Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

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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Related Tools & Publications

Bullying Prevention in Schools: Equipping Students & Adults with Evidence-based Tools
Blog Post
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