PBIS Forum 15 Practice Brief:
Bullying Prevention in Positive Behavioral
Interventions and Supports (BP-PBIS)

Operational definition

Bullying Prevention in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (BP-PBIS)
BP-PBIS is:

- A set of bullying prevention specific practices, systems, and data that can be added to the School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports framework to address continued bullying issues
- BP-PBIS is a universal intervention designed to be implemented school-wide. It gives students the tools to reduce bullying behavior through the blending of positive behavior support, simple responses to disrespectful behavior, and a functional approach to the bullying construct

Rationale

BP-PBIS was designed in 2008 by Ross, Horner, and Stiller in response to the mixed, and sometimes negative, results of previous bullying prevention efforts (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008). Specifically, BP-PBIS was created for five purposes:

1. Fit bullying prevention within a tiered, prevention-based approach that implements efficient universal supports for all students, followed by more intensive supports for students that fail to respond.
2. Prevent social aggression before it ever reaches the severity necessary to be called bullying.
3. Give all students clear, simple, and specific skills that can remove the peer attention driving bullying behavior.
4. Give all adults clear, simple, and specific skills for responding to incidents of disrespect.
5. Implement bullying prevention strategies that are sustainable.

The BP-PBIS universal intervention strategies were originally validated through an experimental trial across 3 elementary schools. Using single-subject methodology and a multiple-baseline-across-schools design, Ross and Horner (2009) observed a 72% reduction in the bullying behaviors of at-risk students after the intervention was delivered. Furthermore, following implementation of BP-PBIS, victims were 19% less likely to cry or fight back, and bystanders were 22% less likely to laugh, cheer, or otherwise join in during incidents.

Since the initial validation, over 1500 schools across the country and internationally have implemented BP-PBIS. Follow-up studies in elementary and middle schools have also shown significant reductions in self-reported bullying (Ross & Horner, 2013) and bullying-related office discipline referrals and suspensions (Good, McIntosh, & Gietz, 2011).

Specific implementation example

- One recent example of scaling the BP-PBIS practices across a district came after a suicide by a middle school student who had been chronically bullied. Following the incident, the district immediately searched for strategies to address future bullying and came across the BP-PBIS materials and research. Considering the SW-PBIS efforts they were already engaged in, the district decided that an embedded model of bullying prevention would be the most effective and efficient.
- The district started by creating a professional development plan for training the 25 elementary and middle schools in their district. They decided to train nine schools the first year, followed by ten the second year, and six the third year. They provided the training to the school leadership teams during the spring prior to the year of implementation. This allowed the schools to collect student-survey

baseline data, gather student input on the intervention components, and create the posters, lesson plans, and follow-up practice strategies necessary for effective implementation the following school-year.

- The schools implemented the BP-PBIS strategies the first week of fall semester, immediately after teaching the SW-PBIS school-wide expectations. This allowed the schools to align the instruction and link the BP-PBIS strategies to their school-wide expectations.
- The school leadership teams included BP-PBIS on their monthly meeting agenda, and did weekly collection of teacher data regarding their implementation of the intervention components.
- At the end of the implementation year, the schools again conducted a student self-report survey about their experiences with bullying. Results of the survey indicated statistically significant improvements in self-reported victimization, perpetration, feelings of safety, willingness to say stop, willingness to help victims walk away, and willingness to tell adults.

Procedures

1. Ensure that the school is implementing SW-PBIS with fidelity and has clearly defined building leadership team membership, and clearly defined school wide expectations.
2. Conduct a school-wide student self-report survey prior to implementation of BP-PBIS strategies. Hundreds of bullying surveys exist, however we recommend using one that does not use the word "bully" as it will result in reduced reporting.
3. Create a student leadership team that can:
   a. Review aggregated student self-report survey data. Doing so can determine the major types of social aggression at the school, where the incidents occur, and how students and staff respond to those incidents;
   b. Help in the development of intervention strategies, including the creation of "stop" language, "stopping" language, and stand-up recognition strategies;
   c. Implement stand-up recognition strategies where students are caught for standing up for others, and are rewarded with peer delivered incentives;
   d. Report the results of implementation to the rest of the school following the post implementation self-report survey.

4. Prior to implementation, the building leadership team prepares initial lessons for faculty, plans for follow-up lessons, and plans to ensure implementation fidelity through a faculty checklist.
5. The BP-PBIS initial lessons are delivered to all students in the school within a two week window. Teachers also follow-up with students for 2-3 minutes each week to discuss strategies and problem-solve continuing issues.
6. All faculty and staff in the school also check in with students on a daily basis right before challenging times (e.g., recess) to pre-correct for the "stop" and "stopping" responses they should use if they encounter disrespectful behavior.
7. The building leadership team should discuss the implementation of BP-PBIS at least monthly to celebrate successes and problem-solve continuing issues. They should also collect data on the implementation by school staff using the faculty implementation checklist.
8. At the end of the school-year, the building leadership team facilitates the follow-up post self-report survey to determine the effectiveness of their efforts, and to prepare for future modifications and implementation.

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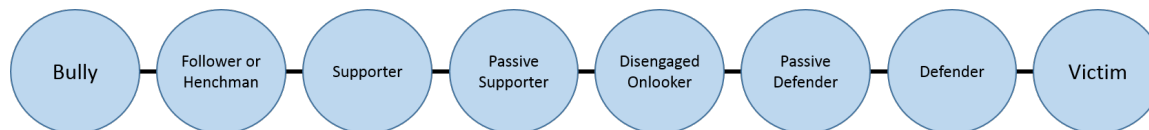## Frequently asked questions

Q: What is bullying?
A: Bullying is physical, verbal, relational, or cyber aggression that involves (1) an intent by the perpetrator to cause physical or psychological harm to the victim, (2) a power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator that makes it difficult to receive assistance or report bullying, and (3) repeated negative acts. However, it is important to point out that this definition of bullying was created without a research foundation, and its value has been drawn into question (deLana, 2012; Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liegfooghe, 2002). For example, when students were asked to define bullying, only 3.6% of students included intent to harm, 40.6% included a power imbalance, and 8% incorporated repeated acts in their definition (Naylor, et. al., 2006).

Q: Why do people bully?
A: Bullying is primarily maintained by peer attention. Research suggests that bystanders are present in over 80% of events (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000), providing reinforcement through laughter, joining in, standing around, or fighting back with victims. Victims can also provide peer attention in the form of fighting back, crying, or whining. In fact, in a study by O'Connell and colleagues (1999), the number of peers present was directly related to the duration of bullying episodes. The more peers around, the longer the incident lasted.

Q: What role do bystanders play in bullying?
A: Bystanders play a spectrum of roles in bullying depending on the environment and their relationships with perpetrators and the victims (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). Reinforcement from perpetrators, reinforcement from victims and adults, and punishment from perpetrators or victims are all in competition, and each bystander's response can be determined by the sum of those consequences. Resulting actions can range from joining-in to defending the victim. The figure below demonstrates this spectrum of bystander roles.

Q: What are the most common bullying prevention strategies?
A: The most common school response to bullying is to do nothing until a major incident occurs, followed by increasingly intense punishment and exclusion of the student(s) caught bullying. Unfortunately, not only has this strategy been ineffective in reducing bullying (APA, 2008), it may contribute to increased aggression, vandalism, truancy, and dropout (Hemphill et al., 2006; March & Horner, 2002; Mayer, 1995; Mayer & Sluzar-Azaroff, 1991; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). From a functional perspective, adult-driven punishment strategies do little to reduce access to peer attention. They can also decrease student feelings of connectedness to school, a major risk factor for dropout (Blum & Libbey, 2004).

Q: Why don't typical bullying prevention interventions work?
A: There are several potential reasons for the troubling findings of bullying prevention efforts, including (a) teaching students how to recognize, and arguably how to perpetrate aggressive behavior, (b) blaming bullies

and excluding them from the social context, and (c) forcing victims to interact with perpetrators who may be further reinforced by the interaction (Merrell, et al., 2008).

Q: What are the most effective bullying prevention strategies that schools can implement?
A: Three strategies appear to be the most promising for addressing bullying in schools.
First, schools can shift their culture so that students feel safe and empowered to stand up to for each other. Second, schools can teach specific strategies for peer recognition and the peer-based reinforcement of positive, stand-up behavior. Third, schools can teach all students (perpetrators, victims, and bystanders) simple strategies for standing up to bullying, which effectively removes peer attention from incidents rather than reinforcing it.

Resources

- For resources on bullying legislation in all 50 states: http://www.bullypolice.org/
- For more resources on BP-PBIS: http://www.pbis.org/school/bully-prevention
- National Bullying Prevention Center: http://www.pacer.org/bullying/

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