

School-based Interventions to Prevent Aggression and Bullying and Promote Positive Social-Emotional Skill Development

Statement of Problem

Exposure to peer aggression and bullying is a serious public health concern. Peer aggression is intentional, mean behavior directed at a peer, while peer bullying is a subset of aggressive behavior in which the aggression has occurred repeatedly and within the context of a real or perceived power imbalance between the bully and the victim.

Involvement in these behaviors—either as a perpetrator or a victim—is linked to significant developmental challenges, including extensive peer difficulties, reduced academic success, and higher drug use. Bullying victims have higher rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts, and notably, bystanders who are witnesses to aggression and bullying experience increased reports of anxiety, depression and trauma.

To reduce these problematic behaviors, multi-tiered systems of support are crucial. Interventions should address different 'levels' of support within a school, such as training for all school staff, classroom anti-bullying and social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula, and targeted small-group interventions for children who use bullying behaviors.

Description

Tracy Waasdorp, Ph.D., and **Brooke Paskewich, Psy.D.**, direct the research and implementation, respectively, of a portfolio of school-based programs to improve SEL and prevent and reduce aggression and bullying among students. This line of research has been ongoing since the early 2000s in collaboration with Dr. Stephen Leff.

Our Current [Programs](#):

Friend to Friend (F2F; students in grades 3-5): This is a tier II targeted small-group program focused on emotion regulation and social problem-solving strategies for children at greater risk for aggressive behaviors.

Preventing Aggression in Schools Everyday: Friendship Voyagers (PRAISE Voyagers; students in grades 3-5): This is a tier I universal, classroom-based program focused on bullying and aggression prevention in children for later elementary-aged students.

PRAISE: Friendship Explorers (PRAISE Explorers; students in grades 1 and 2): This is a newly developed tier I universal, classroom-based program that provides foundational anti-aggression/bullying and social and emotional skills for having and maintaining positive friendships for early elementary-aged students.

Bullying Classroom Check-Up (BCCU; teachers in grades 3-8): This tier I, universal program helps teachers develop classroom management skills that integrate social-behavioral expectations and strategies to detect,

prevent, and intervene with aggressive and bullying behaviors in real-time in their classroom.

We continue to develop new programming, adapt current programming to meet needs and build the evidence-base for the programs with several research projects and efforts outlined below:

- NICHD-funded large clinical trial testing the effectiveness of the coaching adaptation of *F2F* (i.e., school-facilitated instead of researcher-facilitated) and an exploration of mechanisms of change and factors associated with sustainability.
- NICHD-funded large clinical trial of the *Bullying Classroom Check-Up* intervention is ongoing across two sites (Baltimore metro area and Philadelphia) testing the efficacy of the program.
- The CHOP Research Track Faculty Pilot Program is funding the development and pilot testing of the *PRAISE Explorers* program to determine feasibility, acceptability and preliminary program impact.
- Through a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) R49 grant to the Penn Injury Science Center, we are conducting an effectiveness trial of the coaching adaptation of PRAISE, *PRAISE: Voyagers* on child aggression and bullying, social problem-solving skills, positive bystander behaviors, and self-efficacy for non-violence.
- The National Institute of Justice is funding an efficacy trial of virtual reality (VR) enhancements of *PRAISE Voyagers* as compared *PRAISE Voyagers* alone. In the VR condition, a mixed-reality simulator will provide (1) tier-II, small-group supports for children identified as demonstrating aggressive behaviors; (2) enhanced teacher-training with guided practice to optimize implementation fidelity and increase efficacy and motivation in delivering PRAISE.
- Collaborating with local school districts to provide school-staff trauma-informed SEL and anti-bullying trainings.
- Testing a ‘train-the-trainer’ model of F2F, in which CHOP provides training and guidance only so that schools can implement the program on their own.

Next Steps

Research goals for future grant submissions include:

1. a longitudinal survey study to understand behaviors, predictors, and outcomes related to cyberbullying among high school youth, which will inform future child-focused prevention and intervention development efforts;
2. a longitudinal study to examine the association between youth’s use of electronic devices and their mental health, and whether/what parent mediation (discussions, restriction) can ameliorate negative outcomes.

This project will inform future prevention and intervention efforts;

3. a larger trial of the PRAISE Explorers program in 1st-2nd grade in conjunction with PRAISE Voyagers in grades 3-5 to examine the effects of our programming across the full range of elementary school years;
4. adapting F2F for use in special populations (e.g., youth with ADHD).

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PolicyLab Leads

Tracy Evian Waasdorp PhD, MEd

Faculty Member

Tracy Evian Waasdorp is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), and an assistant research professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. She is also affiliated with the Center for Violence Prevention (CVP) at CHOP as the director of Research for School-Based Bullying and Social-Emotional Learning.

Dr. Waasdorp is an expert in childhood aggression and bullying (both in-person and cyber) as well as the design and assessment of school-based interventions. Her programs aim to improve children's social and emotional skills, reduce bullying and aggression, and help adults promote children's positive peer relationships. She also has a strong focus on research methodology and related statistics.

She has collaborated on the design and evaluation of three school-based interventions: Preventing Relational Aggression Every Day (PRAISE), Friend to Friend (F2F) and the Bullying Classroom Check-up (BCCU). PRAISE and F2F are aimed at reducing aggression and bullying for elementary school youth attending under-resourced schools. She led the adaptation of F2F and PRAISE to be used with a coaching model, where schools implement the program with training and guidance from CHOP researchers. This model improves both the uptake and sustainability of programming. BCCU is a program that addresses bullying using an innovative, transportable training simulator combined with an evidence-based teacher-coaching model to increase teachers' prevention, detection, and responses to bullying and promote positive peer relationships in their classrooms. Click [here](#) for more details on the programs.

Dr. Waasdorp did her post-doctoral training in prevention science at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Department of Mental Health. She received her PhD in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Delaware, an MEd in Psychological Services from the University of Pennsylvania and a BS in Psychology from Muhlenberg College.



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Brooke Paskewich is a faculty member at PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP). She is also affiliated with The Center for Violence Prevention at CHOP as a research scholar and co-director of School-Based Bullying Prevention and Social-Emotional Learning Research. Additionally, Dr. Paskewich is a research assistant professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Paskewich's research focuses on promoting positive social-emotional health and development of children through the provision of evidenced-based supports and interventions. She has centered this work in the prevention and intervention of aggressive and bullying behaviors in urban school settings through a range of indicated and universal research programs designed for 3rd to 5th grade students, school counselors and teachers. Dr. Paskewich has expertise in community-based participatory research (CBPR) and qualitative research, which she has applied to a portfolio of five NIH- and IES-funded school-based intervention development studies. Dr. Paskewich is currently conducting developmental research related to social-emotional learning and anti-aggression/bullying programming targeting 1st and 2nd grade youth, a racial microaggression intervention for hospital-based biomedical research staff, and a multi-tiered school-based mental health (SBMH) program.

Relatedly, Dr. Paskewich has extensive expertise conducting randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in schools. She has directed the implementation of two different RCTs funded by NIH and IES testing the efficacy of interventions as conducted by trained research team facilitators. She is currently conducting research that has moved beyond efficacy trials into effectiveness trials testing interventions in real-world conditions, including two new NIH R01 RCTs testing interventions when school-led (e.g., by a teacher or school counselor) with coaching from our research team. The first is a 40-school RCT testing the effectiveness of a school-led indicated aggression prevention program with coaching, and the second is a 32-school RCT testing the effectiveness of a coaching model for training teachers to detect, prevent and intervene with bullying in the classroom. She is an MPI on a RCT study under review by the CDC that will test the effectiveness and sustainability of a universal bullying prevention program that she and her team adapted over the last three years.

Finally, Dr. Paskewich conducts research to bridge the gap between evidenced-based intervention research and practice in real-world settings. She has leveraged a large portfolio of intervention research studies over the last fifteen years to develop expertise in responsive methods for overcoming recruitment barriers and limiting sample bias in school-based research. She has also developed intervention implementation strategies that balance core features required for fidelity with a flexibility that is responsive to the unique needs of schools to maximize intervention feasibility, generalizability, and sustainability. With a focus on historically under-served schools, Dr. Paskewich's research assesses factors (e.g., treatment fidelity and school, implementer, and program characteristics) that are associated with intervention outcomes and that facilitate or impede program uptake and fidelity, and how schools can independently implement and sustain evidence-based programs.

Dr. Paskewich earned a Master of Science in Counseling Psychology and Human Services in 2002 and a PsyD in Clinical Psychology in 2008, both from Chestnut Hill College. She completed an APA-accredited pre-doctoral internship at The Institute for Children and Family Health (formerly The Children's Psychiatric Center) in Miami, Fla., and received post-doctoral intervention research training at CHOP.



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Related Tools & Publications

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[Bullying Prevention in Schools: Equipping Students & Adults with Evidence-based Tools
Blog Post](#)

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