the last month?

N=25,119 (Students grades 4-12; December 2005)
Forms of Bullying

How were you bullied within the last month?

(N=25,119 students grades 4-12)
Cyberbullying/ Electronic Aggression

- “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices”
- Less common than other forms of bullying
  - 15-35% of youth have ever been victims of cyberbullying
  - 10-20% admit ever cyberbullying others
- Most know, or think they know who the perpetrator is
- 28-33% of victims of cyberbullying tell no one about it
  - Similar rates of disclosure to traditional bullying

(Kowalski et al., 2007; Spriggs et al., 2010)
Types of Cyberbullying

- **Flaming**: online fights with angry language
- **Harassment**: repeatedly sending mean or insulting messages
- **Denigration**: sending gossip, rumors
- **Outing**: sharing secrets or embarrassing information
- **Trickery**: tricking someone to sharing secrets
- **Impersonation**: pretending to be someone else, while posting damaging material
- **Exclusion**: cruelly excluding someone
- **Cyberstalking**: intense harassment that includes threats and creates fear
Cyberbullying/ Electronic Aggression (cont)

• Immediate impact for victims
  – 33% felt very or *extremely upset* (Ybarra & Mitchell (2004)
  – 38% felt *distress* (Ybarra et al., 2006)
• Compared to traditional bullying (Smith et al., 2006)
  – Picture/video clip and phone call bullying were perceived as more hurtful
  – Text message roughly equal
  – Email bullying less hurtful
• About 50% of cyberbully victims and offenders experience bullying off-line
Development Differences

- Tends to peak in middle school
  - Except cyberbullying, which appears to increase through high school
  - Relational may persist beyond physical

- Little research on younger children
  - Poorer social-emotional skills
  - Higher base rates of aggressive behavior and ‘rough and tumble play’

(Nansel et al. JAMA, 2001; Rigby, 2008)
Gender Differences

- Males generally more likely than females to be both perpetrators and victims
  - Except cyberbullying, which may be more common among girls
  - Physical forms more common among boys
  - Indirect (relational) about equal for males and females
    - Girls more sensitive to relational forms of bullying
    - Boys more sensitive to physical forms of bullying

(Card et al., 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2011; Crick et al., 2004 Nansel et al. JAMA, 2001)
USDOE’s Dear Colleague Letter

Harassment and Bullying (October 26, 2010)

- Clarifies the relationship between bullying and discriminatory harassment under the civil rights laws enforced by the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR).
- Explains how student misconduct that falls under an anti-bullying policy also may trigger responsibilities under one or more of the anti-discrimination statutes enforced by OCR.
- Reminds schools that failure to recognize discriminatory harassment when addressing student misconduct may lead to inadequate or inappropriate responses that fail to remedy violations of students’ civil rights.
- Discusses racial and national origin harassment, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, and disability harassment and illustrates how a school should respond in each case.

http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html
Immediate Effects of Bullying

When you were bullied, were you:

- Emotionally Hurt/Upset
- Scared for safety
- Physically Hurt/Injured
Effects of Bullying for Victims & Perpetrators

Academic Performance & Engagement

- **V&P** - Absenteeism, avoidance of school, dropout (Smith et al., 2004; Rigby, 1996)
- **V&P** - Dislike school, feel less connected to others at school, & lower grades (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Eisenberg et al., 2003)
- **V&P** - Perceive climate to be less favorable & feel unsafe at school (Bradshaw et al., 2008)
- **V&P** - Lower class participation - leads to lower achievement (Buhs et al., 2006)

(Note. V = Victim, P = Perpetrator)
Effects of Bullying for Victims & Perpetrators

**Physical Illness** (Fekkes et al., 2003)
- V - Headaches (3 times as likely)
- V - Problems sleeping (twice as likely)
- V - Abdominal pain (twice as likely)

**Social-Emotional Problems**
- V - Anxiety & Depression (Eagan & Perry, 1998)
- P - Aggressive behavior & attitudes supporting retaliation (Bradshaw et al., 2008)
- P(&V) - Suicidal ideation (Rigby, 1996; van der Wal et al., 2003)

(Note. V = Victim, P = Perpetrator)
Perceptions of Safety By Frequency of Involvement in Bullying

- Bully Others
- Victimized

Mean Safety Rating

- Once a month
- 2-3 times a month
- Once a week
- Several times a week
Response to Bullying

When you were bullied, what did you do?

N=25,119 (Students grades 4-12; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011)
The Bullying Circle: Students' Reactions/Roles in a Bullying Situation (Olweus)

A. Students who bully
   - Start the bullying and take an active part

B. Followers
   - Take an active part, but do not start the bullying

C. Supporters
   - Support the bullying, but do not take an active part

D. Passive Supporters
   - Like the bullying, but do not display open support

E. Disengaged Onlookers
   - Watches what happens. Doesn't take a stand.

F. Possible Defenders
   - Dislike the bullying and think they ought to help, but don't do it

G. Defenders of bullied child
   - Dislike the bullying, helps or try to help the bullied child

H. Victim
   - The one who is exposed
High School Students’ Responses to Bullying

• When students see bullying they are most likely to
  – stay out of the bullying
  – try to stop the bullying
  – ignore the bullying
  – comfort the victim

• 31.7% of students believe that students in their school try to stop bullying

(MDS3 Spring 2011 Sample: 21,189 Students)
Effective Approaches to Bullying Prevention

• Multi-tiered public health prevention approaches
  – *Universal* system of support, geared towards all students in the school
  – *Selected* interventions to support at-risk students (10-15%)
  – *Indicated* interventions for students already involved in bullying (5-10%)

(Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994; O’Connell et al., 2009; Walker et al., 1996; also see www.PBIS.org)
School-wide Prevention Activities

- Establish common set of *expectations* for positive behavior across all school contexts
- Establish and implement clear *anti-bullying policies*
- Involve *all school staff* in prevention activities
- Train teachers to implement effective *classroom management* strategies and how to respond to bullying
- Collect *data* to inform prevention programming and surveillance
- Provide high-levels of *supervision* in bullying “hot spots” (e.g., playgrounds, hallways, cafeteria)

(Stopbullying.gov; Olweus, 1993; Olweus et al., 2007)
Involving Families And Communities

• Training for parents
  – How to talk with their children about bullying
  – How to communicate concerns about bullying to the school
  – How to get actively involved in school-based prevention efforts

• Bullying prevention activities for the community
  – Awareness and social marketing campaigns
  – Messages tailored for specific groups of adults (e.g., doctors, police officers)
  – Opportunities to become involved in prevention activities

(Stopbullying.gov; Lindstrom Johnson et al., in press; Olweus, 1993; Olweus et al., 2007; Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Duong, 2011)
Non-Recommended Approaches To Bullying Prevention

- Peer mediation, peer-led conflict resolution, and peer mentoring (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011)
  - Suggests a disagreement, rather than peer abuse
  - May increase bullying and victimization

- Brief assemblies or one-day awareness raising events
  - Insufficient for changing a climate of bullying or producing sustainable effects

- Zero tolerance policies that mandate suspensions (APA, 2008)
  - May lead to under-reporting
  - Little evidence of effectiveness
  - Does not provide intervention to change behaviors

(also see Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2011; Stopbullying.gov)
Comments on Evidence-based Programs

• Meta-analysis found that school-based, anti-bullying prevention programs reduced bullying and victimization by an average of 20-23% (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011)

• Challenges
  • Many programs exist, but we need more research on what works for whom and under what conditions
  • No single program will meet all schools’ needs
  • Fidelity of implementation
  • Commitment to sustainability
Examples of Evidence-based Programs

- **Olweus Bullying Prevention Program** (Olweus et al., 2007)
  - Multi-component, school-wide intervention
    - Classroom activities and meetings
    - Targeted interventions for students involved in bullying
    - Activities to increase community involvement
- Studies in Norway and some in the U.S. show positive effects (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011)
Examples of Evidence-based Programs (cont)

• **Steps to Respect**
  • Multi-component, school-wide prevention program
    – Parent activities and classroom-focused lessons
    – Targeted interventions for students involved in bullying facilitated by counselors
  • Studies show positive effects (Frey et al., 2005; 2009)
Examples of Evidence-based Programs (cont)

• Violence prevention approaches and social-emotional learning curricula may also impact bullying
  – Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)
  – Second Step
  – Coping Power
  – Good Behavior Game
  – Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

(See Bradshaw & Waasdorp, 2011; NREPP; Blueprints for Violence Prevention)
Integration of Bullying and Suicide Prevention Efforts

• Integration of school-based programs and initiatives is critical
  • Schools on average are using about 14 different violence prevention programs or strategies (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001)
    – Can lead to ‘program fatigue’
    – Overwhelming for school staff, making it difficult to implement programs with fidelity
    – Results in poor sustainability
  • Create a coordinated, long-term integrated prevention plan to promote a safe and supportive learning environment and healthy students
    (Domitrovich, Bradshaw et al., 2010)
Common Prevention Strategies

• Bullying and suicide prevention share common strategies:
  – Focus on the school environment
  – Family outreach
  – Identification of students in need of mental and behavioral health services
  – Helping students and their families find appropriate services
Overlap in Risk and Protective Factors for Bullying & Suicide

• Overlapping risk and protective factors
  – Risks
    • Depression, anxiety, poor emotion regulation, and impulse control problems
  – Protective
    • Connectedness, social support, and integration to reduce social isolation

(CDC, nd; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Lambert et al., 2008; O’Brennan et al., Zenere & Lazarus, 2009)
Targeting Common Risk Factors

• Develop strategies for identifying students at risk for a range of behavioral health problems
  – Including suicidal behavior and conduct problems

• Both suicide and bullying may be prevented using strategies to identify and treat students with these risk factors
  – Classroom-based prevention program (Good Behavior Game) focused on impulse control and group cohesion reduced suicide ideation and bullying (Ialongo et al., 1999; Wilcox et al., 2008)
  – Additional research is needed in this area
Shared Features of Suicide and Bullying Prevention Efforts

• Policies and procedures for identifying and responding to students at risk for bullying and/or suicide
  – Staff training
  – Linkages with community mental health centers

• Creating a school culture that promotes connectedness
  – Discourages bullying
  – Students support each other emotionally

• Educating parents
  – Identify risk factors for bullying and suicide
  – What to do when a child is involved or at risk

• Increasing adult supervision

(CDC, n.d.; Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; SAMHSA, in press; Speaker & Petersen, 2000)
Action Steps: Creating Synergy in Addressing Both Suicide and Bullying

• Start prevention early
  – Bullying begins at an age before many of the warning signs of suicide are evident
  – Prevent bullying among younger children
    • May have significant benefits as children enter the developmental stage when suicide risk begins to rise and bullying peaks
  – Assess both perpetrators and victims of bullying for risk factors associated with suicide
Action Steps: Creating Synergy in Addressing Both Suicide and Bullying (cont)

• Use a comprehensive approach that addresses
  – Youth, especially those at risk for or experiencing mental health problems (e.g., depression)
  – School context
  – Family
  – Community
Action Steps: Creating Synergy in Addressing Both Suicide and Bullying (cont)

• Engage the bystander
  – Bullying often takes place in areas hidden from adults
  – Often a disconnect between what youth see and what adults see
  – Peers often first aware
  – Encourage the bystander to tell adults about concerns they may have about their peers
  – Safe and structured manner to involve youth in preventing both bullying and suicide

(Bradshaw et al., 2007)
Action Steps: Creating Synergy in Addressing Both Suicide and Bullying (cont)

• Keep up with technology
  – Increasing trend in use of technology in bullying
  – Youth may use social media and new technologies to express suicidal thoughts
  – Adults need to learn how to navigate this new world (e.g., supervision)
  – Programs should incorporate technology in screening, prevention, and intervention
Resources on Suicide Prevention

• Suicide Prevention Resource Center
  – Information and best practices registry
    • www.SPRC.org

• American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
  – Media Guidelines
    • www.afsp.org/media
### INSTEAD OF THIS:

- Big or sensationalistic headlines, or prominent placement (e.g., “Kurt Cobain Used Shotgun to Commit Suicide”).
- Including photos/videos of the location or method of death, grieving family, friends, memorials or funerals.
- Describing recent suicides as an “epidemic,” “skyrocketing,” or other strong terms.
- Describing a suicide as inexplicable or “without warning.”
- “John Doe left a suicide note saying...”.
- Investigating and reporting on suicide similar to reporting on crimes.
- Quoting/interviewing police or first responders about the causes of suicide.
- Referring to suicide as “successful,” “unsuccessful” or a “failed attempt.”

### DO THIS:

- Inform the audience without sensationalizing the suicide and minimize prominence (e.g., “Kurt Cobain Dead at 27”).
- Use school/work or family photo; include hotline logo or local crisis phone numbers.
- Carefully investigate the most recent CDC data and use non-sensational words like “rise” or “higher.”
- Most, but not all, people who die by suicide exhibit warning signs. Include the “Warning Signs” and “What to Do” sidebar (from p. 2) in your article if possible.
- “A note from the deceased was found and is being reviewed by the medical examiner.”
- Report on suicide as a public health issue.
- Seek advice from suicide prevention experts.
- Describe as “died by suicide” or “completed” or “killed him/herself.”
Resources on Bullying Prevention

- StopBullying.gov
  - Tip sheets and other resources for multiple audiences
- FindYouthInfo.gov
  - Interagency resources on range of youth-related topics
- National Registry of Evidence-based Practices and Programs
  - http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/
- Blueprints for Violence Prevention
  - http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/
References

References


References


References


References


