

COMMON QUESTIONS & MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT BULLYING PREVENTION

Often, students are vulnerable to bullying because they lack social skills. If we give the targeted students social skills training, would this make them less likely to be targets for bullying? It is true that students with poor social skills are often targeted in bullying, but it does not follow that providing these students with social skills training will end their torment, or stop the bullying. Any student who needs social skills training should receive it, but providing social skills training as a response to a bullying situation implies that the targeted student is to blame for the bullying, and fails to correct the bullying behavior itself.

Mediation and Conflict Resolution are excellent programs; can we apply these to address bullying situations? The short answer is “no.” Mediation and conflict resolution are excellent programs for situations involving mutual conflict, in which both parties to the conflict have concessions to make or differences to resolve. In a bullying situation, asking a targeted student to face their tormentor and either acknowledge hurt, request cessation, or make concessions, is tantamount to re-victimizing the student and could lead to retaliation or renewed abuse on the part of the offender. Many targeted students, once placed in this untenable and extremely uncomfortable position, will avoid reporting future abuse. Training in conflict resolution and other social skills does, however, have a role to play in the prevention of bullying behavior.

There are a number of anti-bullying programs on the market; our district is planning to purchase one of these programs. Please examine the program to see whether it is a comprehensive anti-bullying program. There are a number of excellent curricula available that can fulfill the student educational component of your anti-bullying program, but although these curricula are often referred to as “programs,” they are *not* comprehensive bullying prevention programs. Review the components of a comprehensive anti-bullying program, and if you choose to purchase a curriculum or any product advertised as a “bullying prevention program,” make sure that you know what additional components you might need to provide to constitute a comprehensive program for your school.

We have had several very good (and expensive) student assemblies; is this our anti-bullying program? No. Student assemblies can be an important technique for raising awareness, generating motivation, encouraging buy-in, and marking the beginning of a school climate change, but student assemblies do not constitute a comprehensive bullying prevention program. If student assemblies are not embedded in a context of on-going curricular, structural, and cultural changes, then any effect of the assemblies will be short-lived.

How do I know if a program is “evidence-based”? If you are purchasing a program, check reputable sources online to investigate the program. If claims are made that the program is “evidence-based,” make sure that the evidence pertains to bullying prevention, and not a different outcome. Use caution, and be aware that the term “evidence-based” has become somewhat of a misunderstood buzzword; evidence varies in quality, and claims to an “evidence basis” can provide a false appearance of objectivity and a false promise of effectiveness. If you are looking for professional development, you want to find a provider whose training is *research-based*, and consistent with the best contemporary practices in bullying prevention.

Funding is limited; can we provide professional development training in-house to our own staff? Quality professional development training is a very important component in an anti-bullying program; if your staff are not informed, motivated, and consistent in their responses to bullying and efforts to create a positive school environment, then all other efforts might be wasted. Professional development training is not the area in which corners should be cut if you are not confident about in-house expertise. Make sure that your professional development training is provided by a competent professional with expertise in bullying prevention and response techniques. Weigh the costs of training against the value of your students’ safety, and take into consideration the possibility that students who are harmed by bullying might file lawsuits.

How can we tell if a program is legitimate? Look at the “Components of a School-Wide Anti-Bullying Program” document. Beware of programs that focus on changing or fixing the target of bullying; look for programs that focus on altering the offending behavior and creating a positive school climate that discourages bullying.

How do we find a competent professional development provider? Beware of “quick fixes,” easy solutions, and approaches that focus on “fixing” the targeted student by providing the target with self-esteem, assertiveness, or confidence training. Beware of “resilience” training and “coaching.” A competent professional development provider will have extensive knowledge of both the psychological and sociological aspects of bullying and bullying prevention, familiarity with relevant laws, a working knowledge of school organizational structures and procedures, and an understanding of specific populations that are likely to be targeted by bullying.



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