

This resource is tailored for Elected Officials as a guide to the StopBullying.gov training module.

For more information on bullying prevention, including the definition, statistics, best practices, and common myths or misdirections, please consult the StopBullying.gov training module at www.stopbullying.gov/communityguide.

Understanding the Roles of Elected Officials in Community-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts

What is known about bullying and how it relates to elected officials and civic leaders?

Bullying affects a large number of students and may have a serious impact on those who are involved. Although everyone shares the responsibility of making our communities friendly, safe, and desirable places to live, our civic leaders and elected officials often steer these important efforts in meaningful ways. Elected officials bring a blend of influence, capacity, and resources that are unmatched by other stakeholders when planning or supporting community-wide strategies to prevent bullying. Bullying prevention fits the priorities of municipal, county, and state governments in many ways. For example:

- **Community safety and crime prevention.** Children who are bullied and many who witness bullying report feeling unsafe. In addition, children who bully are also more likely to be involved in later crimes (Farrington, Lösel, Ttofi, & Therodorakis, 2012). One study found that boys who bullied in middle school were four times as likely to have three or more criminal convictions by the age of 24 (Olweus, 1993). Some bullying behavior is also criminal. For example, bullying can involve assault and battery, destruction of property, and theft.
- **Health promotion.** Bullying is widespread. Children report bullying across age, race, and ethnic groups and in urban, suburban, and rural areas. In 2011, 28% of students aged 12-18 were bullied at school and 9% were cyberbullied anywhere (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013). Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than those who are not bullied to have symptoms of depression, harm themselves, and have high levels of suicidal thoughts (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010; Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schoenfeld, & Gould, 2008; Reijntjes, Kamphuis, Prinzie, & Telch, 2010).

- **Positive youth development.** Involvement in bullying may hinder positive youth development. Children who are bullied are more likely to withdraw from school and community activities. Those who bully others are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviors, dislike school, drop out of school, bring weapons to school, think of suicide and attempt suicide, drink alcohol and smoke, and hold beliefs that support violence (Cook et al., 2010; Klomek et al., 2008; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Therefore, by instituting comprehensive bullying prevention and response efforts in their communities, elected officials can also bring about significant cost savings through reduced social spending.

Elected Officials' Unique Roles in Addressing Bullying

How can elected officials help to prevent bullying?

Elected officials and community leaders know how to bring the power of their office and the resources of their staff to prioritize issues and address community concerns. They can use their skills, position, and resources to develop community-wide prevention and response strategies by:

- **Prioritizing bullying prevention as a community concern.** Local- and state-level policymakers are aware of the harmful effects of bullying, harassment, and cyberbullying, but tighter budgets and limited funds often present significant challenges for response. Since 1999, most states have enacted laws requiring that schools adopt anti-bullying policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Community leaders can leverage existing relationships to inform the community about issues of bullying and champion the development of sound policies at the local level, including efforts to assess the nature and extent of bullying within the community and spearhead low- or no-cost prevention strategies that work.
- **Convening/leading a community-wide effort to address bullying.** City, county, and community leaders with expertise in youth violence prevention should consider adapting their proven planning strategies to address bullying behaviors. The Social Development Research Group's *Communities that Care* provides helpful information on how to get started with a community-wide initiative that has been shown to reduce substance use, delinquency, and youth violence. Researchers credit the model's success to these broad strategies:
 - Assessing local capacities in coalition-building.
 - Forming diverse, broad-based coalitions that are multi-sector.
 - Surveying youth to assess their risks, protective factors, and problem behaviors.
 - Using data to inform coalition decisions on priorities and the selection of scientifically tested and effective prevention programs.
 - Supporting program implementation to ensure fidelity, and monitoring the results for continuous improvement and measures of impact (Fagan, Hanson, Briney, & Hawkins, 2011).

- **Finding funds for low- or no-cost bullying prevention efforts.** Community leaders, armed with facts on the extent and severity of bullying locally, may be persuasive advocates for public financial support to address bullying. They are also well-positioned to draw upon federal and state funding that may ensure youth safety and development. Several federal agencies provide financial support for bullying prevention, which can be accessed at www.grants.gov. In addition, several states that have anti-bullying laws allow their departments of education to offer funding to public schools that train their staff in addressing bullying. For example, Colorado created the *Colorado Trust* to support youth programs about bullying and violence prevention.

Challenges and Opportunities for Elected Officials

Leading a community-change process of bullying prevention requires skill to build, equip, and sustain a coalition. In guiding this process, elected officials and their staff can expect to face some common challenges, including organizational resistance or limited coalition capacities (Fagan et al., 2011).

- **Organizational resistance.** The receptiveness of organizations and program managers to collaborate in a community effort to prevent bullying can be difficult to assess. City mayors and county commissioners often experience resistance from public managers when asked to re-define spending priorities within a tight budget. Collaboration between public and private partners takes time and evolves within trusting and respectful relationships. Elected officials may need to bring cross-cutting ideas to the coalition's first task of setting goals that are reasonable and mutually acceptable.
- **Limited coalition capacity.** Consistent leadership is needed to assist during periods of transition to strengthen the coalition's capacity to ensure the goal of bullying prevention is met.

Despite these challenges and limitations, launching a community-wide bullying prevention effort can present a significant leadership opportunity for elected officials. The *Landscape Assessment Guide* in the Community Action Toolkit can be a helpful resource for getting started.

How Elected Officials Can Engage and Include Others in Community Bullying Prevention Strategies

An effective method used by elected officials and community leaders exploring solutions to wide-spread community problems has been to leverage and pool existing funds and resources across sectors. For example, community-wide coalitions staffed by governmental officials and community volunteers may garner staff expertise and financial contributions from relevant sectors, such as urban and regional planning, human services, crime prevention, community mental health, public health, parks and recreation, youth development, and community schools.

A growing trend is to convene city- and state-level taskforces of key stakeholders, under the auspices of the mayor or governor, for intense study of difficult problems experienced by children and youth. By leveraging city, county, and community resources, the taskforces have historically become standing committees of youth advisors and professionals to provide oversight on needed system changes in the delivery of youth services (Bosland & Karpman, 2009).

Ideas for Next Steps

- Learn more about bullying prevention through StopBullying.gov and the resources listed below. Review the research presented in the training modules and how it is best communicated among motivated audiences.
- Consult the [Community Action Toolkit](#) and perform a landscape assessment that will help identify relevant data, as well as the broader needs and opportunities within the community. Use this as a starting point for building out a strategic plan with the action planning matrix included in the toolkit.
- Plan a bullying prevention event that will inform and train a broader network of staff, volunteers, youth, or other members of the community to help dispel common myths and misdirections. This will also shed light on the importance of a holistic, community-based effort.

Resources and References

Sample of Resources Available

Colorado Trust – Colorado created the Colorado Trust to support the health and well-being of Coloradans. Their bullying prevention initiative endowed 45 grantees across 40 Colorado counties with the funding and ability to help schools and community-based organizations prevent bullying and bullying-related behaviors. For more information, visit www.coloradotrust.org.

Howard County’s “community-based approach to bullying” – A recent initiative in Howard County, Maryland aims to address issues of bullying in their community through a county-led effort campaign for tolerance. Go to the [StopBullying.gov blog](#) for more information.

National League of Cities – This organization highlights initiatives for municipal leadership for children and families in cities nationwide. For more information, visit www.nlc.org.

Social Development Research Group’s Communities that Care (CTC) – CTC is a coalition-based community prevention system that uses a public health approach to prevent youth problem behaviors such as bullying. All CTC training materials are available for download free of charge, and the program provides concrete methods for action within the community. For more information, visit www.sdr.org.

References

- Bosland, J. & Karpman, M.** (2009). *The State of city leadership for children and families*. National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families: Washington, DC. Retrieved from www.nlc.org/iyef
- Cook, C. R., Williams, K. R., Guerra, N. G., Kim, T. E., & Sadek, S.** (2010). Predictors of bullying and victimization in childhood and adolescence: A meta-analytic investigation. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 25, 65-83.
- Fagan, A. A., Hanson, K., Briney, J. S. & Hawkins, J. D.** (2011). Sustaining the utilization and high quality implementation of tested and effective prevention programs using the Communities That Care prevention system. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49, 365-377.
- Farrington, D. P., Lösel, F., Ttofi, M. M., & Theodorakis, N.** (2012). School bullying, depression and offending behavior later in life: An updated systematic review of longitudinal studies. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. Retrieved from www.bra.se/download/18.1ff479c3135e8540b29800014815/2012_Bullying_perpetration_webb.pdf
- Klomek, A. B., Marrocco, F., Kleinman, M., Schonfeld, I. S., & Gould, M. S.** (2008). *Peer victimization, depression, and suicidality in adolescents*. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 28, 166-180.
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M. D., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P.** (2001). Bullying behavior among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, 2094-2100.
- Olweus, D.** (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Reijntjes, A., Kamphuis, J. H., Prinzie, P., & Telch, M. J.** (2010). Peer victimization and internalizing problems in children: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34, 244-252.
- Robers, S., Kemp, J., Truman, J., & Snyder, T. D.** (2013). *Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2012*. Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013036.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education** (2011). *Analysis of state bullying laws and policies*. Retrieved from www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oepdp/pps/index.html