

Executive Summary

Bullying Prevention Is Crime Prevention

Of children in sixth through tenth grade, more than 3.2 million—nearly one in six—are victims of bullying each year, while 3.7 million bully other children.

Preventing kids from becoming bullies and intervening to get bullies back on track can not only protect children from the pain that bullying inflicts immediately, but can protect all of us from crime later on. Fortunately, programs have been developed that can cut bullying by as much as 50 percent. They just need to be implemented in America's schools.

How miserable does bullying make its victims? Compared to their peers, kids who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed. Bullied boys are four times more likely to be suicidal; bullied girls are eight times more likely to be suicidal.

A Cause of Crime – and a Crime Prevention Opportunity

Nearly 60 percent of boys who researchers classified as bullies in grades six through nine were convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24. Even more dramatic, 40 percent of them had three or more convictions by age 24.

Bullying is an early warning that bullies may be headed toward more serious antisocial behavior. Moreover, victims of repeated bullying can explode in ways that threaten not just the bullies but many others as well. For example, a Secret Service study of school shootings found that “almost three-quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured by others prior to the incident.”

Proven Programs Can Cut Bullying in Half— and Sharply Reduce Crime

Research clearly shows that half or more of all bullying can be prevented. The youngsters with the most serious behavior problems benefit most from effective programs. But bullying prevention efforts should be based on rigorous scientific research. Creating an untested program and calling it “bullying prevention” doesn't mean it will work. Thus far, three models that have been rigorously tested have been proven highly effective:

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program—First developed in Norway after a number of bullying victims committed suicide, the program has now been implemented in several hundred

schools in the United States and around the world. It produced a 50 percent reduction in bullying and other antisocial behavior in Norway and a 20 percent reduction in a South Carolina test.

Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)—LIFT shows long-term results are possible from a ten-week anti-aggression program. Compared to LIFT participants, fifth graders whose schools did not receive the program were by eighth grade 59 percent more likely to drink alcohol regularly, and two times more likely to have been arrested during middle school than those who received the program.

The Incredible Years—Originally designed for children ages two to eight with high levels of aggressive behavior, this program trains parents and children in problem-solving and other non-aggressive social skills. It has been able to stop the cycle of aggression for approximately two-thirds of the families receiving help.

Money Well Spent

Bullying prevention programs are relatively inexpensive for the results they deliver. The upfront training and supply cost for delivering both the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and LIFT programs throughout a school district are only a few thousand dollars. Part-time personnel costs for setting up and administering the program can often be covered by existing funding streams that pay for Safe and Drug Free Schools coordinators. Modest additional funds will typically be needed to implement LIFT and The Incredible Years.

These investments will more than pay for themselves by reducing special education costs and future crime. For example, special education classes for 12 years for one child with emotional problems can cost \$100,000 more than regular schooling. Professor Mark A. Cohen of Vanderbilt University estimated that each high-risk juvenile prevented from adopting a life of crime could save the country \$1.7 million.

Bullying is not just sad, it's dangerous. Too many bullies and their victims will go on to commit crimes, including murder. Others will kill themselves.

Every school should be doing what works to prevent bullying. When relatively little investment is necessary to cut bullying by as much as half, it's penny-wise and pound-foolish not to invest in these proven crime prevention programs.

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