



# Comprehensive Bully Prevention and Pro-Upstander Efforts

There are many important steps that individuals – educators, parents and students – can take to prevent and deal with bullying in helpful ways. Unfortunately, the fate of most bully prevention efforts is that they do not incite any real, long-lasting change; short term and extrinsic from everyday school life, most efforts have markedly minimal impact.

**In order for schools to substantially reduce bullying,** educators need to take leadership roles in developing and maintaining comprehensive bully prevention and pro-upstander efforts. Please use these steps to actualize this process, making the necessary tweaks to adjust to your school's unique strengths, needs and challenges.



## 1 Develop a Shared Understanding and Vision

What do you want your school to be? The answer to this question is theoretically the basis for your school's mission and vision. Too often educators and parents are unsure of what their school's mission and vision statement is and, as a result, school communities just react to what is measured: reading, math and science scores and rates of physical violence.

Raise these questions in faculty and PTA meetings:

What kind of school do we want this to be?  
To what extent are our current practices grounded in this goal?

How do our goals for students relate to them feeling safe?

How important is it for us to support students becoming aware of injustice and learning how to be socially responsible or upstanders?



## In Action: Developing a Shared Vision of What Makes a Great School

- 1. Individual Visioning:** think of an ideal school that supports student learning and positive youth development.
- 2. Round robin:** ask each person for one attribute and build a collective list.
- 3. Collective culling:** divide the group and ask groups to reduce the list by a third.
- 4. Final listing:** combine the two lists.
- 5. In triads,** compare the final list to your mission statement and vision statement.

These are basic and exciting questions that we've seen mobilize scores of school communities to come together and develop shared goals. For more information on developing a shared vision, or for more examples of effective protocols, contact NSCC.

## 2 Secure the "Buy-In"

Developing comprehensive bully prevention and pro-upstander efforts rests on securing buy-in for these ideas. It is essential that the school principal totally endorse this goal and the notion that this can and will be an ongoing school-wide effort. Research supports the notion that roughly 75% of the faculty need to buy in to these goals and plans as well. This is often a challenge. Teachers, for example, may understandably feel, "I don't know anything about this. We all have different definitions of bullying. My plate is full as it is just keeping test scores up."

Here are 3 strategies that many schools find helpful in securing buy-in:

### RAISE AWARENESS

At assemblies, plays, PTA meetings, faculty meetings, student council, advisory meetings, parent outreach

Raise awareness about the influence and impact of bully-victim-bystander behavior. In 4 out of 5 lethal shootings in American public schools since 1975, people knew about the planned violence in advance but did nothing. Share powerful statistics like this one and also prompt staff members to think about their own childhood and the impact that bullying, victimization and passive bystander behavior had on them or their friends.



## EVALUATION PLANNING

Recognize student, parent, and school personnel voice. Measuring school climate and/or how safe people feel in schools tends to reveal that students feel much less safe than the adult realize. This has been one of the most consistent findings that our Center has discovered in our school climate assessment work with thousands of students and adults nationwide. Gaining hard and reliable data is one of the most effective ways to “prove” to the school community that bully prevention and pro-upstander promotion is essential.

## FORM A COMMITTEE

Another good way to build interest and incite progress is to amass a team of educators, parents, students and community leaders to work together and learn about what other schools have done and/or what the research says about effective bully prevention efforts.

### 3 Assessment: Learning and Planning

One of the important and positive aspects of the federal educational act No Child Left Behind was to state the obvious: in order to understand student learning and develop school improvement efforts, we first need scientifically sound data.

Measurement is useful for several important reasons. First, it helps communities understand its current strengths and challenges. Second, this data provides a baseline understanding that can be later used to determine the effectiveness of bully prevention efforts. And, third, when we recognize student, parent/guardian and staff voice we can use this feedback to build an authentic learning community. And, that’s a big deal.

There are many ways to assess your schools current strengths and challenges with regard to bully prevention and pro-upstander efforts. Some schools elect to solely focus on school safety and bullying. We suggest a more comprehensive school climate assessment such our own Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) which evaluates all the major factors that shape how we feel in school: safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships and the environment.

To learn more about how school climate assessment is used to promote the three goals noted above, please write to Jonathan Cohen at [jonathancohen@schoolclimate.org](mailto:jonathancohen@schoolclimate.org)



The CSCI is a survey instrument that has been used by states and districts nationwide.



## 4 Develop School-Wide Systemic Interventions

A growing body of bully prevention efforts underscore that effective efforts need to be **school-wide or systemic** and designed to create a climate for safety and learning. The goal of this step is to develop school-wide plans that build on assessment findings from the previous step. It will be important to first consider the current state of your school's educator-parent-mental health professional partnerships and ways to strengthen this in developing action plans. As a group, ask yourself to what extent your school's code of conduct - for students and adults - is aligned with upstander behavior, and how you can make bully-victim-witness behavior part of the fabric of school conversations. Develop plans for how you will support people regularly recognizing upstander behavior and ask yourselves what realistic supports the school will be able to provide for students identified as chronically in the role of bully and/or victim. (Typically students who are chronically 'stuck' in these roles are signaling that they are psychosocially troubled.)

Perhaps the single most important single step that schools can take to reduce risky behavior in general – including bully, victim, passive bystander behavior – is to ensure that every student is 'connected' to at least one caring and responsible adult.

### **In Action: Connecting All Students to Caring Adults**

1. At a faculty meeting, put the name of every student in school on a 3x5 card. Put all the cards up on a wall.
2. Give each faculty member small colored "dots" that stick on paper.
3. Ask school personnel to put a dot next to each student who they feel "connected" to in a positive manner.
4. Note which students have no dots next to their names, and discuss how you can link them to a positive, supportive adult.
5. As a group, decide who will be sponsor these students or make an effort to show them social support and engagement.



## 5 Develop Classroom-based and Instructional Intervention

After the Principal and others have communicated that “our school” is truly committed to bully prevention and pro-upstander efforts, it is essential that teachers consider the range of ways that they can intentionally promote the skills and dispositions that support effective efforts in this area. It is well-known that student learning is powerfully grounded in the life of the classroom; teachers are always social, emotional and civic as well as intellectual teachers.

There are four major and overlapping ways that teachers can be intentionally and helpful social, emotional and civic teachers in general and bully prevention/pro-upstander efforts in particular:

- 1 Being a living example** of upstander behavior in particular and a thoughtful social, emotional and civic learner in general
- 2 Being a mindful classroom manager.** How we manage the classroom sends very powerful messages to students. To what extent – if at all – do we use punishment, bullying and/or a restorative justice model of classroom management?
- 3 Pedagogy:** There are a range of pedagogic methods that powerfully promote social, emotional and civic learning. For example, cooperative learning, conflict resolution/mediation, moral dilemma discussions and service learning are just a few methods that promote reflection, empathy, flexible problem solving, collaborative capacities and additional skills and dispositions that support healthy development in general and pro-upstander efforts in particular.
- 4 Explicit social, emotional and civic curriculum:** There are two ways that teachers can infuse explicit social, emotional and civic learning into the curriculum: (1) using evidence-based curricular programs, and (2) infusing social, emotional and civic learning into existing curriculum and advisory activities. To learn more about these approaches, view the resources at [www.schoolclimate.org](http://www.schoolclimate.org). To view specific activities to support your efforts in this area, view the Educators section at [www.bullybust.org](http://www.bullybust.org).



## 6 Infusing and Reinforcing Upstander Behavior

There are a range of ways that we recognize and support upstander behavior. An important way of infusing and reinforcing upstander behavior is through our own adult behavior.

Raise these questions in your leadership team to discuss how upstander behavior will be infused and reinforced in your school and classrooms:

- In what ways do we show upstander (or passive bystander) behavior?
- In an overlapping manner, how do we listen to and treat one another in and out of class? Are we intentionally and helpfully promoting social, emotional and civic learning (e.g. reflective and empathic capacities; flexible and creative problem solving abilities, impulse control, communication, serving others)?
- How are we using existing curriculum (language arts, social studies, history, service learning, athletics) to recognize bully-victim-witness behavior in the novels, periods of history and so on that color every day of school life?

There is a host of additional ways that we can infuse and reinforce upstander behavior and bully prevention efforts into school, for example: supporting students developing a play, supporting students developing public service announcements, learning about peer mediation projects and learning from other schools making great strides in this process.

## 7 Strengthening School-Home-Community Partnerships

It really is true that it takes a village to raise a child. When educators, parents and community leaders develop shared goals and work together to actualize these goals, we help and support children in a huge way. Leading school-parent leaders have suggested that there are 6 important ways that educators and parents can support one in another in promoting our childrens' positive youth development and learning:

### PARENTING

Establish home environments that support children as students. Develop skills to support children at all age levels and support school needs.

### COMMUNICATING

Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.



## VOLUNTEERING

Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

## LEARNING AT HOME

Involve families with their children by encouraging learning activities at home through homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

## DECISION-MAKING

Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and action teams

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Coordinate resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Many of the activities described above can and should be used in partnership with family and community leaders. In fact, parents and community leaders can and optimally need to be partners with educators to further reinforce the first 6 steps of developing bully prevention and pro-upstander efforts.

An extension of this fundamentally important school-home partnership is engaging community leaders. Leaders from the community - faith-based leaders, business leaders, political leaders, health/mental health leaders, and leaders in media – typically care deeply about reducing bullying and promoting upstander behavior. Although we do deeply appreciate that school leaders are extraordinarily busy, it is often a quick and easy task to invite leaders from the community to talk about this kind of school-based effort. And, when students hear religious leaders, politicians and health and business leaders talking about these efforts, it matters. It reinforces what they are hearing at home and at school.

This is the village – at its best – protecting children and promoting learning.

This best practices was developed by the National School Climate Center (NSCC) as part of their Bully Bust campaign. To learn more about how NSCC can help your school or district actualize these steps, visit [www.schoolclimate.org](http://www.schoolclimate.org) or contact Jonathan Cohen at [jcohen@schoolclimate.org](mailto:jcohen@schoolclimate.org)