

# Loss Control *NOTES*

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## Bullying — a Costly Problem

Source: Barbara B. Oliver, Dennis Kouba, Public Entity Risk Institute

*Loss Control NOTES* highlights management issues that can cause claims against school districts. In this issue it is our intent is to increase administrators' awareness of the cost of failure to address the problem of bullying before it involves serious injury or cost to the district in the form of a lawsuit on behalf of bullied or harassed children.

### Cost to the District

Harassment and bullying of one student by another is a source of increasing claims action against school districts in Alaska. The district realizes the cost through legal fees and higher insurance premiums for its liability program and for property damage when vandalism or, more seriously, arson occurs.

Bullies lower a school's morale. Victims become depressed, vengeful, scared and angry with the bullies and the adults at school who fail to protect them. These feelings inhibit the thinking and learning processes. Victims pay a price in physical suffering, emotional pain, and fear—feelings that foment a school culture where nobody wants to be. Teachers can opt to leave the environment, but students are usually stuck.

Bullying is about power. A bully usually perceives himself as one who has little power. He bullies to feel superior and secure. The victim can be anyone, and is likely to exhibit traits of powerlessness, such as shyness, sensitivity, anxiety, insecurity. Other victims may be chosen for physical attributes, nationality, or religion.

Victims who feel that adults can't protect them may, in turn, resort to violence to protect themselves. Studies of school shootings reveal that most attackers have felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured by others. Bullying is a way to rebel, to feel superior, to

ensure security, to flout rules and regulations.

### Plan of Action

"You can outnumber the bullies if you teach the silent majority to stand up," says Psychologist Carla Garrity, co-author of *Bully-Proofing Your School*. The most effective strategy to defusing bullies is a three-pronged approach involving parents, adults at school, and students.

### Instruct Parents

Educate parents to bullying traits. Encourage them to ask their kids questions about classrooms, events, classmates, traveling to and from school. If the child is not forthcoming with comments or avoids details, there may be something amiss that warrants delving to find out. Educate parents to take seriously complaints of pushing, shoving, name calling, and the like. Help parents to identify symptoms that their kids may be victims, such as withdrawal, declining grades, torn clothes, lost money.

Provide parents with a checklist detailing how to report an incident to the school, including names of administrators, phone numbers, and what to record and report.

### Engage Adults at School

Teachers, coaches, counselors and school employees

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should understand that ridicule, sarcasm, and yelling at students are not tolerated as a method of behavior management. Instruct them that bullying will not be tolerated, and teach them how to stop it. Instruct them how and what to report to administration. Develop intervention strategies and reporting mechanisms. Establish procedures for following up with questions and counseling for victims, the bullies, and their parents. Explain applicable district rules and regulations, and identify penalties for non-compliance. Commit to the anti-bullying policy, and support employees in their efforts to enforce it.

## **Educate Students**

Teach students social skills, how to solve arguments, and conflict resolution skills. Teach kids street smarts that keep them from looking like targets. Walking confidently, staying alert to surroundings, standing up for themselves verbally can go a long way to discourage bullies. Let them know their school is a no-bullying zone.

Schedule student forums or panel discussions. Television dramas, movies, videotapes, cartoon shows and comic strips provide opportunities to talk about bullying.

## **Develop Anti-Bullying Management Plans**

Bring district social workers and counselors and local psychologists to planning committees. Include parent and student representation in the fact gathering and planning stages. Explore how developmental stages affect kids' behavior. Knowing what is appropriate behavior for the age group helps to determine strategies that can be used to manage student safety and enhance their development in ways that contribute to the well being of students, their school, and their community.

## **Resources**

<http://www.edweek.com>

Education Week online newspaper  
Search for "bully"

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.com>

Look for article "It takes a whole school to stop bullying" by Donna Gold; explorations of interventions

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

Research summary studies; workplace bullying

<http://www.safetyzone.org>

National Resource Center for Safe Schools  
Free 35-page downloadable booklet By Request...  
Schoolwide Prevention of Bullying; link to Bullying and Harassment site guide; list of international anti-bullying web sites; list of State School Safety Centers

<http://www.cfchildren.org>

Committee for Children  
Social-emotional learning; training opportunities;  
*Steps to Respect: A Bullying Prevention Program, a whole-school program on bullying prevention*

<http://www.safechild.org>

Coalition for Children  
Downloadable primer on Dealing with Bullies; reading list for teachers, parents, kids; life skills and bullying prevention training

<http://www.antibullying.net>

Anti-Bullying Network  
Information about whole school anti-bullying policies; advice; reading lists

<http://www.aacap.org>

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry  
public service of Facts & Family offer information on issues affecting children teens, their families