

A SCHOOL BASED ANTI-BULLYING INTERVENTION:
CREATING AWARENESS AND PROVIDING
SOLUTIONS

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By
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

I feel like everything in my life has led me to this. My choices, heartbreaks, regrets, everything. And now my past seems worth it. Because if I had done one thing differently, I might not be where I am today. Thank you Mom, Dad and even you little brother for always pushing and motivating me.

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ABSTRACT

A bullying intervention was created at an elementary school due to a bullying situation that occurred the year prior. The project was implemented to create a safe learning environment for the students who attended this school. The project included groups of students, parents, and school staff to create lasting connections and provide a solution to the bullying situation. Students, parents and school staff were provided with training and awareness around different bullying aspects and connections were formed to give student an opportunity to report and find solutions for a bullying situation that they might be a part of. Prior bullying situations led to the implementation of this project, which created guidance for students, parents, and school staff on how to deal with other bullying situations. The importance and heart of this project was the creation of connections among students, parents, and school staff. This connection led to the success of this project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this graduate project is to work in partnership with a local school (students, teachers, and parents) to create a safe school (learning) environment where students can attend school and receive an education without the fear of being physically or emotionally hurt. Fundamentally, the project has two components: a) an educational or consciousness raising component where various groups are engaged in learning about bullying and creating safe places for students; b) a social support component collaborative where participants are joined to form partnerships and support systems that can sustain and nurture relationships necessary for a safe educational community.

The project took place at a local elementary school located in the Stanislaus County. The school runs from kindergarten to fifth grade. The school is under Aspire, which opens and operates small high-quality charter schools in low income neighborhoods in order to create equal opportunities. The idea of this project arose from a situation that had occurred between a group of girls the year prior. This situation caused the movement of a student to a different school, because she felt unsafe. School staff and parents were not pleased with the situation and felt that action needed to take place in order for the students to feel safe while at school.

Bullying is not a new found problem in the United States, as one out of every four students (22%) report being bullied during the school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015) and 64 percent of children who were bullied did not

report it (Petrosina, Guckenburn, Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig, 2001). Not knowing who to go to or fear of what will happen if students tell someone gives the bully more power and creates an atmosphere where students keep quiet. Statistics show that more than half of bullying situations (57%) stop when a peer intervenes on behalf of the student being bullied (Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig, 2001) and creating school based bullying prevention programs decreases bullying by up to 25 percent (McCallion and Feder, 2013). Giving students the power and knowledge of what to do if they witness a bullying situation or if they are being bullied empowers the students to stand up for not only themselves but for others as well. Through collaboration, education, awareness and empowerment this graduate project seeks to give students the tools necessary to know how to handle a bullying situation instead of keeping silent, becoming a bystander, or walking away when they witness someone being bullied.

Through consciousness raising, partnership, support groups and the creation of nurturing relationships, the goal is to give students the power to voice when they feel unsafe and to know who to go to and what to do. With the partnership of the school teachers and parents, the goal is not only for students to gain power and knowledge, but for the teachers and parents to collaborate and be involved in creating a safe learning environment for their students. Schools are environments that educate our future; every child has the right to feel safe at school in order to be able to reach his or her full potential.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The goal of this project is that through education, awareness, and collaboration we can decrease bullying at a local elementary school. The project contains three objectives that were created with this goal in mind. The first objective was to educate and create awareness of bullying from students, teachers, and parents. Engaging the entire school and creating school wide involvement helps to ensure the community constituents have a more complete understanding of the problem and issues and helps make individuals aware of their own roles in the bullying situation. The participation and collaboration of the school as a whole gives everyone the knowledge and awareness they need, empowering them to create change. This change includes the creation of awareness of the effects of bullying pushing staff and parents to deal with a bullying situation with seriousness, giving students a voice and empowering them to act when a situation arises.

The second objective was to create the materials needed in order to raise awareness for each individual group. The materials focused on the individual group's needs and included the following information: what is bullying, how to stop bullying, who to go to when you witness or are a victim of bullying, and other bullying awareness raising and educational information. Separate materials were created and tailored to meet the individual needs of students, teachers, and parents. This means that presentations and material for students were focused on students' needs and roles; presentations for parents focused on the parent's roles and how they can

address a bullying situation as a parent. The material created a guide for the individual groups (students, parents, and teachers) in order to create nurturing relationships, empowering students to feel safe to speak up about a bullying situation.

The last objective was the creation of a peer group. The group was composed by both students who have been victims of bullying and students who have bullied other students. The combination helped create a better understanding and give individual perspectives on a bullying situation. The peer group was educated on bullying and helped with presentations about bullying in their peer's classes. Having the peer group present allowed students to learn from their own peers, creating power among students. The peer group also served as a mediation team during recess. The group helped resolve conflict among their peers. Before the students are punished by staff about a situation, they had a chance to talk and resolve a problem with the help of the mediation team. The mediation team also brought awareness and education to their own peer about how an action can hurt someone's feeling or how to handle a situation differently. Having the peer group out during recess gives the bully less power and less opportunity. Having the students learn from their own peer's actions and be informed by their peers creates power among the students to handle a bullying situation without fear.

The project's direction to reach the goal was inspired by empowerment theory. The empowerment theory is the "process by which individuals and groups gain power, access to resources and control over their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals"

(Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998, p.9). Providing the school access to information, resources, support, and the opportunity to learn and develop creates empowerment to stop bullying or deal with bullying head on. The structure of this projects helps empower the school through education, awareness, and collaboration leading to the creation of pathways and resources. Empowerment in the school, as a whole, allows for control over the bullying situation as collaboration, instead of only having a few individuals deal with it. Having the entire school involved creates strong and reliable relationships.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROJECT

The overall goal of this project is to create an intervention strategy that can promote the elimination of bullying at elementary schools. Guided by the empowerment theory, the goal is to educate and raise awareness throughout the school in order to build nurturing and trusting relationships so that students can speak up and take action when a bullying situation arises. The “empowerment theory is based on the premise that in society (to include groups, communities, and organizations) there is an unequal distribution of power; however, the theory holds that power originates from various sources and that power is infinite because it can be generated in the process of social interaction” (Empowering and Community Planning, p.46). By educating students, parents, and teachers and raising awareness for the school as a whole, an atmosphere against bullying is created.

This project was created as an intervention so that others are able to replicate it and use it in order to eliminate bullying in school settings. Social work has a long history in the school setting. This project is significant to a social worker because it can be used to deal with or prevent a bullying situation at the school that he or she is located. With the implementation of this project, Social workers are able to bring social worker knowledge, values, and skills to a school setting. Social workers believe in social justice and that everyone has the right to go to school without the fear of being physically or emotionally hurt. Every child has the right to an education, and making the school a safe environment allows for students to receive this

education without additional fear or distractions. The Empowerment theory focuses on how an environment can be modified to improve an individual's environmental fit. Social Workers can use this project to modify an unsafe school environment into an environment with nurturing and reliable relationships.

Bullying is a problem that affects schools around the United States, and this project helps give Social workers the guidance needed in facing a bullying problem or can serve as a way to keep a school bully free. The Empowerment Theory also encourages Social workers to collaborate with client systems to increase their personal, interpersonal, or political power so that systems can take action to improve their lives (Gutierrez, 1991). Social workers can use this project to teach students, teachers, and parents new skills and values, as well as create healthy safe nurturing environments so that the individuals can solve the problem with the new skills and resources instead of ignoring or depending on someone else.

By creating change in the school as a whole, it will lead to change not only at the school setting but in the community:

The process of community empowerment is a social change process which involves organizing and creating a community. A collective with a common critical characteristic, that suffers from social stigmas and discrimination, acquired ability to control its relevant environment better and to influence its future. Community empowerment processes develop a sense of responsibility, commitment, and ability to care for collective survival, as wells as skills in problem solving, and political efficacy to influence changes in environments

relevant to their quality of life (Empowerment and Community Planning, p.145).

Education of the individual groups (students, parents, and teachers) created change of behavior and action at school, but also created the same change at home. If all schools in a certain community were educated on new skills and values, then all the students and parents who attend these schools will be made aware and educated on new skill and values when it comes to dealing with conflict in the community. The awareness made to the youth and their parents can help address community violence. If children and parents are educated on how to address conflict at school, then this new education can be used when it comes to the community. The more students and parents hold this awareness, the greater influence and power that they will hold in their communities. As stated in the Empowerment Theory, this practice builds pathways for client systems to access power resources within themselves, their families, and social contexts (O'Melia, 2002). By empowering the individual groups at schools, it creates an evolution of change in the community and this can lead to a nationwide change.

Creating change and empowering groups in schools and in the community leads to social justice. Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities. Social workers aim to open the doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly those in the greatest need. Social work aims in helping people address their problems and matching them with the resources they need to lead healthy and productive lives. Through this

project we are able to build authentic relationships, giving students the power of voicing their concerns. When we connect students to the resources needed they are able to build a voice and overcome their fear. This project helps students address the problem of bullying with the connection to nurturing relationships. Even though this project is implemented in the school setting, it creates change in the individuals who use their new resources and knowledge to expand to their own communities. This action contributes to the pursuit of social justice.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Bullying is an issue that has been facing the United States for a long period of time. It is so indirect and hidden that many do not know how to resolve it, but now more teachers, school staff, parents and youth are bringing attention to the problem and creating solutions. Bullying is defined as an unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time. Both children who are victims of bullying and children who bully may suffer from serious lasting problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that bullying can include aggression that is physical (hitting/tripping), verbal (name calling, teasing), or relational and social (spreading rumors, exclusion from group).

Bullying and Its Effects

A child can play different roles in a bullying situation. The child could be a victim, perpetrator, or both. According to the results from the 2011 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, almost one out of every four students (22%) report being bullied during the school year. Different factor can increase a youth's risk of engaging in or experiencing bullying. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the factors that are associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in bullying behavior include: externalizing problems

(such as defiant and disruptive behavior), harsh parenting by caregiver, and attitudes accepting of violence. Some of the factors associated with higher likelihood of victimization include: poor peer relationships, low self-esteem, and being perceived by peers as different or quiet.

Center for Disease Control (2015) states that students who experience bullying are at increased risk for poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression. Students who engage in bullying behavior are at increased risk for academic problems, substance use, and violent behavior later in adolescence and adulthood. Also, students who are both targets of bullying and engage in bullying behavior are at a greater risk for both mental health and behavior problems than students who only bully or are only bullied (Center for Disease Control, 2015). Students who experience bullying are twice as likely as non-bullied peers to experience negative physical health effects such as headaches and stomachaches (Gini and Pozzoli, 2013). Students affected by bullying have a hard time engaging and focusing in school and can also experience effects in their school work and education.

School Based Prevention

The ultimate goal is to stop bullying before it starts. School based bullying prevention programs are widely implemented, but infrequently evaluated. Based on a review of the limited research on school based bullying prevention, the following program elements are promising: Improvement of supervision of students, school rules, and behavior management techniques in the classroom and school to detect and

address bullying by providing consequences for bullying (Centers for Disease Control Prevention, 2015), having an entire school anti-bullying policy, enforcing that policy consistently, promoting cooperation among different professionals, and between school staff and parents create for better construction of an implemented resource, and creating a valuable solution for bullying at schools.

Surveys show that bullied youth are most likely to report a bullying situation when actions made for an adult accessed support from others and made a positive difference (Davis and Nixon, 2010). Actions aimed at changing the behavior of the bullying youth (fighting, getting back at them, telling them to stop, etc.) were rated as most likely to make things worse (Davis and Nixon, 2010).

According to Davis and Nixon (2010) students reported that the most helpful action a teacher can take when a student approaches them with a bullying situation is listen to the student, check in with him or her afterwards to see if the bullying stopped and give the student advice. This project informed the teachers on how to address a bullying situation when one arises. Teachers learned to take every bullying situation with seriousness. Students need to know that if they are in trouble or in danger, someone will listen to them and the situation will not be merely ignored.

Davis and Nixon (2010) also reported that according to a student survey, the most harmful action a teacher took when approached with a bullying situation was to tell the student to solve the problem, tell the student to act differently to prevent others on bullying them, ignore the situation, or accuse the student of tattling. Being aware of these harmful behaviors that teachers could be guilty of, will help guide

teachers in becoming more helpful and aware when a bullying situation is brought to their attention.

Additional research from the U.S Department of Health and Human Services state that there are specific criteria that should be implemented in order to create good school based intervention. This project implements these criteria's and suggestions. First, we begin by assessing bullying. In order to assess bullying you must first determine how often bullying occurs, where it happens, how student and adults intervene, and whether your prevention efforts are working. By engaging parents and youth, you include the community as a whole to send a unified message against bullying. Awareness must be made to youth and parents to make the objectives known to the school and community. By enforcing and creating policies and rules that directly deal with bullying, the school is able to establish a climate in which bullying is not acceptable. A mission statement, code of conduct, school wide rules and a bullying reporting system should all be created to disseminate and communicate widely the message about bullying. The next step would be creating a safe environment; the school should establish a culture of acceptance, tolerance, and respect. There are numerous strategies that can be used to create such a culture, including using staff meetings, assemblies, class and parent meetings, newsletter to families, the school website, and the student handbook to establish to positive climate at school. The school should also reinforce positive social interactions and inclusiveness. Lastly, the students and school staff should be educated by building bullying prevention materials into the curriculum and school activities. Teachers and

staff should be trained on the school's rules, policies, and should be given skills to intervene consistently and appropriately (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

Bullying can threaten students' physical and emotional safety at school and can negatively impact their ability to learn. Because we want all students to have an equal opportunity in school, we want to promote a safe learning environment. This project takes research and evidence to create a school wide change involving the entire school and focusing in on the creation of nurturing relationships, so that students can learn how to address bullying. The project also makes sure to raise awareness to the school staff, teachers and parents and educate them on bullying, as well as on what to do if their students or children are being affected by bullying.

For more information on bullying some websites to look into would be:

- www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying_factsheets.pdf
- www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/stats.asp
- Home | StopBullying.gov

METHODOLOGY

This project was created into four phases: introduction, parent and school involvement, the plan, and the celebration in order to resolve the problem of bullying at an elementary school. Previous research guided the creation of this project, and it showed the importance of a peer group and the involvement of staff and parents. This project wanted to make sure students felt heard and knew where to go for help when faced with a bullying situation. Only fourth and fifth grade girls were part of this project with hopes that the information and examples will trickle down to the younger grades. The charter school in Central California (which hosted this graduate project) only runs from kindergarten to fifth grade, thus the older grades served as the focus of this pilot project.

Phase one began with the introduction of the project to the school staff and parents. The project was introduced through a meeting where staff and parents were informed about the creation of the peer group, future training and presentations for teachers, and the project itself. The importance of the involvement of the staff and parents was highlighted and promoted.

The peer group was opened to all fourth and fifth grade girls, but special invitations was given to students who teachers felt would benefit from the group or would be a great asset to the group. Fourth and fifth grade teachers gave a list of specific girls who they felt would excel in the group. These students received a special verbal invitation to the group. The group met on a regular basis; they met on

Tuesdays and Thursdays during lunch time. During that time students received training on what is bullying, what to do in a bullying situation, and the role they play as bystanders. All fourth and fifth grade classes were presented the first power point presentation where they will be introduced to the bullying topics and educated on what is bullying, what to do in a bullying situation and the role that a bystander plays. They were also encouraged to seek school staff support for a bullying situation in which they felt they needed help. The fourth and fifth grade classes and the peer group came up with a catchphrase to motivate students on the awareness of bullying. This catchphrase was introduced to the entire school and promoted in order to bring awareness to bullying and grasp the students' attention.

Phase two was the involvement of parents and school staff. Fourth and fifth grade parents and guardians who have a student in the peer group were convened as stakeholders for awareness on bullying at the campus. Parents were called and informed of their individual roles in this bullying awareness approach. They were given resources and contact number in case their child approached them with a bullying situation. They were also invited to a training where parents can further learn how to handle a bullying situation at home. A meeting was hosted with school staff to educate and inform staff on the school's anti bullying efforts and the role that they played in this transition and change. Both staff and parents were educated on what a bully is, how to handle a bullying situation, and were provided with resources and support on bullying.

In phase three, the school dedicated one day per week for the entire month of April to promote the anti-bullying catchphrase. Students wore purple every Friday of the month of April to bring awareness to bullying and its effects. With guidance the peer helper group created a PowerPoint presentation on all the issues that they learned about bullying. The peer group led a classroom presentation around friendship, kindness, and self-respect to all fourth and fifth grade classes. The peer group was introduced and recognized and worked as mediators during recess time to resolve conflict and create a safer environment. The group consisted of about fifteen girls who would take turns as the mediators. Groups of three were assigned a day in the week where they would be in charge of resolving conflict. The mediators served as the first step when conflict arose during recess. If a solution could not be found, then the situation would be handed to the yard duty with possible disciplinary actions. The peer group was already trained on different ways to resolve conflict and positive ways to express idea and opinions.

Phase four was the final phase and the celebration. During this phase we celebrated the students, staff and parents on their participation. An evaluation meeting with fourth and fifth grade staff and parents was held for feedback about the campaign. Feedback included issues that could be improved so that next year this could continue. A meeting for the evaluation included two parts for staff and parents to provide feedback: suggestions for changes or improvements and things that they liked and found beneficial about this project. We also had a brief discussion about the project and its benefits. The peer group celebrated the project with a pizza party

where they were able to also discuss what they saw was beneficial about the project and things that they would change or improve for next year.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Project Experience

The creation of this project was inspired by a bullying situation which had occurred the prior year. The school wanted to revisit their policy and the actions that they were taking against bullying to better benefit the students. In prior years, when staff or parents were approached with a bullying situation there was no protocol or resources for teachers and parents to guide action. This resulted in bullying issues being dismissed or forgotten. As the issues were dismissed, students felt unheard or did not find a solution to their bullying situation. This contributed to the continuation of the bullying, affecting the students heavily. Working closely with other staff, parents, and students, a guide was built to tackle bullying. The project focused on building connections, providing resources, and bringing awareness and knowledge to bullying.

The project included numerous presentations for different audiences. Two bullying presentations were introduced to all the fourth and fifth grade classes, which averaged about twenty-two students per class. The first PowerPoint presentation was completed by the facilitator of this graduate project, where the students were informed about bullying (what is bullying, how to address a bullying situation and what is a bystander). The students were motivated to take action when in a bullying situation, and through the process a catchphrase was created. The catchphrase was

used during bullying awareness month (in April) to draw attention to the harmful impact of bullying and to develop anti-bullying strategies across the entire school.

The second presentation was facilitated by a girl peer group. This presentation was created by the girls and focused on friendship, kindness, and self-respect in connection with the new information that they had learned during the peer group. The peer group ran the presentation and answered student questions at the end with guidance from the facilitator.

A presentation was prepared for the parents as well; the parents were invited during after school hours to learn how to handle a bullying situation at home. This presentation provided the parents with resources and connections to the school so that any bullying situation could be addressed. This presentation was given to ten parents who were parents of the students in the peer group. Fourth and fifth grade teachers were also given a presentation on what bullying is, how to handle a bullying situation, and resources/support on bullying. This presentation was given to six teachers, but the core content of the presentation was emailed to all teachers at the school.

Lessons Learned

Through this experience I learned the value in strong connections. If students are able to approach a staff member or parent with a situation, then there is a higher chance for that issue to get resolved. There is great value in connection among students, but through this project we witnessed the importance of connections among school staff members with each other and parents. Teachers began collaborating to resolve bullying situations, and parents became more involved in working with school

staff to find the best solution for the bullying situation, but also increased when communicating about other aspects of the child's needs in school.

Another lesson that was learned was that teachers and parents want the best for their students, but sometimes lack the resources or knowledge needed to deal with students outside of academics. The importance of trainings and resources was learned through this project. Teachers and parents retained the information, and once they had knowledge they were able to implement the information to their classrooms and homes.

A limitation was the number of trainings that were able to be provided to parents and teachers. I believe that more trainings and discussions could be beneficial to this project. I would like to create a monthly meeting where teachers are able to gather, discuss concerns and help each other with bullying situations that they might have faced with their students. This meeting will allow teachers to help each other in resolving a bullying situation and learn what others tried with a similar situation.

Another issue to keep in mind is how busy parents are. Something that would help parents is a package with printed information and resources on bullying. This information could be mailed to all parents of the school, so even if busy parents cannot attend the training they are still being informed on the issue and provided with information and resources.

Overall, with guidance and awareness, the teachers, parents, and students began to form strong connections. Teachers were collaborating with other teachers or parents to fully address bullying situations. This led to the creation of valuable change

in the school. Through this project, students learned what to do when they were faced with a bullying situation, but they also learned about the role they play in a bullying situation and how to identify the situation. Students not only learned this, they were also given connections to teachers who were trained on how to address these situations. These connections were the key to this project. The peer groups grew closer as the meetings continued, creating a safe place and strong connections among the group members. After trainings, the attention to bullying awareness and stronger connections to the group, the students became passionate about their roles as peer leaders and began to promote their learned skills and solutions with their peers. The focus was on fourth and fifth grade students, but the results were noticed within all grades. Through observation we began to see students resolve conflict on their own and address bullying situation among their peers.

Implications

This project created significant change in the school, and in order for this change to continue the project needs to continue to the next school year. Every year the project should be revised and implications should be added to best serve the school's needs. As new evaluation data is gathered, the project should be adjusted to involve the best practice when addressing bullying situations.

A pre and post survey should be added to the project in order to gather feedback and research on what practice of this project benefit the students the most and what needs to be changed or adjusted. Separate surveys should be distributed in the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year to students, parents,

and teachers. This project will serve as a guide, but strategies might need to change for improvement to continue. This change will create a stronger impact and will better benefit the school. Feedback was gathered at the end of the project, but I believe that pre/post surveys will create a better form of gathering feedback.

A challenge could arise to find someone to take over this project and present the information to the students, teachers, and parents; but, I believe that the continuation of these trainings is important and necessary to continue in a bully free zone. This goes to show the importance and benefits of having a Social worker at a school based location. One of the Social worker's roles is to advocate for those who need to be heard. Having a Social worker on campus would help guide this project and the continuation of a bully free zone. Every student deserves to have a safe place to learn. Social workers provide the support of this goal. Aside from academics, the student safety, concerns, and mental health need should be addressed to give them the best opportunity for an education. Social workers at in a school setting are there to give students the best opportunity in life with support and resources and as advocates. With the advantage of this school having a Social work intern located on their campus, the creation of this project was possible and one of the biggest school issues was addressed.

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