

Bullying and Youth Resiliency

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“Bullying is repeated aggression in which one or more persons demonstrate greater power, and an intent to harm, or disturb another” (Liston, 2012). In a nationally representative study of 6th- to 10th-grade US students, 13% were identified as bullies, 11% were identified as victims, and 6% as bully-victims (i.e., bullies who also get bullied by others) (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003, p. 1231). Bullying can be incredibly dangerous and is currently capturing the attention of media outlets, due to extreme physical violence in schools, and adolescent suicide. As parents and youth development professionals, it is our duty to work with our children, and the adolescents we serve, and teach them the negative effects bullying can have on themselves, and their peers, and where possible, implement antibullying programs for them to take part in.

Tyrone Donnon, of the University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, conducted a study investigating the function of the resiliency profile as a model for understanding why adolescents engage in bullying and acts of aggression, and how having developmental strengths (both extrinsic and intrinsic) reduces victimization (Donnon, 2010). Donnon described a youth’s resiliency profile as the combination of developmental and risk factors that enhance or impair a youth’s ability to be resilient. Using self-report questionnaires of 2,991 7th- to 12th-grade students from 7 schools in Canada, Donnon and his colleagues had students list how many of the 31 developmental assets they possessed on a 5-point scale (1=*strongly agree* to 5=*strongly disagree*), as well as how often they demonstrated certain at-risk behaviors (e.g. never, once, twice, 3-4 times, 5 or more times). Their findings showed a linear relationship between engagement in bullying and developmental strengths, for example, of students with the fewest

reports strengths (i.e., 0-5 developmental assets), approximately 60% of them reported bullying others 3 or more times per month (Donnon, 2010).

Donnon's study provided evidence that adolescents who have a higher resiliency profile (i.e. more developmental assets) are less likely to bully another person, as well as fall victim to bullying by their peers. In order to foster the necessary developmental assets in today's youth, teachers, parents, and youth development professionals must all work collaboratively on programs and interventions to increase the number of developmental strengths one is exposed to, and limit the number of risk factors. In addition, all antibullying programs implemented in schools and communities must be comprehensive and systemic in their approaches to promote a protective-protective model of resiliency, so the risk and outcome relationship decreases with each protective factor present (Donnon, 2010).

In order for youth to understand the effects of bullying, and to promote a healthy school culture, research shows that a multifaceted approach is more likely to succeed than single-component programs (Liston, 2012). Liston (2012) states that a comprehensive, school-wide Bullying Prevention and Response (BPR) program will contain all of the following features:

- **Identification:** Assesses how, what, and when bullying occurs and empowers all involved to identify what is and is not bullying, as well as if law enforcement should be notified.
- **Protocols:** Customized school-wide protocols for administration, teachers, students, staff, and community members to "report, remediate, and resolve" bullying incidents.
- **Prevention:** Comprehensive, on-going program that trains administration, teachers, students, staff, and community members to develop a culture of respect and caring, social-emotional skills, behavior management, awareness, advocacy for victims of

bullying, and intervention techniques. It is also important that the adults model these behaviors and discuss them with students.

- **Supervision/Intervention:** Adults must monitor students during school and school functions. These adults would be trained to intervene in a bullying incident.
- **Development:** When an incident occurs, the focus should not be on punishment but on student development aimed at both the bully and the victim. By using a developmental approach, it allows adults to teach students empathy, replace bullying with positive treatment of others, and develop individual strengths as a substitute source of identity and worth.
- **Evaluation:** Continuing assessment and modification that surveys staff, students, parents, and the community to develop program improvements and strategic planning.

When properly used, school-based antibullying programs can decrease bullying by 20 to 23 percent and decrease victimization by 17 to 20 percent (Ttofi & Farrington, 2012). Such programs also contribute to the reducing factors related to school violence, as well as promoting factors related to resilience (Taub & Pearrow, 2013).

Another way for parents and youth development professionals to combat the increase in bullying is to be aware of the school engagement, social adjustment, psychological distress, and social status of their children and youth they interact with. Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster (2003) found that bullies manifest the fewest number of adjustment problems, were psychologically stronger than students not involved in bullying, and enjoyed a higher social status among their classmates, whereas victims suffered not only emotional distress, but also felt like social outcasts because their classmates tended to avoid them. In addition to bullies and victims, bully-victims are the group that parents and professionals should be most concerned for. Bully-victims were

the most socially excluded, most likely to display conduct issues, least engaged in school, and they reported higher levels of depression and loneliness (Juvonen, et al., 2003). Since social status, among adolescents, is a strong predictor of positive self-esteem and well-being, often times youth who feel as though they are not “popular” tend to be more depressed and lonely than their peers, whereas bullies may have a higher social status (Liston, 2012), however often times that status is given based on fear (Juvonen, et al., 2003).

Other important information for parents and youth development professionals to be aware of is that bullying is most common in elementary school, but its violence becomes more severe with older children. Schoolyard research shows that 96% of bullying goes unobserved or unstopped by teachers, whereas peers interrupted bullying three times as often as teachers, and the bully often times stopped within 10 seconds if stopped by a peer (Liston, 2012). In addition, the impact of bullying is not felt by just the direct victim. Students who saw the incident often are deeply affected and show the same emotional reactions to trauma as the victim, they are often distracted from learning due to the images of bullying replaying in their minds or thoughts of its effect on the victim (Liston, 2012).

Adolescents are a very resilient group of individuals and it is up to parents and youth development professionals to foster their developmental assets and reduce the number of risk factors they are exposed to. If educators, parents, students, and members of the community all worked together to create comprehensive, antibullying programs, and use a strength-based approach, it would help promote the development of resiliency in the youth of our communities (Donnon & Hammond, 2007).

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