

Research in Brief: Anti-bullying programs in schools



Are anti-bullying programs in schools effective?

A recent systematic review found that anti-bullying programs in schools were effective in reducing bullying by 20% – 23%. Of the 44 international programs reviewed, 19 programs were effective in reducing bullying, including one from Canada.

This review also looked at what strategies were most effective. Anti-bullying programs that lasted longer, used a greater number of strategies and were aimed at children over 11 were more effective.

The most effective elements of an anti-bullying program that were associated with a decrease in bullying were: parent training/ meetings, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, classroom management, teacher training, classroom rules, whole-school anti-bullying policy, school conferences, information for parents, and cooperative group work.

What is a systematic review?

The purpose of a systematic review is to sum up the best available research on a specific question. This is done by bringing together the results of several studies. Studies included in a review are screened for quality, so that the findings of a large number of studies can be combined.

What did they do?

The researchers found 622 relevant articles published from 1983 to May 2009. They then reviewed these studies looking for studies that included all of the following: a program specifically on anti-bullying; in schools; involved kindergarten to grade 12 students, used a standard definition of bullying; measured outcomes, had a control group; possible to measure the size of the effectiveness of the program.

The researchers found 89 studies, describing 53 different program evaluations. But only 44 studies provided enough data to calculate the size of the effectiveness of the program.

Using these 44 studies, researchers calculated the size of the effectiveness of the programs and related this to the strategies of the program. Researchers of the individual studies were

Why does this matter?

- ⇒ School bullying has serious short-term and long-term effects on children's physical and mental health.
- ⇒ This review found that certain types of anti-bullying programs were more effective than others.
- ⇒ From an extensive list of possible strategies, this review identified the most effective strategies .
- ⇒ Anti-bullying programs that lasted longer, used a greater number of strategies and were aimed at children over 11 were more effective.



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Anti-bullying programs in schools

contacted to verify the results.

What did they learn?

This systematic review found that overall these anti-bullying programs in schools were effective. The researchers found that these programs reduced bullying by 20% – 23%.

The most effective elements of an anti-bullying program that reduced bullying were: improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, classroom management, classroom rules, cooperative group work, school conferences, whole-school anti-bullying policy, teacher training, information for parents and parent training/meetings.

Disciplinary methods included both punitive and non punitive methods. About 1/2 the schools used punitive methods and the other have non punitive measures

Classroom rules refers to the use of rules that students were expected to follow. Rules were often written and displayed in the classroom. Often, the rules were a result of cooperative group work between teachers and students.

Classroom management refers to techniques for detecting and dealing with bullying behaviour.

School conferences are school assemblies where students are informed about bullying. They were often used as an initial step to introduce the program to the students and introduce the students to bullying.

Providing support for teachers was also an effective strategy. Supporting teacher with information about classroom management, development of classroom rules, disciplinary methods and specific teacher training sessions proved effective.

Information for parents and parent training/meetings included newsletters, guides and information on the anti bullying program offered in the school. These findings suggest that parents should be engaged with the issue of school bullying through educational

presentations and teacher-parent meetings.

In addition, programs that used more strategies, and lasted longer and were aimed at older children were more effective.

Programs aimed at children over 11 were better at decreasing bullying. Many of the anti-bullying programs are based on encouraging and rewarding social behaviour and discouraging and punishing bullying. These programs are likely to work better in building empathy and perspective-taking skills with older students.

Some strategies actually increased being bullied. Programs that expected students to manage bullying on their own, without adult direction or leadership, caused an increase in being bullied. As well, programs targeting only students who cause bullying increased the bullying behaviours.

The researchers recommended that anti-bullying programs should use the key program elements and evaluation components that were found to be most effective.

A previous systematic review showed anti-bullying programs were not effective. This new review was more extensive. It included a greater number of studies, from a greater number of countries and used more extensive research analysis to calculate the effectiveness of the programs. This new review did find that anti-bully programs could be effective.

This brief summary was prepared from:

David P Farrington, Maria M Tfofi; (2009) School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization, Campbell Systematic Reviews 6

Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.