

Outcomes From a School-Randomized Controlled Trial of Steps to Respect®: A Bullying Prevention Program

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To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among diverse populations, we:

- ◆ conduct research on factors that influence development;
- ◆ develop and test the effectiveness of interventions;
- ◆ study service systems and work to improve them;
- ◆ advocate for science-based solutions to health and behavior problems; and
- ◆ disseminate knowledge, tools, and expertise produced by this research.

Bullying is a significant public health problem in the United States and may be the most prevalent type of school violence. Bullying is a serious problem that can affect students' school performance through school avoidance, lower levels of academic achievement, and more conflict with teachers. Victims of bullying are also at increased risk for psychological and emotional problems, including loneliness, depression, suicidal ideation, and low self-esteem. A randomized controlled trial of *Steps to Respect®: A Bullying Prevention Program* led by researchers at the Social Development Research Group showed that this bullying prevention program was effective in preventing bullying-related behaviors and improving school climate compared to control schools.

Steps to Respect®: A Bullying Prevention Program is a preventive intervention that targets multiple areas of the school environment. The school-wide program is intended to foster a positive school climate and positive norms through teacher and staff training focused on the creation of effective disciplinary policies,

Key Findings

Elementary schools using *Steps to Respect®: A Bullying Prevention Program* showed improvement compared to control schools, including:

- 33% less physical bullying
- 35% fewer teachers reported fighting as a major problem
- 20% more staff members reported their school is promoting a positive

improved monitoring of students, and instruction on how to effectively intervene with students involved in bullying situations. Classroom curricula target Grades 3 to 5 and are intended to promote socially responsible norms and behavior and increase social-emotional skills. Classroom lessons help students recognize bullying, increase empathy for



Steps to Respect®: A Bullying Prevention Program teaches elementary students to recognize, refuse, and report bullying, be assertive, and build friendships. The program was developed by and is available through the Committee For Children (cfchildren.org).

students who are bullied, build friendship skills to increase protective social connections, improve assertiveness and communication skills to help students deter and report bullying, and teach appropriate bystander responses to bullying.

The goal of the evaluation was to test the efficacy of the Steps to Respect® bullying prevention program using a sufficiently large number of schools to investigate school-level effects, thus avoiding design limitations that had been noted in previous evaluations of school bullying prevention programs.

The evaluation was conducted during the 2008–2009 school year and included 33 California elementary schools, 1,296 staff members, 128 teachers, and 3,119 students. Schools were randomly assigned to implement the program immediately or to wait a year. Schools assigned to implement the program were provided with materials, staff training, and data collection reminders, but were otherwise uninvolved in program implementation.

The evaluation utilized a school-randomized pretest-posttest design to test for intervention effects. Staff, teachers, and students from schools that implemented the program, as well as control schools were surveyed in the fall and again in the spring. Staff completed a School Environment Survey which addressed six areas of school climate experienced by both students and staff. Teachers completed the Teacher Assessment of Student Behavior which describes students along five dimensions, including social skills, academic skills and achievement, and observed physical and nonphysical bullying behavior. Third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students completed a survey which included questions about the school climate, school connectedness, student support, bullying prevention and intervention, and bullying behavior.

Results demonstrated that Steps to Respect® is an efficacious bullying prevention program. School staff, teachers, and students from schools that implemented Steps to Respect® reported significantly better outcomes compared to control schools. For school staff, favorable outcomes were present in 5 of 6 school environmental dimensions (see box). Teacher reports demonstrated intervention impacts along 2 of 5 student behavior and skill dimensions. Student reports indicated significant preventive effects along 5 of 13 survey outcomes. Overall, 12 of the 24 (50%) assessed outcome measures indicated significant prevention effects, providing strong evidence for the efficacy of the Steps to Respect® program.

Significantly better outcomes in schools using Steps to Respect® compared to control schools in:

School Environment Outcomes

- ✓ Anti-bullying Policies & Strategies
- ✓ Student Willingness to Intervene in Bullying
- ✓ Student Climate
- ✓ Staff Climate
- ✓ Bullying-related Problems

Teacher Assessment Outcomes

- ✓ Social Competency
- ✓ Physical Bullying Perpetration

Student Survey Outcomes

- ✓ Teacher/Staff Bullying Prevention
- ✓ Student Bullying Intervention
- ✓ Teacher/Staff Intervention
- ✓ Positive Bystander Behavior
- ✓ Student Climate

This research was funded by the Raynier Institute & Foundation and was conducted by Eric C. Brown, Ph.D. and Kevin P. Haggerty, Ph.C. (SDRG), in partnership with investigators Brian H. Smith, Ph.D. (Committee for Children) and Sabina Low, Ph.D. (Wichita State University).

For additional information on this topic, refer to the original article: Brown, E. C., Low, S., Smith, B. H., & Haggerty, K. P. (2011). Outcomes from a school-randomized controlled trial of Steps to Respect: A School Bullying Prevention Program. [School Psychology Review, 40\(3\), 423-443.](#)