



BULLY-PROOFING YOUR SCHOOL

**Administrator's Guide
to Staff Development
in Elementary Schools**

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Preface

Aggressive behavior in students has long been a disruptive element in the educational arena. At a time when violence is so prevalent in our society, bullies have become a (sometimes lethal) threat to the physical and emotional safety of students. Many of us can probably recall personal or professional experiences with bullies. The recall of these memories is intense and awakens strong emotions, especially of fear and helplessness. The pervasiveness of the fear results in a feeling of powerlessness. Bullies bring this imbalance of power and fear to schools, as well. After suffering unchecked bullying, self-destructive acts or desperate retaliation with lethal weapons is not uncommon.

A most discouraging situation is occurring in many schools today. Many children are unwilling to turn to staff for help with bullying because they believe that not only will the staff fail to help them but that telling will make the situation worse. Although we as educators would like to believe that we can simply send children to handle these problems on their own, many need adult support to develop the coping skills necessary to protect themselves from the attack of bullies. The old adage “Just hit ‘em back” is one of the myriad of unsuccessful myths surrounding bullying behavior and is in fact probably one of the most dangerous strategies with a true bully. However, there are many approaches that can defuse the situation and lower the potential for aggression. For instance, just having more adults among students has been shown to influence bullying behavior.

Eighty-five percent of the students in schools are neither bullies nor victims. This “caring majority” of students, though, observe the behavior and interactions of bullies, live with an uncomfortable feeling about their own safety, and often believe that if they get involved the aggressive actions will be transferred to them. Fear and power struggles are a reality in elementary schools, and one of the goals within schools must be to bring these issues in line so they are manageable. The actions and influence of this caring majority are a powerful resource with which to maintain the value of kindness and decency. They are the untapped reservoir of strength, the leverage for impacting change in creating a safe school environment for all children.

The *Bully-Proofing Your School* program operates on many levels within a school. It is our belief that developing the caring majority’s intervention skills so they feel confident to be involved is crucial. Their power is implicit by number, and explicit by positive acts of kindness toward victims. By developing a strong, reinforced identity, they can help set the tone of a school and dictate its operating environment. This group can give strength and support to the victims and defuse the power of the bullies.

Bullies can occupy an inordinate amount of time from staff, students, and parents. Swift and precise adult interventions that avoid power positions and clearly establish bullying behaviors as unacceptable can prevent the wounds of repeated victimization. Escalating direct power struggles with bullies is exhausting and generally not effective. Intervening calmly and consistently before bullying behavior escalates can strip the bully’s power.

Many standard curriculum packages fail after three to four months because there is an expectation inherent to them that all staff members can and will intervene in the same manner. A lack of congruence between an individual and curriculum can cause the program to be undermined—one becomes uncomfortable with the new way and thus returns to one’s old style. However, this will not be the case with this program. We strongly

believe, and have designed this program around this tenet, that the acknowledgment of personal styles up front is crucial in formulating a team ethic comprised of multiple approaches achieving the same goal. Teachers need to identify and accept the skills they already have that can be implemented in a focused fashion to impact aggressive behavior, support the strength of the caring majority, and soothe the wounds of victims. The wheel doesn't need to be reinvented, just to be mounted and balanced.

The community should also be included in recognizing and supporting a “no-bullying” position. Addressing bullying behavior requires strong support from parents to prevent fractionalizing of the community. Understanding some basic tenets, such as that all parents believe their children are the victims and that very rarely are children self-confessed bullies, helps clarify the picture and enables collaborative relationships with parents to stop bullying.

Developing a comprehensive approach will lead to successful results in identifying and intervening with bullies. As a supplement to the *Administrator's Guide to Staff Development* and the *Teacher's Manual and Lesson Plans* this book presents two curriculums designed to be used in individual or small group formats: one for interviewing with bullies, the other for understanding and supporting the victims. These activities focus on kindness and inclusion for all students, and when used in conjunction with the rest of the *Bully-Proofing Your School* curriculum will help change the balance of power within a school.

Why Bully-Proof?

Scope of the Problem

In the average elementary school classroom, two to three students spend their day afraid. Some of these children avoid the restroom, cafeteria, and playground because they fear they will be humiliated or picked on by bullies. The United States Department of Justice and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) estimate that 160,000 children miss school each day because of fear (Lee, 1993).

Increasingly, children simply do not feel safe at school—safe from violence, safe from humiliation, and safe from bullying. Every seven minutes bullying happens on elementary school playgrounds (Pepler, 1998). Children as young as second grade report that no one helps them; they do not believe that their teachers or the other school staff will help protect them if they report their fear. Indeed, research confirms that what these children are reporting is true. Most of the time no one helps and, if anyone does, it is more likely to be another child than an adult.

Consequently, children are left feeling helpless, afraid, and “on their own” to figure out how to cope with these feelings. Many younger children hide throughout the school day, experience physical symptoms of distress, or even refuse to attend school. As they grow older, children are more likely to take more active measures to protect themselves—often these are not positive measures. Some will begin carrying weapons to school, others will associate with a gang for protection, and still others will drop out of school entirely.

Every day approximately 100,000 children carry guns to school. As many as 6,250

teachers are threatened each day, and of those about 260 are actually attacked (Lee, 1993). School violence is multidetermined and not solely the result of bullying.

However, what is bullying behavior in elementary school can easily turn into violence by middle and high school.

The *Bully-Proofing Your School* program can be an early, preventative measure against this type of behavior. More importantly, however, it is designed to stop bullying at the elementary level to ensure a safer school environment—one that does not tolerate acts of physical or emotional aggression against children. It is within this type of safe and caring environment that children can learn. And it is within your influence to provide just such an environment.

The Bully-Proofing Your School Program

Bully-Proofing Your School provides a blueprint for an elementary school to easily implement a bully-proofing program designed to meet one criterion: to make the school environment safe for children both physically and psychologically.

Bully-Proofing Your School encompasses a number of underlying principles:

- **It is the responsibility of adults to ensure that school is a safe environment in which children can learn.**

Many children live with fear every day at school. This can be incapacitating and can severely affect learning.

The participation of the staff is an important element in the success of the bully-proofing program.

Bully-Proofing Your School Outcome

Bully-Proofing Your School

OUTCOME

Bullies

- ▶ Lose power position
- ▶ Fewer behavioral problems
- ▶ Change in thinking errors
- ▶ May stay out of criminal justice system later in life
- ▶ Some become positive leaders in peer group

School Environment

- ▶ Overall sense of caring
- ▶ Safety and protection
- ▶ Respect for diversity
- ▶ Shared responsibility—everyone contributes to maintain “no-bullying” values

Victims

- ▶ Decreased vulnerability
- ▶ Greater self-esteem
- ▶ More friends
- ▶ Protected by teachers and other school staff
- ▶ Decreased self-blame
- ▶ Less risk of repeated victimization

Teachers and Other Staff

- ▶ Fewer behavioral management problems
- ▶ Shared responsibility
- ▶ Increased awareness of peer conflict versus bully-victim incidents
- ▶ Stronger conflict resolution skills
- ▶ Knowledge of own conflict styles

Parental Community

- ▶ Sense of security concerning their child at school
- ▶ Responsiveness from the school
- ▶ Mutuality in reinforcing good values
- ▶ Sense of community with school

Caring Majority of Students

- ▶ Recognition given for altruistic behaviors
- ▶ Empowered to affect change
- ▶ Increased moral development and reasoning
- ▶ More empathy and compassion for others

Chapter Seven

Collaboration With Parents

Working effectively with the community of parents is an important and integral component of a successful bully-proofing program. The development of a clear message from the school to the parents regarding bullying is a fundamental first step. A strong, clear position that bullying behavior will not be tolerated must be communicated to parents in order to build collaborative relationships between the school and home.

In the staff training component of this program (Chapter Four, Session 6) a plan for working with parents should have been developed. This plan should specify: (1) how parents will be informed about the classroom curriculum and kept apprised of developments with the bully-proofing program (suggestions include community meetings, newsletters/fliers, PTA involvement, telephone calls/meetings with staff members), (2) how parents should inform the school staff of a situation in which their child is being bullied, and (3) how parents will be informed when their child is bullying.

Many parents may have attended the orientation presentation to introduce the adoption of the *Bully-Proofing Your School* program, and all the parents will have received a letter inviting their participation in that presentation, which briefly explained the program. Beyond those initial communications to parents, the ongoing message should not only specify behaviors that will not be tolerated, but should also educate parents about bullying and victim behaviors and strategies for handling each. The philosophy to be communicated should be one of working together to create a safe school environment with children exhibiting appropriate behaviors.

The parents should also be informed, with specific details, about the classroom curriculum. Strong assurances must be given

to the parents that none of their children will be individually identified or labeled as either victim or bully.

Parents appreciate being informed of who at the school they can contact if they are concerned that their children are experiencing bullying. The staff training plan should specify a contact person for both parents of victims and parents of bullies. This person might be the classroom teacher or someone else, such as the facilitator, an administrator, or a member of the school's mental health team.

Overall, it is critical that the school take a position that no one benefits when harassment and destructive conflict are allowed to take place. Parents of bullies need to hear the same message that their children are hearing: "Bullying behavior is not allowed."

Periodic updates are encouraged in which parents are kept informed about the progress being made with the program as well as educated about teaching their children appropriate skills for avoiding and defending against bullying behavior, both physical and verbal. Parents can help their children to become stronger and less vulnerable to attacks from other children, especially if they feel the support of the school staff toward providing a safe environment that allows learning to take place.

There are two "Golden Rules" to keep in mind when meeting with parents:

► **Most parents feel that their child is the victim.**

Even when bullying behavior has been documented, the majority of parents will argue that the victim was provocative and therefore caused the difficulty to arise.

Grades K–5

Bully-Proofing Your School

Administrator's Guide to Staff Development in Elementary Schools

Now In a New Edition—The Most Effective Way to Make Your Elementary School a Safe, Bully-Free Place!

Countless school districts across the country have used *Bully-Proofing Your School* to create a supportive environment for their students, one free of fear, violence, and intimidation. *Bully-Proofing* is a comprehensive program designed to teach educators how to recognize bullying, how to shift power away from the bullies, how to prevent future incidents of bullying, and, importantly, how to nurture the values of kindness and decency in their classrooms. But *Bully-Proofing* is not a vague, “touchy-feely” system based only in theory—it’s a practical, easy-to-implement blueprint for decreasing physical and emotional aggression by mobilizing the “caring majority,” the 85% of students who are neither victim nor bully.

This third edition of *Bully-Proofing* builds on the strengths of previous versions by expanding treatment of staff training, systems interventions, student instruction, and victim support.

The *Administrator's Guide to Staff Development* contains everything needed to educate your staff about the *Bully-Proofing* program, including strategies for training, information on scheduling, and a helpful resource guide. Reproducible handouts and transparency masters are included.

A *Teacher's Manual and Lesson Plans* and a *Working With Victims and Bullies* manual are also available.

Bully-Proofing Your School will ensure an educational climate that is both positive and caring, an environment in which everyone—even the ex-bullies!—can learn without fear or humiliation.



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