

5 Look Ahead...



Creating a Bullying-Free Environment



Lasting change requires the creation of an environment where everyone understands that bullying is unacceptable, harmful, and preventable—and where everyone takes responsibility for stopping it.

Creating a bullying-free environment requires systematic and thoughtful planning. When developing a bullying prevention plan for your setting, consider these steps:

Lay the groundwork.

Use this toolkit to assess both staff and children’s beliefs about bullying. Identifying these beliefs will let you know where you need to target your efforts and help you create appropriate policies and procedures. It will also provide a good starting point for conversation and for engaging people in the change process.

Develop connections, a team approach, and a support system.

Bullying is less likely to occur in environments where people feel closely connected and responsible for one another. Children who feel isolated are less likely to report bullying and to seek help. Adults may not intervene if they feel they don’t have the support of their coworkers or supervisor. Make sure every child has a trusted adult to whom they can turn for help and advice. Consider a buddy system where older children look out for younger children or where several children provide support to a vulnerable child.

Build a shared vision.

Use this toolkit to develop a clear, shared definition of bullying and a strong, positive statement that describes your program’s bullying prevention philosophy and goals. Involve everyone—adults and children—in developing this statement. This will increase everyone’s commitment to and responsibility for creating an environment that discourages bullying behaviors and encourages positive, supportive actions.

Create an inclusive environment.

A bullying-free environment is one in which all children and adults feel safe and included. Encourage all children and adults to appreciate diversity among their peers and to include, rather than exclude, children because of their differences.



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Establish clear bullying prevention policies and procedures.

Develop rules, responsibilities, and a code of conduct that includes a disciplinary policy with clearly stated rules and consequences for behavior. Involving children in the process of creating rules and identifying appropriate consequences ensures their understanding and commitment to them. It is important that policies and procedures address the roles of everyone involved: bullies, victims, and bystanders, as well as adults.

Communicate key concepts to everyone in the program.

Post rules in public places, such as common areas and dining halls. Review and discuss the rules and their consequences regularly, and incorporate them in the common language of your program. Use the toolkit activities to encourage adults and children to talk about their bullying issues and concerns, and to engage in bullying prevention strategies.

Supervise children responsibly.

Provide adequate supervision. Be prepared to take action to stop bullying and ensure children's safety. Respond promptly, consistently, and appropriately. Pay special attention to situations where children may be at highest risk, such as during unstructured activities and when they are in isolated areas, such as bathrooms, empty classrooms, or cabins.

Encourage children and staff to speak out as soon as they witness or experience bullying.

Assure them that reporting bullying incidents is not tattling and that they will not get into trouble for telling. Create opportunities for children to speak privately with staff. Consider a "bullying prevention box" where children can confidentially submit their concerns and suggestions, as well as their recommendations of children who deserve commendation for bullying prevention.

Provide ongoing education and training for all staff.

Provide education and training to make sure all program staff recognize and understand issues related to bullying, are prepared to prevent it, and can respond appropriately when it occurs. Lasting systemic change requires regular, ongoing opportunities for assessing and dealing with bullying prevention. Be sure to include personnel, such as playground monitors, bus drivers, and custodians, who staff areas where bullying is more likely to occur.

Involve parents.

The cooperation and support of parents is essential to creating a bullying-free environment in your program, and extending it to families and communities. Regular communication with parents will help to support children's developing beliefs and skills. Keep parents informed when a bullying incident occurs, and encourage them to contact program staff if they think a child is being bullied or is bullying. This sends the message that you take bullying seriously, and it elicits their cooperation and support. Share this toolkit and your program's policies with parents, and invite them to participate in bullying prevention workshops.