

**Bullying Victimization and Bullycide: Implications for School Safety**

Dr. Scott Poland  
Nova Southeastern University

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**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

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**New Term Bullycide**

- Parents believe that schools failure to stop the bullying greatly contributed to their child's depression and suicide is a foreseeable consequence of the school's failure to identify and constrain bullies from victimization.
- *Jasperson v. Anoka-Hennepin MN State Appeals* Court found the suicide of an 8<sup>th</sup> grader was not foreseeable to school personnel. School personnel did not know the student continued to be victimized and that his failing grades were due to fear. There was no causal connection between the conduct of school personnel and the tragic suicide. All school personnel acted within their discretion without malice and were entitled to official immunity.

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**My Most Recent Congressional Testimony**

- Strengthening School Safety and Prevention of Bullying
- House Education and Labor Joint Subcommittee on July 8, 2009
- Focus of my testimony
- Other witnesses: Ms. Walker, Parent, Student President of S.A.V.E., Ken Trump, School Security

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**Importance of Building Relationships and Connections**

- The Fourth R article
- Research on bullying prevention is still developing
- We know that positive interactions and good relationships between staff and students can significantly reduce bullying
- Creating connections is a critical element (*U.S. Department of Education Website*)
- Maslow's Hierarchy
- Principal letter to parents example
- One example, Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. ROPES Program

➤ Adventure based program and more information at [www.pa.org](http://www.pa.org)

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**Parental Involvement is Preventative**

- Children want adults involved in their lives (letter example)
- Many tragedies can be prevented
- Examples of questionable parental practices
- Where is the "Full Value Meal"?
- Parenting more challenging as children are exposed to more violence and more advanced technology than ever before
- There is something dangerous and largely unguarded in almost every home!

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### 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 victimization not conflict!
- All school staff must be trained
- One example Bus Driver Training (key components)

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### Quotes From School Shooter, Evan Ramsey

- "I got stuff thrown at me. I got spit on. I got beat up. Sometimes I fought back but I was not good at fighting."
- "After a while the principal told me to just start ignoring everybody. But then you can't take it anymore."
- "I felt a sense of power with a gun. It was the only way to get rid of anger."
- "I would have a different life if I hadn't been treated like that."

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### Bullying Facts

- Bullied children are more likely to be anxious or depressed and more likely to take their own lives.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds and the fourth for those aged 10 to 14.

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**2009 YRBSS Results**

- Surveyed 15,000 H.S students and in the last year
- 26.1 % reported being sad or hopeless
- 10.9% made a suicide plan
- 6.3% made an attempt

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**Schools and Suicide Prevention**

- It is everyone's responsibility and the vast majority of suicides can be prevented
- Know the warning signs and the importance of working with a team to get help for a suicidal student
- Separate facts from misperceptions about suicide
- Link with community resources and agencies

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**Schools and Suicide Prevention**

- Provide annual training for school staff on the warning signs and the importance of not keeping a secret about suicidal behavior
- Provide presentations for parents on safeguarding their children and the warning signs of suicide
- Investigate depression screening programs
- Create a prevention task force and involve the community
- Designate/develop a suicide prevention expert

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**American Association of Suicidology: School Suicide Prevention Accreditation Program**

- Designed for support and mental health professionals
- Become your school/community authority
- Know best/evidence based practices
- Reading list and sample exam provided
- Includes membership and ongoing support

➤ For more information, please visit [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

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**GLBT Issues**

- Higher rates for youth not due to identity but unique complications “nothing inherently suicidal about same sex orientation”
- Research has spotlighted greater risk of suicide compared to peers
- External factors: conflict, harassment, being bullied, abuse, rejection, lack of support
- Advocacy for GLBT population in school often met with resistance

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**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

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**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 for others
- Encourage involvement in prosocial activities
- Reward them for appropriate behavior towards others

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**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.

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**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

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### 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

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### Key Points for Schools

- The attitude of school staff are the key to reducing bullying.
- Importance of building relationships.
- It is not about the bully! It is about the school climate!
- Be familiar with resiliency research
- Resiliency is learned and students “bounce back” when surrounded by loving family and friends, when they remain optimistic about their future, utilize problem solving skills and vent strong emotions

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### School Safety Examples



- Create task force and include students
- Use student safety/bullying prevention pledges
- Floor plan exercise
- Survey students

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Safety is an inside job that most of all involves a commitment from the student body!

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### 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

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### What if My Child is Bullying Others?

- Take it seriously and let them know it will not be tolerated
- Develop clear and consistent rules for your child's behavior
- Spend time with them and increase your supervision
- Build on their strengths
- Share information with adults and get help

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**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

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**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 interventions
- 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

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**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 cyber bullying
- Maintain open communication with your child and create times when your child will truly talk to you

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**Protective Factors**  
Source: *World Health Association*

- Family cohesion and stability
- Coping and problem solving skills
- Positive self worth and impulse control
- Positive connections to school and extracurricular participation
- Successful academically

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**Protective Factors**

- Good relationships with other youth
- Seeks adult help when needed
- Lack of access to suicidal means
- Access to mental health care
- Religiosity

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**Best Practices: Final Thoughts**

- Hold parent meetings and provide training
- 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
- Know Carnegie Foundation Recommendations for Children and Success

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## Federal Anti-bullying Program

- Take A Stand Lend A Hand: Stop Bullying
- [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp)
- [www.bullyinginfo.org](http://www.bullyinginfo.org)

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## Contact Information

- Email: [spoland@nova.edu](mailto:spoland@nova.edu)
- Website: [www.scottpoland.com](http://www.scottpoland.com)
- Articles posted: [www.districtadministration.com](http://www.districtadministration.com)

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