Locations: Transforming Schools from Bully-Havens to Safe Havens

Bullies are opportunistic, preying upon students whom they perceive as weak. Bullying cannot take place, though, unless the bully has a setting or location in which he or she is able to exploit and hurt the victim. The far corner of a classroom, a deserted hallway, the bathroom: these are all locations in which bullying may happen. Places where bullying is common are frequently deserted or poorly supervised.

The good news, though, is that when adults are present to supervise a particular setting, intervene quickly when they witness bullying behavior, and provide fair and appropriate consequences to the bully for his or her misbehavior, the rate of bullying in that setting will plummet. A teacher can work with other school staff to put locations off-limits to bullies by first identifying where bullying most often occurs in the school and then providing increased levels of trained adult supervision in those settings.

Uncover Bullying 'Hot Spots' in the School & Community. Crime analysts note that a small handful of locations in the community often serve 'magnets' for crime, with multiple criminal incidents reported to police (Schmerler et al., 1998). In schools, too, just a few locations tend to be the site of many incidents of bullying. Often, these locations are poorly supervised. When schools identify locations where bullying typically happens, they can take steps to make these places less attractive to bullies. Ideas that teachers can use to discover bullying locations in and around a school are to:

- Go on a school walking tour with your class. Ask students to identify 'safe' and 'unsafe' areas of the school, the times of day these areas are most safe or least safe, and the reasons that they are safe or unsafe. Record student comments. Or hand out maps of the school's interior and ask students to color in red those places that are least safe and in blue those places that are the most safe. (Also, consider asking other teachers to perform similar activities with their classes and compare your results with theirs to see if shared or dissimilar patterns are found.) Share these results with other members of your teaching team and your principal.

- Give students street maps of the neighborhood surrounding your school. (To make them easier for students to interpret, clearly mark well-known landmarks such as stores or fast-food restaurants on the maps.) Ask the class to identify any locations in the neighborhood where bullying or other unsafe behavior tends to happen and to mark these locations on the map. Also, ask class members to identify places in the neighborhood that tend to be *more safe* and to mark those on the map as well. When the students share the results of the activity with you, record their comments regarding both the unsafe and safe locations. Share these results with other members of your teaching team and your principal.

  NOTE: You may also want to share the information that you collect on unsafe neighborhood locations with your School Resource Officer or a representative from your local police

department. Invite him or her to visit your classroom to give your students tips on how to stay safe when transiting to or from school.

Put Strategies in Place to Make Locations Less Attractive to Bullies. After you have identified locations in and around your school where bullying tends to occur, you can take simple but effective steps to make these locations less 'friendly' to bullies. Among strategies to consider are to:

- Perhaps the most effective way to decrease bullying is to increase the level of adult surveillance in hallways, stairwells, and other settings where bullying is frequently reported—and during the time(s) when it is most likely to happen. You may also choose to enlist older, trusted students to monitor identified locations. Adult and student monitors should receive training about what bullying behaviors to look for and how to intervene effectively with bullies.

- Help hallway, lunchroom, and playground monitors to learn the names of students (e.g., by inviting them into classrooms at the start of the school year to be introduced to students). Adults can intervene much more effectively in bullying situations when they know the names of the children involved and their assigned classrooms.

- Separate older and younger students when they are in less-supervised settings (e.g., playground) to prevent older children from victimizing younger ones.

- Train non-instructional staff (e.g., lunchroom aides) to intervene promptly when they see bullying, or suspected bullying, occurring in their areas. Work with these staff to design a list of specific intervention strategies that are likely to be effective (e.g., set up a 'time-out' table in the cafeteria; after one warning, a student who bullies is sent to that table for a 5-minute timeout).

- Increase the 'natural surveillance' of areas of the school (e.g., hallways) that are unsupervised for long periods of time by moving some whole-class or small-group activities to these locations. For example, students can complete a learning activity on the metric system by measuring the length of a hallway in meters. As public traffic moves more frequently (and unpredictably) through a previously deserted area, bullies will find fewer opportunities to pick on potential victims.

- Change your classroom layout or rearrange seating to eliminate any 'blind spots' where bullies can victimize students outside of your view. Circulate frequently throughout the classroom so that you can monitor student conversations and behavior.

- Have classrooms 'adopt' stretches of public space in your school (e.g., hallways) by agreeing to help keep that space clean and to put up posters that provide positive anti-bully messages (e.g., welcoming visitors, reminding students of appropriate behaviors, giving pointers on how to respond assertively to a bully). When a classroom asserts ownership over a public space, this action conveys the impression that the space is cared for and watched over, serving as a kind of extension to the classroom itself. As the public

space ceases to be anonymous and impersonal, bullies no longer have the assurance that they can operate in that location unseen and unnoticed.

References

Batsche, G.M., & Knoff, H.M. (1994). Bullies and their victims: Understanding a pervasive problem in the schools. *School Psychology Review, 22,* 165-174.

Doll, B. (1996). Children without friends: Implications for practice and policy. *School Psychology Review, 25,* 165-183.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying in school: What we know and what we can do.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Schmerler, K., Perkins, M., Phillips, S., Rinehart, T., & Townsend, M.. (1998)*. COPS problem-solving tips: A guide to reducing crime and disorder through problem-solving relationships*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Snell, J.L., MacKenzie, E.P., & Frey, K.S. (2002). Bullying prevention in elementary schools: The importance of adult leadership, peer group support, and student social-emotional skills. In M.A. Shinn, H.M. Walker, & G.Stoner (Eds.) *Interventions for academic and behavior problems: Preventive and remedial approaches*. (2nd ed., pp.351-372). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

US Department of Education (1998). *Preventing bullying: A manual for schools and communities*. Retrieved 3 April 2003 from: http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/ssp/bullymanual.htm

Recommended Bully Prevention Programs

No Bullying. From not-for-profit Hazelden.
Visit the main Hazelden site at: http://www.hazelden.org/
Go to the Hazelden online bookstore to locate No Bullying teacher manuals, etc.:
http://www.hazeldenbookplace.org/

Steps to Respect: A Bully Prevention Program. For information, visit the Committee for Children website at: http://www.cfchildren.org