

The Role of the Middle School Counselor in Preventing Bullying

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### Abstract

Middle school counselors are in a strategic position to provide leadership in promotion of bullying prevention efforts in their schools. This article provides middle school counselors with an understanding of early adolescent bullying, an overview of a comprehensive set of interventions that can be implemented to support a whole-school approach to addressing bullying, and suggestions for how middle school counselors can support the adoption and implementation of such an approach in their schools.

### The Role of the Middle School Counselor in Bullying Prevention

Early adolescence is a time of significant cognitive, emotional, social, and sexual development. During the middle-school years, academic development occurs in a school environment where students are also learning to negotiate more socially mature peer relationships in the context of their emerging sexuality. Bullying is an integral part of the social environment in middle school, and, as social relationships change with increased maturity, so does the nature of bullying. As students become more aware of the nuances of social relationships among their peers, bullying may shift from direct forms of physical and verbal bullying used in the elementary school years to more subtle forms of verbal and relational bullying as well as sexual bullying. Being victimized by these forms of bullying behavior can have a devastating impact on emotional health as well as negative effects on others in the school environment (Merrell, Buchanan & Tran, 2006; Young, Boye & Nelson, 2006; Pellegrini, 2002; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

There has been an increase in research on adolescent bullying in recent years, fueled to some degree, from reports issued after the series of school shootings in the 1990s indicating that the shooters had been long-term victims of peer bullying (Vossekuil, Reddy & Fein, 2000; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum & Modzeleski, 2002). These studies have produced a body of research that can provide guidance in addressing bullying in middle school. Schools have begun adopting a “whole school” or comprehensive approach that attends to system variables as well as to the needs of bullies and victims (Olweus, 2003; Smith, Schneider, Smith & Ananiadou, 2004). Middle school counselors are in a key position to bring bullying to the attention of the school

community and to encourage and support the development of a comprehensive approach to addressing the bullying problem in their schools. The purpose of this article is to provide middle school counselors with information about the dynamics of early adolescent bullying, an overview of a comprehensive set of interventions that can be implemented to support a whole-school approach to addressing bullying, and suggestions for how the middle school counselor can support the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive approach.

### Early Adolescent Bullying and Victimization

A commonly-used definition of bullying, developed by Olweus from his pioneering research on bullying in the schools of Norway, identifies bullying as a repeated behavior, either verbal or physical, that occurs over time in a relationship characterized by an imbalance of strength or power (Olweus, 1994). More precisely, bullying behavior can be defined as direct physical (hitting, kicking, pushing) or verbal (teasing, insulting, name calling) aggression or indirect verbal behaviors that focus on talking about or excluding others (gossiping, spreading false stories, exclusion from the group). Indirect bullying is sometimes referred to as relational bullying since these behaviors have the distinct aim of hurting the victim interpersonally and socially. Sexual bullying is a form of direct bullying expressed through inappropriate and unwanted touching and/or sexual comments.

Researchers have found that the nature of bullying behavior changes as children mature into adolescence. Bullying appears to follow three stages: direct physical, direct verbal, and indirect/relational (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992; Rivers & Smith, 1994). By the time students reach middle school relational bullying has become

more salient, and the advent of puberty brings a focus on sexual behaviors that may be expressed through sexual bullying. Pellegrini (2002), for example, found that bullying becomes more sexual in nature when children move into middle school.

Bullying can be proactive in nature, motivated to achieve some end (e.g. dominance or status) or reactive as an emotional response to frustration or anger (Pellegrini, 2002). Until recently, bullies and victims had been divided into two dichotomous groups. As the research literature grew, it became apparent that there was a third group of children who were both bullies and victims and had a set of distinct characteristics and problem behaviors of their own. This group has been referred to in the literature as bully victims or reactive victims. Bullies, victims, and bully victims have different psychological and behavioral profiles.

### *Bullies*

Adolescent bullies use proactive aggression to establish dominance and leadership in their peer group (Juvonen, Graham, & Shuster, 2003; Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999). Although they are often popular and have social status among their peers, their friendships are primarily with other bullies (Pellegrini, et al., 1999). They show little empathy for others (Bernstein & Watson, 1997), little anxiety in social situations (Juvonen, et al., 2003), and use bullying as a means to get what they want (Griffin & Gross, 2004). Bullies often adhere to antisocial beliefs or values and are accepting of antisocial behaviors (Haynie, et al., 2001; Pellegrini et al, 1999). They tend to do poorly academically and to be disengaged from school (Juvonen et al., 2003).

*Victims*

Adolescent victims are often depressed, lonely, and anxious in social situations. They tend to have poor self esteem, low social status among their peer group, and have difficulty making friends (Haynie et al., 2001; Juvonen et al. , 2003; Olweus, 1994). Victims have negative attitudes toward bullying yet they report friendships with bullies and bully victims (Pellegrini et al., 1999). They may blame themselves for their plight, believing themselves to be unattractive, unintelligent, and less significant than other students. These negative self-beliefs may contribute to reluctance to talk to adults about being bullied thereby perpetuating victimization (Carney & Merrell, 2001). In some cases, particular groups of students may be targeted as victims. For example, in a sample of primarily Latino and Asian 6<sup>th</sup> graders, Mouttapa, Valente, Gallaher, Rohrbach, and Unger (2004) found that Asian students were disproportionately victimized by other students. Peterson and Ray (2006) found that victimization, primarily name calling and teasing about appearance, was commonly reported among gifted students. Surveys of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students (California Safe Schools Coalition and 4-H Center for Youth Development, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2001) indicate high levels of victimization that include both physical and verbal bullying.

*Bully victims*

Research has shown bully victims to be more troubled than either bullies or victims. They tend to be highly emotional, anxious, and often behave impulsively. Because of their poor social skills and inappropriate behavior, they are unpopular with and disliked by their peers (Carney & Merrell, 2001; Olweus, 2003; Pellegrini et al.,

1999). In contrast to the proactive aggression of the bully, they use reactive bullying behaviors in response to being victimized by others. Their academic achievement is often poor, and they tend to exhibit conduct problems and a lack of bonding to school (Haynie et al., 2001; Juvonen et al., 2003).

### *Frequency*

A 2001 National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study found that bullying in schools occurred most frequently in grades six through eight (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001). In a survey of 15,686 students in grades six through 10 sampled from public, parochial, and other private schools, 29% of the respondents reported that they had been involved in some aspect of bullying as the bully, the victim, or both. Of these, 13% reported moderate or frequent bullying of others, 10.6% reported being bullied moderately or frequently, and 6.3% had both bullied others and been bullied themselves (bully victims). Urban, suburban, and rural students responded similarly. Males were more likely than females to bully others and to be victims of bullying and more likely to indicate that they had been bullied physically. Females reported being bullied more frequently verbally and indirectly (rumors, exclusion, etc.) than males.

These rates are similar to what has been found in other studies. For example, in a study of 454 rural seventh and eighth graders, Seals and Young (2003) found that 24% of the sample were directly involved in bullying one or more times per week as bullies (10%), victims (13%), or bully victims (1%). Verbal bullying was more common than physical bullying, and bullying often occurred in groups. Pellegrini and Bartini (2000) found an increase in bullying behavior from fifth to sixth grade after the move to

middle school, followed by a decrease in bullying behavior by the end of sixth grade. The researchers hypothesized that this increase in bullying by new sixth graders is an effort to establish dominance in a new environment where they are the youngest and often the smallest (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000). Males bullied more than females with boys usually bullying other boys. Less frequently, boys victimized girls either directly or with sexually aversive behaviors (Pellegrini, 2001; Pellegrini, 2002; Pellegrini et al., 1999).

A retrospective study of school bullying by Elsea and Rees (2001) found that 73% of participants reported being bullied at school at some point in time, most frequently in early adolescence between the ages of 11 and 13. The researchers suggest that these early adolescent memories of bullying may be most vividly remembered because they are the most painful, possibly reflecting the shift from physical/verbal to indirect/verbal bullying that occurs at around this age.

### *Negative Effects*

A number of research studies have investigated short and long-term effects of bullying on both the bully and the victim. Prinstein, Boergers, and Vernberg (2001) discussed a transactional model for understanding victimization that suggested that adolescents who experience adjustment difficulties may initially be more vulnerable to victimization and that subsequent victimization may then influence both concurrent and prospective adjustment problems. Consistent with this, Fekkes, Pijpers, Fredriks, Vogels, and Verloove-Vanhorick (2006) found that children with depressive symptoms and anxiety were at greater risk of being victimized. They also found that victims of bullying were at greater risk of developing new psychosomatic and psychosocial

problems than children who were not bullied. Van der Wal, de Wit, and Hirasing (2003) found that girls age 9 to 13 who reported being both directly and indirectly bullied reported higher levels of depression and suicidal ideation than those who did not. The same was true for boys who were indirectly (but not directly) bullied.

In a qualitative study of relational aggression in 15-year-old females, Owens, Slee, and Shute (2000) documented a sequence of reactions to being victimized that included: (1) feelings of confusion and sometimes denial of any negative ill effects, (2) subsequent negative psychological reactions including anxiety, depression, and loss of self esteem, and (3) a desire to escape by leaving the peer group or school with possible thoughts of suicide. The researchers found that these reactions to relational bullying were compounded by irrational self-talk and that victims could be particularly vulnerable if they were new to the school, had few friends, or lacked assertiveness. Consistent with this, Newman, Holden, and Delville (2005) found that college students who had been victimized by bullying and who had felt isolated in high school were more likely to experience stress symptoms during college including depression, anxiety, dissociation, sexual problems, and sleep disturbance than those who had been bullied but did not feel isolated.

With regard to bullies, Peplar contends that the combined use of power and aggression, characteristic of school-based bullying, is a precursor to sexual harassment, dating aggression, workplace harassment, marital aggression, and elder abuse (Peplar, Craig, Connolly, Yuile, McMaster & Jiang, 2006). Her research shows the emergence of sexual harassment and dating aggression during the adolescent years concomitant with pubertal development and a relationship between bullying and

these two forms of aggression. Those children who were more advanced in pubertal development were more likely to report the use of both sexual harassment and dating aggression (Peplar et al., 2006). Prinstein et al. (2001) found that adolescents who used nonnormative forms of aggression (girls who used physical aggression and boys who used indirect aggression) were at greater risk for adjustment problems (e.g. depression and loneliness). Some studies have shown that, as adults, bullies are more likely to have criminal convictions (Glew, Rivera & Feudtner, 2000; Olweus, 1995; Roberts, 2000) and, as Peplar contends, exhibit aggression toward their spouses and severe physical punishment toward their children.

#### *Adolescent Views*

As children mature into adolescence, their views of bully and victim change. Schäfer, Korn, Brodbeck, Wolke, and Schulz (2005) found that as students moved from the primary to secondary grades they shifted from social rejection of bullies to social rejection of victims. Pellegrini and Bartini (2000) found a decrease in negative attitudes toward bullying in sixth grade boys along with an increase in bullying behavior used to establish and maintain dominance in the peer group. Although girls held more negative views of bullying than boys, they were attracted to the boys who bullied (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000).

Salmivalli and Voeten (2004) examined anti-bullying beliefs and classroom norms in the late primary grades and found that both significantly decreased from fourth to sixth grade. Endorsement of antisocial attitudes and behaviors appears to increase as children move into early adolescence reflecting more identification with the bully than the victim. This is consistent with research that shows that adolescent victims are often

rated as unpopular by their peers while adolescent bullies are rated as popular, if not necessarily well liked (Juvonen et al, 2003; Pellegrini et al, 1999). This shift in norms and beliefs coupled with an increase in the status of the bully may be due to the perception that bullies are challenging adult norms and exploring new adolescent roles (Juvonen et al., 2003), one of the developmental tasks of adolescence. These changes may also reflect the greater role of relational aggression in influencing middle school peer relationships.

### *Social Nature*

Relational bullying is a social behavior and, by its intent, an act of social aggression. Since a hallmark of relational bullying is its indirect nature, it is often difficult to readily identify either tangible evidence of harm to the victim or the identity of the perpetrator (Young et al., 2006). Although relational bullying is sometimes described as more characteristic of females, it is common to both males and females (Merrell et al., 2006), and is viewed by many adolescents as a normative behavior among their peers. Studying groups of both seventh and eighth grade girls and fifth and sixth grade boys and girls, Werner and Nixon (2005) found that beliefs about relational aggression (i.e. acceptability of relational aggression) were associated with involvement in relationally aggressive acts and that such beliefs and behaviors were distinct from beliefs and behaviors about physical aggression.

Cunningham, Adams, Paul, and Nordloh (2006) found that middle school age students who admitted to engaging in non-physical forms of bullying (verbal and/or indirect) had less favorable attitudes toward bullying than those who admitted to physical bullying alone or physical bullying combined with other forms of bullying. They

also expressed a higher level of attachment and commitment to school. These students, even though engaging in more subtle forms of bullying behavior, appear to fit more comfortably into the academic and prosocial peer cultures of the school and probably do not view themselves as bullies.

The effectiveness of relational bullying appears to be tied to the social status of the bully. Those with higher status are more successful at using relational aggression to maintain or improve their position in peer groups. Rose, Swenson, and Walter (2004) found a relationship between perceived popularity and relational aggression for fifth, seventh, and ninth grade males and females. For females, relational aggression predicted perceived popularity over time indicating that these girls used relationally-aggressive behaviors such as exclusion, gossip, and rumors to manipulate the social context in ways that resulted in their being perceived as high-status and popular. For both males and females, perceived popularity in earlier grades was followed by an increase in relational aggression in later grades. The researchers hypothesized that youth who are popular may use their social power to manipulate relationships to hurt others who are out of their favor.

Individuals other than the bully and victim often play significant roles in the social dynamics of bullying. Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman & Kaukiainen (1996) identified “participant roles” played by students who reinforce or assist the bully (the “reinforcer” and the “assistant”), come to the aid of the victim (the “defender”), or avoid or ignore the bullying (the “outsider”). They recommend that interventions designed to reduce bullying address the roles these students play in perpetuating a social climate in the school that reinforces bullying.

Despite the finding that students who engage in relational bullying are often popular with their peers, students appear to realize the negative impact of such behavior. Galen and Underwood (1997) found that students in middle school grades viewed relational aggression as more hurtful than physical aggression perhaps because of the increased importance of social relationships and social standing during early adolescence. Prinstein et al (2001), studying students in grades 9 through 12, found that relational victimization was related to higher levels of depressive symptoms, higher levels of loneliness, and lower global self-worth.

The relatively recent advent of the use of technology (e-mail, chat rooms, cell phones, pagers, etc.) to “cyberbully” has provided a new and powerful venue for relational aggression (Armes, 2005; Smith, 2006). Although much of the cyberbullying occurs outside school walls, the cyberbullies and cybervictims are members of the student body who bring the problem into the school. A recent survey of junior high students (Li, 2006) indicated that over 25% of the respondents reported being cyberbullied and that, in the majority of the cases, incidents were not reported to adults by either the victims or bystanders. The effects of cyberbullying are just beginning to be investigated, but because the method allows broadcast of information to such a wide audience using a variety of methods (e.g. digital photographs, video), researchers believe that it can be more harmful than traditional forms of relational bullying (Strom & Strom, 2005).

### A Comprehensive Approach to Bullying

Addressing bullying in schools requires an approach that acknowledges the complexity of the problem. Effective violence prevention approaches in schools,

including those addressing bullying, are characterized by multiple interventions aimed at changing individuals and systems and which are supported by collaboration among stakeholders. Erickson, Mattaini, and McGuire (2004) noted the importance of “constructing cultures incompatible with violence and threat” rather than relying on curricular add-ons and narrow skills-training approaches. Developing a comprehensive approach that addresses bullying through both system and individual interventions is consistent with approaches that advocate for the prevention of a number of adolescent problem behaviors (Cunningham & Sandhu, 2000; Nickels, 2000) and can be integrated with other school-based comprehensive plans to promote healthy prosocial behavior (e.g. Safe and Drug-Free Schools plans).

Components of a comprehensive or whole-school approach to bullying are included in Table 1. This broad approach requires that the whole school community become involved in bullying prevention through a variety of strategies and behaviors that best fit their roles in the school community. All groups including school administration, teachers, other school staff, students, and parents should be included in planning, implementation, and evaluation to create ownership and investment in success. Working together to maximize impact and avoid duplication of efforts is essential to such an approach (Cunningham & Sandhu, 2000).

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, an example of a comprehensive approach, was the first whole-school intervention for bullying put into place and systematically evaluated on a wide scale (Smith et al, 2004). Based upon a foundation of awareness and involvement on the part of adults, it includes school level, classroom level, and individual level components that work together to maximize impact on bullying

**Table 1**

***Areas of Inservice Education for School Personnel to Facilitate Implementation of a Whole-School Approach to Bullying***

Area	Examples
Awareness and Problem Assessment	Recognition of types of bullying and negative effects of bullying on individuals and school environment Assessment and use of assessment information to design interventions and monitor progress Parent education and involvement
School Climate Strategies	Policies and procedures that address all forms of bullying behavior and that facilitate immediate, ongoing, consistent responding Promotion of healthy norms, standards, and beliefs Facilitation of prosocial behaviors in students Staff modeling of prosocial behaviors Surveillance and supervision in the school building
Classroom Strategies	Classroom rules against bullying Classroom education including classroom meetings to facilitate awareness, self reflection, and opportunities to practice new behaviors/skills Teacher and student interventions to encourage inclusion and discourage exclusion and social isolation
Strategies for Individuals Involved in Bullying	Encourage reinforcers, participants, defenders, and outsiders to engage in behaviors that discourage bullying. Provide individualized services for bullies, victims, and bully victims (social skills training, self-management skills, individual and group counseling, etc.).

(Olweus, 2003). The Olweus program has been recognized as a Blueprint for Violence Prevention (University of Colorado, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence) because of its proven effectiveness in lowering levels of bullying and victimization. As is characteristic of the Olweus program, a comprehensive approach should include: (1) awareness and problem assessment, (2) environmental/school climate strategies, (3) classroom-based strategies, and (4) interventions aimed at individuals involved in bullying.

#### *Awareness and Assessment*

Creating awareness of the problem is the first step in addressing bullying in schools. Kallestad and Olweus (2003) found that one of the best predictors of whether teachers would adopt and implement anti-bullying measures was whether the school gave attention to bullying problems. Teachers who saw themselves, their colleagues, and the school as important agents for change in addressing bullying were more likely to get involved in anti-bullying efforts and to implement specific anti-bullying strategies in their classrooms. Given this, it is critical that the school principal provide leadership in advocating that bullying be addressed as an important part of the school agenda.

The school counselor can play a key role in helping the school principal understand the importance of investing the energy of the school community in addressing bullying. Information about the prevalence of middle school bullying and its harmful effects on school climate and academic achievement as well as on individual students can help convince the principal that time, energy, and funds spent on reducing bullying are worthwhile investments of resources. This same information used by the principal can help win support among school staff. Effective strategies for creating

awareness for action include education for all members of the school community, institutionalization of a coordinating committee to keep attention focused on the issue, and regular and ongoing assessment of bullying and victimization in the school.

*Inservice Education.* Awareness for the school community begins with education for all staff that addresses both prevention of bullying and interventions with those involved in bullying. Dake, Price, Telljohann, and Funk (2003) found that most teachers did not talk to students about bullying until after it occurred – and then, only with the bullies and victims. Teachers indicated that they lacked training in how to address bullying in the classroom and, therefore, did not view themselves as effective in addressing the problem. Although Dake et al. (2003) only surveyed teachers, their findings probably apply to all school staff. Education about bullying should provide all school staff with the general information they need to understand the dynamics of bullying, how it is manifested in the school environment, and specific information needed to take action given their roles in the school. The school counselor can help develop educational experiences for school personnel that cover the areas listed in Table 1. Education should also include follow-up consultation or technical assistance to ensure effective implementation of what is learned.

The school counselor can also recruit key people from the community to be included in inservice education and subsequently involved in planning and implementation of anti-bullying strategies. For example, mental health professionals who can provide counseling services for those students who have been identified as bullies, victims, and bully victims can be invited to become partners in the overall plan for addressing bullying in the school. Education for parents is also an important part of

creating awareness in the school community. Counselors can work with teachers to develop the most effective approach for educating parents and involving them in anti-bullying efforts in the school.

*Bullying prevention coordinating committee.* A bullying prevention coordinating committee to provide ongoing guidance for school efforts is a key component of a comprehensive approach (Olweus, 2003). Such a group can keep attention and energy focused on bullying and ensures that the school's efforts are well-coordinated and comprehensive. The school counselor can help organize the committee and recruit members in a manner that ensures broad representation. Membership should include representatives from all stakeholder groups including administration, teachers, support staff, parents, students, and the broader community including community service providers who can support anti-bullying efforts in the school. Heterogeneity in membership provides a variety of unique viewpoints for understanding and addressing the problem. For example, a teacher and a school cafeteria worker can both witness bullying, but it may look different in the classroom vs. the more social environment of the cafeteria. A student's view of bullying may be very different than that of the school vice principal or a parent.

The Coordinating Committee can "piggy-back" on an existing group with a similar mission and/or function such as a Safe and Drug-Free Schools action planning team. Coordination of activities with other related school efforts can increase the power of anti-bullying strategies. It is critical for the committee to be endorsed by the principal and sanctioned to exercise leadership as the coordinating body and facilitator of a broad array of anti-bullying efforts.

*Assessment.* Assessment of bullying and victimization in the school is also an essential component of raising awareness and creating energy to take action. Data that describes bullying and victimization in your own school building makes the abstract concrete. Such an assessment includes, at the least, measures of the types of bullying and victimization that occur (physical, verbal, indirect/relational, sexual); the extent of each type; and breakdowns by sex, grade, and other variables relevant to the school community. Other significant factors can also be measured such as locations in the school where bullying occurs, role of bystanders in bullying situations, feelings of safety in the school, and negative outcomes experienced as a result of bullying or victimization.

Such information provides a baseline measure of bullying and victimization in the school before implementation of anti-bullying strategies as well as relevant information for selection of appropriate interventions. Later administrations of the assessment measure can indicate whether changes in bullying and victimization have occurred in the school. Data from the assessment should be shared regularly with stakeholders so that they have concrete evidence of changes that have occurred in the school and can use the information to guide further planning and evaluation.

#### *Environmental/School Climate Strategies*

Too often prevention efforts are narrowly-focused “silver bullets” that aim at changing specific student behaviors. Although such efforts have their place in a comprehensive approach to prevention, they generally ignore the larger ecological context of the school. As noted above, bullying is a social behavior that occurs within the peer group and within the context of school and classroom environments defined by

school-wide and classroom-level rules and policy as well as by both adult and peer norms for behavior. Such variables define a complex world of influence in which the student operates. The most successful approaches to reducing problem behaviors including bullying are those that work systematically at changing the climate of the school in ways that support the development of prosocial behaviors that underlie academic and social success.

The work of Hawkins, Catalano and others in the prevention of adolescent problem behaviors (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996) underlines the importance of creating healthy environments that support the development of prosocial behaviors in youth. Their Social Development Model (SDM) posits that healthy behavior develops when youth are bonded to systems with healthy normative beliefs. Bonding results from having the skills necessary to succeed in the system, opportunities for meaningful participation in the system, and reinforcement for participation. Because of the connection between academic success and social/emotional health (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Cohen, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), it is important for schools to help students achieve success socially and emotionally as well as academically.

By providing conditions (protective factors) that foster success as well as the opportunities and skills to navigate in both the academic and prosocial peer cultures of the middle school, students can achieve success without the use of bullying and other negative social behaviors. Important ways to help create a positive school climate include establishing and enforcing clear anti-bullying policy, reinforcing healthy norms

for behavior, supporting policy and norms through expectations for adult behaviors that are consistent with policy, and setting up systems for surveillance and supervision.

*Anti-Bullying Policy.* Expectations for student behavior are created through the development, implementation, and enforcement of school policy. Policy specifically addressing bullying gives a clear message about the importance and seriousness of the issue. Very little research has looked at the correspondence between bullying policy and level of bullying in school. Woods and Wolke (2003), analyzing policy in a sample of elementary schools to see how well it matched the components of the Olweus (1994) whole-school intervention approach, found no relationship between content and quality of anti-bullying policy and prevalence of direct bullying. It is noteworthy, however, that they (2003) found that those schools with the most detailed and comprehensive anti-bullying policies had high levels of relational bullying and victimization behavior as reported by students.

Woods and Wolke (2003) offered several possible explanations for these findings, all of which have important implications for how anti-bullying policy is developed and enforced in schools. For example, schools may be using policy to address bullying that was designed to address general aggression and antisocial behavior rather than specific types of bullying behavior. Similarly, anti-bullying policy may be failing to include indirect or relational bullying behaviors and placing exclusive emphasis on direct verbal and physical bullying. In both cases, policy needs to be rewritten – in the first case, to include those characteristics that distinguish bullying from other aggressive behaviors, and in both cases, to include and clearly define indirect relational bullying so that it will be recognized and addressed when it occurs.

Woods and Wolke (2003) also hypothesized that the visibility of anti-bullying policy may have the negative effect of shifting direct bullying behavior to a more subtle (relational) form that is less noticeable to adults. This may be particularly true for students with better social-cognitive skills who are more adept at the use of relational aggression. This possibility calls for better surveillance to ensure that all types of bullying are detected and addressed by school staff. Since situations that involve relational bullying are more difficult to identify and mediate, it is critical that inservice education for staff include strategies for recognition and intervention with relational bullying.

Lastly, anti-bullying policies may not be in the forefront of the school agenda so are not well implemented and integrated into the operation of the school. In this case, it is important, as described above, to make bullying a priority, educate school staff about how to intervene with all types of bullying, and provide follow-up consultation and technical assistance to ensure that staff will follow through with appropriate interventions.

*Promoting healthy norms, standards, and beliefs.* Hawkins and Catalano's Social Development Model (SDM) maintains that healthy norms and beliefs serve as a protective factor against the development of antisocial or unhealthy behaviors in youth (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). It is important for schools to provide clear and consistent norms for behavior through both formal and informal messages beyond official policy. Vision and mission statements are common vehicles for explicating school values and beliefs that support academic success for students. Such statements can be used to emphasize the importance of creating what Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) call "a

culture of respect and recognition where bullying is not only not tolerated but is not necessary" (p. 108).

Similarly, Greene (2006) advocates for the adoption of a human rights approach to bullying that "explicitly addresses what has come to be known as bias-based bullying (attacks motivated by a victim's actual or perceived membership in a legally protected class) as well as bullying that is not so motivated, e.g., bullying based upon looks, social status, class, envy and jealousy, personality, and personal idiosyncrasies" (p. 69). Values, attitudes, and behavior that encourage the development of constructive, rather than destructive, relationships are reinforced for both students and staff in a school where these beliefs are promoted as normative behaviors for all members of the school community.

Given that school staff create norms for behavior through the messages they give in their day-to-day interactions with students, it is important that adult values, attitudes, and behaviors related to bullying be consistent with both school policy and with those values, attitudes, and behaviors expected of students. Unfortunately, not all school staff view bullying as a serious problem, and some see it as a normal part of growing up (Smith & Brain, 2000; Yoon, 2004). Addressing bullying as an important and integral part of the school's work, as described above, can counter such views.

Although the problem has not been widely studied, research has shown that some teachers themselves are bullies. In a recent study by Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, and Brethour (2006), 45% of the teachers surveyed admitted to having bullied a student. Almost 20% of the teachers were rated by others as frequent bullies. Analysis of teacher responses revealed that teachers could be categorized as both bullies and

bully-victims, defined similarly to bullies and bully victims in the research on children and adolescents.

Characteristics of bully teachers included repeatedly punishing the same child, humiliating students to stop disruptions, putting students down to punish them, setting up students to be bullied, and making fun of special education students. Characteristics of bully-victim teachers included allowing him/herself to be bullied, watching as students bully each other, using needless physical force, failing to set limits, and allowing disruptions without intervening. Plainly, these are not attributes of effective teachers. Further research needs to be done in this area; however, it is the responsibility of the school administration to ensure that students are not subjected to these behaviors at the hands of teachers.

*Surveillance and Supervision.* It is important that all students feel safe on school grounds. Observation and staff supervision in high-bullying areas in the school building and on the school grounds help reduce bullying in areas that are trouble spots for victims (Olweus, 2003). Cunningham, Look, Thompson Wahl, and McCane (2004) found that victims, bully victims, and bullies agreed more on locations in and around the school where bullying occurred than students who were neither bullies nor victims. Students who are perpetrators or victims appear to be much more aware of areas where bullying is prevalent than students who are not involved in bullying. It could be that students who are not bullies or victims take no notice of what is going on around them. Creating awareness and enlisting the cooperation of these students to report and help prevent bullying is critical to a whole-school approach. Ongoing assessments of

bullying can provide information about which locations are “hot spots” for bullying and whether bullying in these locations has changed as a result of interventions.

### *Classroom-Based Strategies*

Teachers, by virtue of their daily contact with students, can play a major role in preventing bullying and intervening in bullying incidents that occur in the classroom. Because of the social nature of bullying and the involvement of students beyond bully and victim, it is important to intervene and change peer dynamics that support and encourage bullying behaviors (Juvonen et al, 2003; Rodkin & Hodges, 2003; Young et al., 2006). Merrell et al. (2006) point out that relational aggression, because of its social nature, should be addressed from an ecological perspective within the school environment. They recommend the adoption of approaches that promote social-emotional competency in order to decrease the probability that students will use relational aggression as a common mode of peer interaction. Rodkin and Hodges (2003) emphasize the importance of understanding both the horizontal organization of the peer culture (the nature of existing relationships among individuals and groups) and the vertical structure (who has social status and power and how that status and power influences the acceptance or rejection of bullying) in order to intervene to change bullying behavior.

The classroom environment provides teachers with opportunities to observe and intercede when bullying situations arise within the peer group. More importantly, teachers can structure their classrooms in ways to discourage bullying and encourage prosocial behaviors. Kallestad and Olweus (2003) found that teachers were the key agents of change with regard to adoption and implementation of classroom measures to

address bullying, that they were more likely to intervene if they perceived bullying to be a problem, and that implementation of classroom interventions was related to a reduction in bullying. Yoon (2004) found that empathy, feelings of self-efficacy in terms of addressing bullying, and perceived seriousness of bullying all influenced teachers to respond to bullying situations.

From these findings, it is clear that inservice education for teachers is critical for increasing awareness of the negative outcomes of bullying behavior and to increase feelings of efficacy in creating a bully-free classroom. Education for teachers should include information about developing classroom rules to address bullying, understanding the dynamics of bullying in the classroom, and adopting classroom strategies to reduce bullying.

*Classroom rules.* A major way that teachers can prevent bullying is through the development, implementation, and enforcement of classroom rules that support school anti-bullying policies. Classroom rules against bullying are a component of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program along with regular class meetings with students to discuss various aspects of bullying including adherence to classroom rules (Olweus, 2003). Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) advocate a zero-tolerance policy for bullying based on clear rules and consequences for violations. Such rules exist within “a culture of respect and recognition” where “everyone works to ensure that there are no social payoffs for bullying” and “those who have previously been involved in bullying can be guided to discover alternative forms of personal power and more effective ways to obtain recognition or vent their frustrations” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 108). Although “zero tolerance” can sound harsh, it gives a clear message that bullying behavior will

not be allowed. Such a no-tolerance policy can be imbedded within an overall approach to bullying “that prioritizes respect, recognition, security, and growth for all students” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 108).

*Development of prosocial skills.* Prosocial skills provide students with the means to successfully follow classroom rules and, more importantly, to interact with their peers successfully. Hawkins and Catalano’s Social Development Model maintains that young people will be successful within a given system if they have opportunities for meaningful participation, the skills to succeed, and recognition for performing those skills successfully (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). In the classroom, the teacher’s official role is to provide the appropriate opportunities, skills, and recognition for students to succeed academically. In the process of teaching and interacting with a diverse group of learners, the teacher is often in a position to guide social and emotional as well as academic growth. Providing students with the opportunity, skills, and recognition to succeed socially can prevent bullying as well as help students function better socially and emotionally.

Development of prosocial behaviors can be incorporated into regular academic teaching or delivered in special curriculums designed to develop specific skills such as initiating friendships, managing anger, acting assertively, etc. The school counselor can consult with teachers to help them address bullying situations that arise as a regular part of student interaction in the classroom. Identifying the social status of students in the classroom, members of social groups or cliques, and typical roles played in bullying interactions (bully, victim, assistant, reinforcer, defender, outsider) can help the teacher analyze the dynamics of the bullying situation and decide how to intervene. Strategies

that discourage exclusion and social isolation of particular students, those that restructure established social groups (cliques) to interrupt ongoing patterns of bullying and neutralize peer support, and those that provide social support for victims can all be used to deal with bullying in the classroom.

A “befriending” strategy implemented in two Italian middle schools (Menesini, Codecasa, Benelli & Cowie, 2003) illustrates how encouraging support for victims among classmates can change the dynamics of bullying in the classroom. The goals of the program were to (1) reduce bullying by making bullies aware of their own and others’ behavior, (2) increase student support for victims of bullying, (3) enhance bystander responsibility and involvement in bullying situations, and (4) improve the quality of relationships among class members. The befriending intervention was chosen because it could be integrated into the everyday social interactions in the classroom and was designed to enhance “the natural processes of responsibility toward others, empathic feelings, communication, emotional support, and reciprocal interventions that children spontaneously display in their everyday interactions” (Menesini et al., p. 3). Components of the program are included in Table 2.

Evaluation showed that the program prevented the increase in favorable attitudes toward bullying and lack of support for victims that was found in the control students who did not receive the intervention and that has been reported in the research literature (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Also, the role of outsider decreased with more students indicating empathy for and willingness to take action on the part of the victim. The opposite was true for those students who did not

**Table 2*****Components of a Befriending Intervention Program***

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description</i>
Phase 1	Class activities aimed at making the class aware of prosocial and helping behaviors and increase positive attitudes toward others. Introduction of the Befriending intervention.
Phase 2	Selection of 3-4 peer supporters per class through self and peer nomination
Phase 3	Training of peer supporters to enhance skills and attitudes that facilitate positive interaction with other children. Development of listening and communication skills.
Phase 4	Classroom activities including circle meetings of the whole class to identify the needs of students who are victims of bullying, consent of victims to work with peer supporters, and specific activities between peer supporters and victims. Weekly group supervision of peer supporters by the teacher.
Phase 5	Training of additional peer supporters involving the original group of peer supporters.

*Note.* Phases excerpted from Menesini, Codecasas, Benelli & Cowie (2003)

receive the befriending intervention – they showed less willingness to get involved and less willingness to provide support for the victim.

The intervention had more positive effects for those students who had previously played pro-bullying roles and for outsiders than for the victims. Although the victims were provided peer support, they appeared to need more intervention than that provided by a single classroom strategy. In follow-up interviews, victims indicated that

the class climate had changed and some bullying had been eliminated, but they were still bullied. The authors concluded that victims need additional forms of intervention such as those described in this article. An interesting point gleaned from the interviews was that bullies sometimes used bullying to come to the aid of victims. Although their intentions had changed, they had not learned the social skills to intervene in a prosocial manner. This finding highlights the importance of giving bullies, as well as victims and bully victims, the skills they need to act appropriately.

In addition to interventions integrated into the regular activity of the classroom, specific skill-building curriculums can be offered in the classroom that can have an impact on bullying. Administration can sanction these programs as a regular part of the curriculum by providing teachers with the resources necessary to deliver them (e.g. time and funding.). Counselors can play an important role in encouraging the use of classroom-based curriculums by providing leadership in researching and selecting appropriate programs and then providing training and follow-up technical assistance to teachers in using them.

#### *Strategies for Individuals Involved in Bullying*

Level of involvement in bullying and victimization can vary from student to student. If students involved in bullying do not respond to school-wide and class-level interventions, they may require individualized services to address behavioral and emotional deficits related to their bully or victim behaviors including referral for mental health services. Juvonen et al. (2003) noted that it is important to recognize the unique problems of each of the groups in order to intervene appropriately and effectively.

Despite the growing body of research on the etiology and dynamics of bullying and victimization there is little research on the effectiveness of specific interventions aimed at ameliorating the behavioral and emotional deficits that have been identified as characteristic of those involved in bullying as bully, victim, or bully victim. Much of the literature about interventions consists of logical suggestions based on symptoms or behaviors that have been identified in the bullying research. In some cases, interventions are recommended because they have been used successfully with similar problems or with youth having similar symptoms. Such an approach makes sense since students who are labeled bully or victim generally exhibit a number of clinical symptoms or behavioral deficits that are related to their involvement in bullying.

Given the state of the research, a comparable approach is taken here. Proposed courses of action with bullies, victims, and bully victims are those that have been recommended in the bullying literature because they make logical sense and have some validity in addressing related problem areas or symptoms. All of these interventions are familiar to mental health professionals and are used regularly by counselors when working with clients who have social, emotional, and behavioral problems. They are consistent with school-wide and classroom-level anti-bullying efforts and build student capacity to function successfully in the school environment both academically and socially.

*Interventions for bullies.* Bullies must be made aware of classroom rules and school policies on bullying and be held accountable for violations. Bullying behaviors most likely to come to the attention of school staff are those that involve physical bullying and verbal bullying that disrupts the school environment. Bullies must also be

held accountable for relational and sexual bullying that may not be as readily identified as bullying or that may be ignored by school staff who do not know how to address it or do not see it as a problem. In confronting bullies, their problem behaviors should be addressed within the overall context of a school environment that communicates, in multiple and consistent ways, that bullying behavior will not be tolerated.

Bullies may need education, in addition to that provided to the student body in general, to enhance their ability to identify and take ownership of their own bullying behaviors. Some authors have suggested behavioral interventions and social skills training for bullies (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Young et al., 2006). The success of such interventions probably depends on the nature of the bully. Some bullies may lack social skills and have difficulty self-regulating their own behavior; however, popular bullies are often socially adept and use their social skills to bully other students. Some bullies understand empathy cognitively and can use it as a tool to manipulate others, but they lack the critical affective understanding that is the core of empathy (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Because of this, empathy training may not be a helpful strategy to use with bullies as it may better prepare them to hurt rather than understand others. Because of the emergence of sexual bullying during middle school, bullies may need specific education in recognizing behaviors that fit the definition of sexual harassment and learning appropriate social behaviors for interacting with both opposite and same-sex peers.

*Interventions for victims.* The approach to working with victims is two-pronged with the emphases on skills training to develop successful social behaviors and counseling to address cognitive and affective aspects of victimization. Because of poor

social skills and failure to form social networks of support within their peer group, victims need to develop skills to gain and maintain social support among their peers. Social skills training, assertiveness training, and stress reduction strategies can help victims develop skills to form friendships and to respond to bullying using a considered choice of response rather than responding in a reactive and dysfunctional manner. Newman, Holden, and Delville (2005) suggest peer mentoring and after-school programs to help build social support networks for victims. Students identified as “defenders” have been found to have social status in the peer group and can be recruited to provide support to victims through such structured approaches as well as in the every-day school environment (Goossens, Olthof & Dekker, 2006; Sutton & Smith, 1999).

In terms of behaviors specific to bullying situations, Salmivalli, Karhunen, and Lagerspetz (1996) found that when victims responded to bullying with helplessness (e.g. crying, running away, staying home from school) or counteraggression (e.g. calling the bully names, harassing someone else, attempting to get others to bully the bully), bullying was more likely to continue. “Nonchalance” (the appearance of staying calm, of not taking bullying seriously, of not caring) was a more effective strategy to get bullying to decrease or stop. Victims can be taught that “it is a good response not to respond” by learning to remain calm and remove themselves from the bullying situation.

Salmivalli et al. (1996) caution; however, that a victim’s “subjective feeling in the bullying situation” is not necessarily addressed by learning new (overt) behaviors. Individual or group counseling can help victims work through cognitive and emotional responses to being victimized. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) stress the importance of seeking out and identifying victims that need support services since they don’t readily

self identify. Victims should also be encouraged to report bullying; however, victims are less likely to do so if they believe that the school tolerates bullying behavior (Unnever & Cornell, 2004). Special groups of students who are disproportionately victimized should be identified and encouraged to seek help. School staff should be aware of these special groups that are the particular focus of bullying and provide support and assistance.

*Interventions for Bully Victims.* It is likely that bully victims have already come to the attention of the school counselor. Their impulsivity and inability to regulate their behavior often results in behaviors that are openly disruptive to the school environment. Bully victims can benefit from many of the same interventions specified for bullies and victims since they share characteristics of both bully and victim. Behavioral interventions and social skills training to help bully victims develop self-management skills and engage in more considered and appropriate behaviors can improve conduct in the classroom as well as social behaviors in the peer group. Interventions that help bully victims manage negative emotions such as anger management or other cognitive interventions are particularly important. As with bullies, strategies that increase prosocial and academic bonding to school will help the bully victim feel more comfortable and successful in the school environment. As with both bullies and victims, referral to a mental health agency for individual counseling may help bully victims deal with their problem behaviors and negative emotions.

#### *Resources for Comprehensive Planning*

Table 3 lists resources that are helpful in developing a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying including government and university technical assistance

**Table 3*****Resources for Comprehensive Planning***

<i>Resource and Website</i>	<i>Information/Services</i>
Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence <a href="http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/">http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/</a>	Information on youth violence prevention including research-based Blueprint Programs for youth violence prevention.
Center for Mental Health in Schools <a href="http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aboutmh">http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aboutmh</a>	Addresses barriers to learning and promoting healthy development.
Flirting or Hurting: A Teacher's Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools (Grades 6-12) Order online from NEA Professional Library	Curriculum for addressing sexual harassment in middle and high school.
National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center <a href="http://www.safeyouth.org">http://www.safeyouth.org</a>	Information for youth as well as adults. Includes basic information about bullying.
National School Safety Center <a href="http://www.schoolsafety.us">http://www.schoolsafety.us</a>	Extensive information and resources related to school safety including bullying.
Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools U.S. Department of Education <a href="http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs">http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs</a>	Includes free publications on youth violence including bullying.
Olweus Bullying Prevention Program <a href="http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/">http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/</a>	U.S. website for the Olweus bullying Prevention Program.
Peace Power! <a href="http://www.bfsr.org/PEACEPOWER.html">http://www.bfsr.org/PEACEPOWER.html</a>	Program that focuses on building non-violent cultures.
PeaceBuilders <a href="http://www.peacebuilders.com">http://www.peacebuilders.com</a>	An empirically-validated violence prevention program.
The Safety Zone Northwest Regional Educational Lab <a href="http://www.safetyzone.org">http://www.safetyzone.org</a>	Clearinghouse for information and material related to school safety. Includes a map and locations for state school safety centers.

providers that address bullying prevention in the general context of violence prevention. Also included are two examples of research-based programs that have been used to address bullying in middle schools (PeaceBuilders and Peace Power!) and an example of an empirically-supported curriculum developed to prevent sexual harassment in middle and high schools (Flirting or Hurting?). The National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center includes bullying information designed specifically for students and can be used as a tool to help teachers educate their students about bullying. The Safety Zone and the Northwest Regional Educational Lab provides a listing of state school safety centers that can provide technical assistance on bullying to schools in their states.

*Summary and Guidance for Implementation*

Comprehensive approaches to bullying prevention in schools generally include the four components discussed in this article: awareness and problem assessment, school climate change strategies, classroom-based strategies, and strategies for individuals involved in bullying. As noted earlier, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, which includes these four components, has been extensively studied and has shown positive outcomes in terms of reducing bullying and victimization. Evaluations of other comprehensive approaches have not necessarily shown the same results. In a meta-analysis of evaluation studies of whole-school programs, Smith et al. (2004) found that many of the programs showed non-significant reductions on self-report measures of bullying and victimization. Based upon examination of these studies, Smith et al. (2004) believe results may be due to lack of rigorous program implementation and problems in research methodology rather with the approach itself. In examining treatment integrity,

they found that those whole-school programs with a monitoring component that ensured better implementation fidelity had better outcomes.

This finding points to the critical importance of ensuring that program components are truly implemented as planned. As part of a series of articles in the *American Psychologist* on “Prevention that Works for Children and Youth,” Nation et al. (2003) identified a set of principles of effective prevention programs that have relevance for implementing a well-planned whole-school approach to bullying prevention. The principles and applications listed in Table 4 were gleaned from prevention studies in four areas (substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, school failure, and juvenile delinquency and violence) that showed positive outcomes.

**Table 4**

***Principles of Effective Strategies for Whole-School Bullying Prevention Programs***

<i>Principle</i>	<i>Relevance for Bullying Prevention</i>
Comprehensive	Multicomponent interventions that address the development and perpetuation of bullying
Varied teaching methods	Interventions that use diverse teaching methods to increase awareness and understanding of bullying behaviors and facilitate acquisition of prosocial skills
Sufficient dosage	Interventions that are sufficient to decrease bullying and victimization and provide follow-up to maintain effects
Theory driven	Interventions that have a theory base that are grounded in accurate information, and that are supported by empirical research on early adolescent bullying

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<i>Principle</i>	<i>Relevance for Bullying Prevention</i>
Positive relationships	Interventions that provide exposure to positive adult and peer role models in ways that promote strong relationships and support development of prosocial behaviors and reduction in bullying and victimization
Appropriately timed	Interventions that are initiated early enough to have an impact on the development of bullying behavior and that are sensitive to the developmental needs of early adolescents.
Socioculturally relevant	Interventions that are tailored to the school community and cultural norms of the students and that include students in program planning and implementation
Outcome evaluation	Interventions that have clear goals and objectives related to (1) the reduction and prevention of bullying and victimization and (2) the development of prosocial behaviors  Systematic documentation of results related to the goals using school-wide assessment of bullying, victimization, and relevant prosocial behaviors
Well-trained staff	School staff who support the whole-school program and are provided with the inservice education needed to understand and intervene appropriately according to their role in the school community

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*Note.* Principles excerpted from Nation et al. (2003).

These nine characteristics, taken together, emphasize the importance of a careful and thorough approach to whole-school programming. Given Smith et al.'s findings (2003), it is critical that such programming be monitored to ensure fidelity and feedback for program improvement. Erickson et al. (2004) add that a feedback system that tracks

“what we are doing” and “how we are doing” (p. 113), serves as an important motivator for involvement and ongoing action for school staff.

School counselors are in a strategic position to support the integration of a comprehensive approach to bullying into the school environment and to encourage the involvement of all members of the school community in the work of bullying prevention. As mental health professionals with expertise in both individual and system change and as advocates for the healthy psychological development of students, counselors can be a major force in ensuring that students are safe from the physical and psychological effects of bullying. A well-conceived and well-implemented comprehensive approach to bullying prevention helps support a school environment that facilitates the academic, social, and emotional development of all students.

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