Bullying and Negative Outcomes: Promising Prevention Practices

Presented by:
Dr. Scott Poland

October 2016
Welcome

- Presentation will be recorded
- A copy of the recording will be sent after the presentation
- Attendees are in listen-only mode
- Please submit questions on the right side of your screen
- Connect with us!

@kognito

#kognitowebinars
Today’s Presenter

Dr. Scott Poland
Co-Director of the Suicide and Violence Prevention Office
Nova Southeastern University
spoland@nova.edu
Reality of Bullying

Bullying Facts from U.S. Department of Education Website:

- Bullying peaks in middle childhood
- Studies show 15 to 25% of students are being bullied with some frequency
- Most common forms are being made fun of, being the subject of rumors, being pushed, shoved, kicked, tripped or spit on
- Only 1/3 of the victims told an adult
Bullies

- Seek out children who are younger, smaller or weaker
- Harshly punitive home environments can foster bullying
- May have troubled relationships with parents and have little trust in others
- Are often untroubled by anxiety and view themselves positively
- Can be popular as they are socially dominant but their peers really do not like them
Myths About Bullying

• Bullies seek power because they are powerless—they are very calculating and often get what they want
• Bullies were themselves previously abused—long term studies show that children who have been abused are most likely to be the victim
• Bullying is a problem only for schools to solve—it’s a societal problem
• When bullied it is best to fight back—social assertiveness is better and the best is to walk away and tell an adult
• Bullies outgrow bullying—many carry their pattern of aggression into adulthood
Would this student be bullied in a middle school?

- Has an extensive psychological history
- Walks funny and speaks with a lisp
- Has a bad skin condition on his face
- Described as pale and frail
- Identifies as gay
- Identifies as Buddhist
Importance of Building Relationships and Connections

• My Fourth R article and school experience in understanding the importance of building relationships between students and school staff
• Research on bullying prevention is still developing and there is inconsistency in the definition of bullying
• We know that positive interactions and good relationships between staff and students can significantly reduce bullying (*U.S. Department of Education*)
• Summary of most recent Congressional testimony
Definition of Bullying

- Bullying occurs when a person is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons (Olweus).
- It is about power and is nasty and humiliating.
- It is victimization not conflict!
- Today it includes cyberbullying which is especially challenging for parents and schools.
- All school staff must be trained and engaged in bullying prevention.
Cyberbullying

• Messages can be posted anonymously 24 hours a day and can reach students even when alone
• Messages can be very difficult to trace and to delete
• Messages and posts may be especially nasty and may be viewed and commented on by many others
• Schools need internet citizenship presentations and prompt investigation of cyberbullying as it effects learning
• Parents need to have discussions with their child and close supervision of internet activities
Bullying Facts

1. Bullied children are more likely to be anxious or depressed and more likely to take their own lives.
2. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 24 years old and suicide rates have increased the fastest for those aged 10 to 14.
3. The U.S. Secret Service Study of Targeted School Violence found that 2/3 of school shooters were the victims of bullying and that 2/3 were suicidal.
4. All states have bullying prevention legislation.
Raising Awareness of School Staff

- School wide buy in and training first for all staff is essential and a suggested program to show to faculty is the free documentary Bullied
- Bullied which is the story of Jamie Nabozny the first student to ever successfully sue his school for failing to protect him from bullying
- The documentary Bullied is available from the Southern Poverty law Center at www.splcenter.org
How Can School Staff Help a Student Who Is Bullying Others?

• Let them know consequences are inevitable, consistent, and non-hostile and escalate in severity
• Hold them accountable and confront the excuses they make for their behavior
• Let them know that school staff will be watching for further bullying behavior
• Assess possible reasons for their behavior
How Can School Staff Help a Student Who Is Bullying Others?

- Contact and conference with their parents
- Consider referral for mental health treatment
- Help them to develop empathy
- Encourage involvement in pro-social activities
- Reward them for appropriate behavior towards others
Bystanders: Key Role

• Present 80% of the time
• Can intervene to stop bullying
• Can encourage it or view it passively
• Literature has found bystanders reported anxiety and insecurity as a result of witnessing bullying
• The term witness has been recommended instead of bystander
• Research has found programs that specifically targeted bystander attitudes and behavior were the most effective
Why Don’t Bystanders Get Involved?

• Not sure of what to do.
• They are afraid of retaliation.
• They are afraid that they will become ostracized by their existing friends or social group.
• They are concerned they might do the wrong thing and make the situation worse.
• They think adults won’t help.
• “It is the bystanders that must have the courage to say something and step forward to stop bullying” Bill Modzeleski, U.S.D.O.E.
What Should School Staff Do if They Hear or See Bullying?

- Take immediate action and stand between bully and the victim
- Support the victim but without questioning them in front of others
- Provide additional support for the victim privately
- Let all students know that bullying behavior is not acceptable and include bystanders in the conversation about how to intervene next time
- Provide immediate consequences for the bully or refer them to the appropriate personnel
What Should School Staff Do if They Hear or See Bullying?

- Do not require students to meet and work things out
- Share information with other staff about the incident
- Let the bully know that you and other staff will be watching them closely
- Let the victim know the next steps that will be taken and urge them to report any further incidents
Student Involvement and Commitment is the Key

- Student survey input needed to determine the extent of the problem but surveys often are met with resistance
- Hold student meetings and create task forces
- Train all students and then gain a commitment through pledges
- Utilizing the arts through drama and music to create awareness and prevention programs
- Creating a means for anonymous reporting
What if My Child is Being Bullied?

• Take it seriously and do not ignore it or blame your child
• Listen carefully and learn as much as you can about the bullying incidents
• Empathize and let them know the bullying is wrong
• Ask your child what will help
• Do not encourage physical retaliation
• Step back and consider your emotions and options carefully
• Do not contact the parents of the bully as that may make the situation worse
Who Should I Contact if My Child is Being Bullied at School?

- Contact your child’s teacher as bullying often does not stop without adult intervention
- Ask the teacher to alert other school staff to the problem
- If you are not comfortable with the teacher’s response make an appointment with the principal
- Commit to making the bullying stop and to talking regularly with your child and the school staff
How Can My Child Become More Resistant to Bullying?

- Help develop their talents and positive attributes and areas/activities where they are successful—find their niche!
- Encourage your child to build friendships
- Teach your child safety strategies and how to seek adult help
- Make sure your home is a safe and loving environment where they feel sheltered
- Be alert for signs of cyberbullying
- Maintain open communication with your child and create times when your child will truly talk to you
SPRC Brief: Suicide and Bullying

- Both victims and perpetrators are at higher risk than peers
- Personal characteristics such as internalizing problems; low self-esteem; and low assertiveness increase the risk of being bullied and these factors are also associated with risk for suicide
- Children most at risk for suicide are also at risk for being bullied
- It is difficult to control all the risk factors to determine if being bullied was a proximal cause to a youth suicide
Bullying and Suicide Prevention: Common Strategies

- School environment is the key
- Family outreach when necessary
- Education of parents about warning signs and importance of their involvement
- Building relationships with all students
- Identification of students and families in need of services and obtaining services for them
Best Practices: Final Thoughts

• School wide program where all staff engage and cooperate towards common goal
• Increase staff supervision in areas where bullying occurs the most
• Take immediate action to stop bullying when it occurs
• Provide consequences for bullies
• Provide support for victims
• Engage students in bullying prevention
• Do not hesitate to ask a victim of bullying about hopelessness and suicidal thoughts
Bullying and Negative Outcomes: Promising Prevention Practices

Resources

- www.stopbullying.gov
- www.nova.edu/suicideprevention
- www.splcenter.org
Q&A

Dr. Scott Poland
Co-Director of the Suicide and Violence Prevention Office
Nova Southeastern University
spoland@nova.edu