

WHAT'S INSIDE

CEC's Policy on Safe
and Positive School
Climate
Page 1-2

Steps Schools Can
Take To Stop Bullying
Page 3

Tips for Implementing
a Positive School
Climate
Page 4

Additional Resources
Page 5



Council for Exceptional Children

Recommendations for Implementing a Positive School Climate

CEC's Policy on Safe and Positive School Climate

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) recognizes the important impact a safe and positive school climate has on the personal development and academic achievement of all students. Research has shown that schools implementing supportive and positive school climate strategies are more successful in creating environments conducive to learning. Recent incidents of school violence, including harassment directed at students with disabilities and/or gifts and talents, have drawn attention to the unacceptable cost of not assuring a safe and positive climate in our schools for all students. Furthermore, students with disabilities may be more at risk because they do not necessarily have the ability to understand and report what is happening to them.

Such incidents, as well as surveys of students and faculty regarding safety, document continuing and pervasive harassment and bullying experienced by students and reveal that these actions are more likely to be perpetrated on the basis of appearance and actual or perceived differences in ethnicity, race, language, abilities, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, or religion.

As student enrollment becomes increasingly diverse, schools are challenged to assure that all students feel valued and supported. Available research confirms that students feel safer and learn better when schools have clear policies prohibiting harassment and discrimination and when all members of the school community (students, parents, educators, administrators, and other school personnel) actively uphold the right of every student to a safe learning environment. Harassment can take many forms, including cyber bullying and other technological/electronic methods. In addition, although overt acts easily come to the attention of schools, it is essential that covert acts are recognized and addressed. CEC believes that all members of the school community have a critical role to play in assuring that students have access to a safe and supportive school environment.

In light of legal mandates and professional standards that promote the use of evidence-based practices to increase positive academic and social-emotional behaviors among students, CEC believes that special educators must acquire and use a knowledge base of effective practices for promoting supportive school climates in ways that support human and civil rights and promote social justice for the diverse student populations in today's schools.

Discrimination or harassment directed at students or adults on the basis of ethnic and racial backgrounds, language, age, abilities, family status, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious and spiritual values, and geographic location violates the human and/or civil rights of individuals who are the targets of such behavior.

To ensure the creation of safe learning environments that contribute to all students' cognitive, academic, social-emotional, and ethical development, it is the policy of the Council for Exceptional Children that:

- All schools should have clear policies that prohibit harassment and discriminatory behaviors of any kind, including those related to ethnic background, language, age, abilities, family status, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious and spiritual values, and geographic location. Students and staff should be clearly informed of such policies and procedures, including data collection, reporting, sanctions, and indemnity to those reporting incidents. Educational efforts at the federal, provincial, state, and local levels should promote policies, guidelines, and universal interventions designed to reduce or prevent discrimination or harassment as well as to create a school climate that is conducive to respect and dignity for all individuals.
- Because bullying and harassment create emotional wounds that amplify the hardships of exceptionality as well as jeopardize the emotional and mental well-being of students, teachers, administrators, and other school support personnel with knowledge of harassment or bullying carry the responsibility to report these behaviors to relevant authorities and school personnel similar to the professional obligation to report child abuse.
- School-based implementation of anti-discrimination policies must equally support and provide open access for the participation of students in activities and student-led groups designed to enhance a respectful, safe, and positive school climate and to promote respect for diversity in general or with respect to one or more diversity elements.
- To support antidiscriminatory policies, schools should provide students, staff, and administrators with access to a range of resources, including designated professionals with expertise in intercultural and diversity-related counseling and human-relations.
- School policies should promote practices and curricula that build a sense of community and understanding for and among all students in recognition of the positive relationship between school climate, learning environments, and educational outcomes for all individuals.
- Professional development for educators and educational administrators should build schools' capacity to implement a diversity-rich curriculum as well as to respond effectively to instances of harassment, bullying, or intimidation. To this end, such activities should enhance educators' skills and strategies for effectively delivering culturally-sensitive educational experiences within the context of current standards-based curricula. Similarly, professional development for administrators should develop their leadership skills and strategies for developing and implementing anti-discrimination policies and for ensuring positive learning environments for all students. Schools should provide opportunities for parent education to complement professional development for educators.
- Teacher and educational leadership preparation programs should prepare educators, administrators, and related services personnel to create safe learning environments and to intervene effectively in the event that harassment or discriminatory behaviors occur. This includes understanding about the range of ways that schools can evaluate school climate comprehensively using evidence-based practices as well as how school climate findings can be used to build authentic learning communities that support positive youth development and academic achievement.

Steps Schools Can Take to Stop Bullying



School Administration

Establish school-wide behavior strategies that all teachers know about and adhere to, including:

- A clear, positive purpose
- A set of positively stated expectations for prosocial behavior
- Procedures for teaching school-wide expectations
- A continuum of procedures for encouraging students to display expected behaviors
- A continuum of procedures for discouraging violations of school-wide expectations
- A method for monitoring implementation and effectiveness.*

Develop and implement clear policies and a system for taking reports of bullying and harassment and following up on them.

Provide students and staff with access to a range of resources, including professionals with expertise in intercultural and diversity-related counseling and human relations.

Instruct all school staff on the importance of bullying and provide training in bullying prevention.

Post staff throughout the school (and especially in “hot spots”) to detect and report incidents of bullying.

Develop programs to help those bullied as well as children who are engaging in bullying.

Develop an anti-bullying team, including teachers, parents, administrators, and students.

**From the Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, George Sugai and Robert Horner.*

Teachers

Use class time to prevent bullying through class discussion and role playing.

Teach students the difference between tattling and bullying. (Tattling is to get someone in trouble. Reporting is to keep someone safe).

Teach students strategies to deal with bullying such as:

- Teaching victims to be assertive and say, “That’s bullying.” If the bullying continues, the child should report it.
- Teach bystanders how to respond, *i.e.*, not joining in or offering support.

Reach out to *all* students, so students feel connected to school and school personnel.

Cyberbullying

Discuss cyberbullying, *i.e.*, what it is, it is important to take seriously, the victim has done nothing wrong.

Ensure students know to report cyberbullying to a responsible adult.

Provide information about how students can protect themselves when using a chat room and other Web services.

Provide information about what to do if cyberbullying occurs: report it to a trusted adult, keep and save messages, do not respond to the message, get cell phone number changed, share phone and e-mail addresses only with trusted friends.

Implementing a Positive School Climate

Tips for Educators

Creating a safe school environment for students and educators is critical to the personal development and academic achievement of all students. To assist educators in implementing a positive school climate, CEC has developed the following tips to assist in creating school environments that act as a catalyst to learning.

Confront the Issue: Assess School Climate

By understanding the current school climate, a plan can be developed to build upon strengths and address areas that need improvement. To effectively assess school climate, seek feedback from all school personnel, students, and families. Conducting an anonymous survey/questionnaire can provide valuable insight.

Be Pro-Active: Establish & Promote a School-Wide Anti-Discrimination Policy

By establishing, disseminating, and enforcing a clear policy that prohibits harassment/discriminatory behaviors, describes unacceptable behavior, and defines/encourages teaching of expected behaviors, educators create an environment that sets clear expectations for students, school personnel, and families. Establishing these expectations is a critical step in creating an environment that supports learning.

Work Together: Engage All School Personnel & Families

To improve school climate, it is important to gain buy-in from all school personnel and families. Strategies – including soliciting feedback and encouraging participation – should be used to engage the entire school community. Working together with a unified message reinforces the importance of creating and maintaining a positive school climate.

Create an All-Star Team: Educate the Educators

Just as professional athletes must maintain a strenuous exercise regimen, all school personnel need to have access to on-going, effective professional development that supports school-wide strategies as well as in-the-moment strategies to create a positive school climate.

Lead by Example: Integrate Tolerance in Teaching

What better way to create a positive school environment than reinforcing messages of tolerance during appropriate times in classroom teaching? Whether through history lessons that illustrate the impact of tolerance/intolerance or examples in literature, classroom experiences provide excellent opportunities to help students gain a better understanding of the importance of tolerance.

The Digital Age: Understanding All Forms of Bullying

As e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging become increasingly popular forms of communication among youth, identifying and addressing cyberbullying should be included in bullying prevention/intervention training for all school personnel.

Stop the Cycle: Addressing the Needs of Bullies/Bullied

Providing supports to students who bully as well as to those who are bullied is vital to getting to the crux of the issue and may prevent future incidents. School personnel – particularly school counselors, social workers, and psychologists – play an integral role in addressing bullying, the underlying causes for such behavior, and coping strategies.



Additional Resources...

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

<http://www.cec.sped.org>

The Council for Exceptional Children is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.

Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders

<http://www.ccbd.net/>

The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders is the official division of the Council for Exceptional Children committed to promoting and facilitating the education and general welfare of children and youth with emotional or behavioral disorders.

Council of Administrators of Special Education

<http://www.casecec.org>

The Council of Administrators of Special Education, a division of the Council for Exceptional Children, consists of members who are dedicated to the enhancement of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of each individual in society.

National School Climate Center at the Center for Social and Emotional Education

<http://nsec.csee.net/>

The quality and character of school life (school climate) shapes students' development and capacity to learn. The Center includes a growing body of information and guidelines about school climate in general, and school climate research, policy and practice in particular.

National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

<http://www.pbis.org/main.htm>

The OSEP-funded National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports addresses the behavioral and discipline systems needed for successful learning and social development of students.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

<http://www.aacap.org/>

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

<http://www.bazelon.org/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness

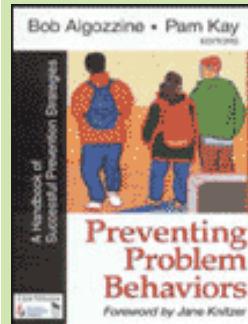
www.nami.org

National Association of School Psychologists

www.nasponline.org

National Association of School Social Workers

www.sswaa.org



Preventing Problem Behaviors

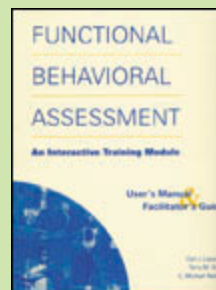
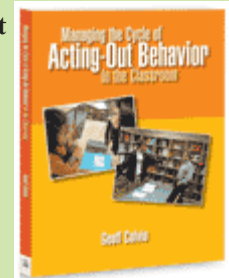
This ground-breaking book provides successful classroom and school-wide strategies that can stop problem behavior before it starts. It's the perfect "launch pad" for your school's prevention programs and can lead to better outcomes for students, teachers, and the school at large.

Available for purchase at www.cec.sped.org (see CEC Store).

Managing the Cycle of Acting-Out Behavior in the Classroom

This publication provides practical and safe strategies to manage and prevent acting-out behavior such as defiance, tantrums, threats, resistance, avoidance, and classroom disruption. This book presents an insightful model that depicts acting-out behavior in terms of seven phases.

Available for purchase at www.cec.sped.org (see CEC Store).



Functional Behavioral Assessment: An Interactive Training

This CD-ROM interactive training module teaches educators who work with students with problem behaviors the basic steps in conducting a functional behavioral assessment. The step-by-step training module includes video examples, reproducible forms, case studies, self tests, and more.

Available for purchase at www.cec.sped.org (see CEC Store).