27 A whole school approach to preventing and managing bullying

Gerald Wurf

How to use this policy

Four decades of research have demonstrated that whole school anti-bullying programs are effective in reducing school bullying and the negative health and wellbeing outcomes associated with victimisation (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Gaffney et al., 2019; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Effective whole school programs are long-lasting and intensive. They incorporate multilevel strategies to address bullying at the individual student level, as well as preventative strategies targeted at the teacher/classroom level and at the broad level of parents/school community (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011, Wurf, 2012).

Whole school anti-bullying interventions are underpinned by strong school policies that ensure bullying incidents are managed by restorative approaches (Gregory et al., 2016; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012) and proportional, authoritative disciplinary consequences (Gaffney et al., 2019; Gerlinger & Wo, 2016; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Meta-analyses have highlighted that the fair, consistent enforcement of school rules and use of sanctions are key to school safety (Gregory et al., 2010). However, support that incorporates the teaching and reinforcement of pro-social behaviour and the promotion of respectful relationships has been found to be of equal value (Gerlinger & Wo, 2016). We therefore encourage school leaders and teachers to embrace strategies that have an empirical evidence base and to work with the wider parent body/school community in order to customise and sustain these interventions.

Strong policy represents an ideal starting point for addressing bullying in a systematic and evidence-informed manner. Broad policy consultation is vital to ensure all stakeholders have a voice in framing specific strategies and the restorative and disciplinary actions that address bullying (Smith et al., 2012). Consultation also raises awareness of bullying and informs curriculum and other routine and whole school-based preventative strategies. Transitions, including those at the beginning of the school year, are a time when bullying is known to increase (Espelage et al., 2015). Therefore, times of transition present an ideal opportunity to ensure the school community is informed

about the school's bullying policy and the preventative and disciplinary approaches that are used to address reports of bullying.

[To adapt and use this policy, delete or modify the text as indicated]

[INSERT name of school] Whole school anti-bullying policy

Rationale

Definitions of bullying commonly refer to repetitive actions (i.e., occurring more than once) that cause harm to others and involve a power imbalance such that a victim has difficulty defending themselves (Smith, 2016). Internationally, prevalence rates of bullying vary depending on the measures and definitions that are used. However, large scale self-report survey data continues to suggest that approximately 15 to 30% of school students report being bullied every few weeks or more often (Jadambaa et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2017; Skrzypiec et al., 2018). Of note, individual characteristics that set a student apart from the prevailing group are likely to increase the risk of bullying. However, social factors including minority cultural status, sexual/gender diversity, disability and religious diversity are strongly linked with increased bullying and warrant attention in school anti-bullying interventions (Smith et al., 2012).

School bullying has been found to emerge in the early years of primary school and tends to peak around 11–14 years. Whereas physical bullying declines as students' progress through school, relational, indirect and cyberbullying continues into the final years. Numerous studies have found that boys more often engage in physical bullying; however, gender differences in relational and indirect forms of bullying, such as exclusion, are more difficult to interpret. Females report cyberbullying during early to mid-adolescence, whereas males are more likely to experience higher levels of cyberbullying during late adolescence (Barlett & Coyne, 2014).

Adverse consequences of bullying have been widely reported in the literature. High-quality data from an Australian population-based study, for example, linked being bullied with markedly increased negative mental health outcomes including higher anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal behaviour (Ford et al., 2017). Given this, the need for systematic evidence-based interventions across school populations is imperative.

Purpose

This policy outlines how a whole school policy requires close collaboration between school leaders, teachers, other school staff, students and parents in order to monitor and prevent bullying. As outlined, extensive empirical evidence now supports the use of whole school approaches to manage bullying.

Scope

This policy applies to school leaders, teachers and students of **[INSERT name of school]**.

[INSERT specific roles and responsibilities of individuals or teams]

Policy statement

School management

[INSERT name of school] has adopted a positive behaviour program and has a clear mechanism for quickly advising parents of alleged instances of bullying that affect their child. The school's disciplinary policy specifies a proportionate range of sanctions for bullying including opportunities for restorative practices (Gregory et al., 2016; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Because peers and parents are more likely to be aware of bullying, and students are traditionally reluctant to inform their teachers/school authorities (Novick & Isaacs, 2010; Rigby & Bagshaw, 2003), we actively facilitate reporting by students and parents of alleged bullying occurring at **[INSERT name of school]**. Accordingly, we take action to investigate allegations of bullying.

Our school management ensures data to capture overall levels of self-reported bullying is collected via school surveys and is shared with the school community. In addition, professional learning opportunities that promote student engagement and wellbeing are supported by school administrators. School counsellors/psychologists are available at the school to support students and their families to peruse interventions to stop bullying.

[INSERT name of school] implements a whole school approach to build an inclusive, positive and supportive school culture.

Teachers

Teachers at **[INSERT name of school]** build positive relationships with students and their families. Together with the school leadership team, teachers communicate with families in a timely manner when their child is subject to the school's disciplinary procedures.

Teachers at **[INSERT name of school]** access published curriculum material and resources (including video material) that is designed to explicitly prevent school bullying from authoritative sources, and they deliver anti-bullying lessons in our classrooms (Farrington & Ttofi, 2010; Wurf, 2012). We use opportunities such as school assemblies and parent information evenings to raise awareness of bullying and to promote the school's initiatives to prevent and manage bullying.

Out of classroom supervision and the monitoring of playgrounds and hallways by teachers is undertaken at **[INSERT name of school]** because these are known places where bullying occurs and adult supervision is associated with

lower rates of bullying (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). An “on-duty” teacher is always available during school hours.

Students

Classroom behavioural expectations are negotiated with students and expectations make it clear that bullying is not permitted. Students are encouraged and taught to participate in cooperative, group work exercises. A peer support program is active at [INSERT name of school]. Students who provide peer support receive training in the school’s anti-bullying policy and the importance of bystander intervention to stop bullying (Polanin et al., 2012). This training includes role plays and opportunities to rehearse bystander pro-social behaviour.

Rating of evidence base

Figure 27.1. A Whole School Approach to Preventing and Managing Bullying Rating of Evidence.

Author Note. Olweus’ (1978) seminal work has inspired 40 years of empirical research into programs to prevent school bullying. Recently, Gaffney et al. (2019) synthesised results from robust studies including 45 randomised control trials (RCTs). Whole school anti-bullying programs significantly reduced prevalence rates when compared to control schools (OR = 1.309; 95% CI: 1.24–1.38; $z = 9.88$; $p < 0.001$). Significant RCT results have been reported from multiple jurisdictions including Asia, Australia, Europe and North America. Effective programs are long-term, intensive, address multiple levels of intervention and were implemented with a high degree of fidelity across all school years. Although whole school programs are easily embedded, sustained effort is required to ensure practices become routine. School bullying, on average, is reduced by 20–23% when whole school programs have been evaluated (e.g., Farrington & Ttofi, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 2011).

Authorship

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Related policy and documents

[INSERT RELEVANT POLICY AND DOCUMENTS]

Date of ratification

This policy was ratified on the [INSERT DATE].

Date of review

This policy will be reviewed by [INSERT DATE].

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