Bullies in the Block Area
Understanding and Reducing Mean Behaviors in Early Childhood

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Kristen’s background
About Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that improves the lives and prospects of children and youth by conducting high-quality research and sharing the resulting knowledge with practitioners and policymakers.

We . . .

1. take a whole child approach
2. study children in the real world
3. want children to flourish
4. value objectivity and rigor
5. pursue knowledge development and knowledge transfer

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Early childhood bullying: why we’re interested

• Little research on early-childhood behaviors
• Bullying rates are declining, but remain high!
• Few bullying programs focus on prevention
• Bullying prevention starts by supporting positive social and emotional development in early childhood
Learning outcomes

1. Learn about definition of bullying and origins of mean behavior in early childhood
2. Understand how social and emotional competencies support child and classroom success
3. Learn evidence-based strategies to help teach social emotional skills.

Head Start Program and Performance Standards

- Promote children’s cognitive, social, and emotional growth for later success in school
- Program-wide culture of support for mental health, social and emotional well-being
- Effective classroom management
- Promote parents’ ability to support their children
- Support children with challenging behaviors
- Screening and assessment
Bullies in the Block Area

Bullies in the Block Area: The Early Childhood Origins of “Mean” Behavior

Understanding and Addressing the Early Childhood Origins of “Mean” Behavior and Bullying: Resources for Practitioners

Who is in the audience today?

- Infant-toddler teachers (0-2)
- Preschool teachers (3-5)
- Family child care providers
- Family support staff
- Home visitors
- Administrator/directors
- Therapists/early intervention specialists
- Researchers
- Parents
- Other 😊
What is “bullying” in early childhood?

For older children:
- Repeated aggression
- Imbalance of power
- Direct and indirect forms

With young children:
- Development of aggression
- How aggression can become bullying
- Warning signs

Bullying roles

- Kids who bully
- Kids who are bullied
- Kids who assist or reinforce bullying
- Outsiders
- Kids who defend
The importance of not labeling

• Avoid calling the kids "bullies" and "victims"

• Instead of labeling, focus on the behavior, e.g.
  o "the child who bullied"
  o "the child who was bullied"
  o "the child who was both bullied and bullied others"

https://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/roles-kids-play/
The “bully” in the block area...

Jacob and Stella are building a castle for a family of farm animals. Stella is the architect and Jacob helps by handing her materials and cheering her on.

Sam wanders over to admire their project.

Cool!” he says. “Can I help?” He picks up a yellow block and Stella quickly snatches it from his hands.

“NO!” she yells. “We don’t want you to help!”

"Yeah!” chimes Jacob. “You can’t play with us. Go away!”

Sam begins to cry for his teacher as he slowly backs away.

Development of aggression in young children

• Patterns are noticeable as early as 17 months of age
• Aggression over time predicts bullying behavior in elementary school
• Kids at risk for bullying can be identified in early childhood
• Not all aggression is, or becomes, bullying
**Risk factors**

**Parent and Family System**
- Poor caregiver attachment
- Parenting skills and mental health status
- Maltreatment

**Environment**
- Early care and education settings
- Early exposure to bias
- Media exposure
- Additional environmental factors (e.g. peers, neighborhood safety, socioeconomic status)

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**Caregiver attachment**

**Theory:** Parent/child attachment style may be linked to difficulties with interpersonal relationships

**What does the evidence say?**
- Avoidant attachment style may be a risk factor for *being* bullied
- Attachment style not directly related to aggression in preschoolers
Parent behaviors and characteristics

**Theory:** Poor relationships with parents increase the risk of behavioral and emotional problems

**What does the evidence say?**
- Parenting styles of mothers may relate to relational bullying in preschool
- Discipline techniques can influence aggressive behavior
- Parents’ skills and role modeling are critically important
- Parental involvement and engagement matters

Maltreatment

**Theory:** Physical abuse relates to aggressive behavior in children; maltreatment also negatively affects brain development

**What does the evidence say?**
- Child victims of physical or sexual abuse have higher risk of bullying or aggression
- Persistent maltreatment alters the brain and leads to developmental problems
- Positive relationships with other children and adults can help reduce the effects of maltreatment
Early care and education settings

Theory: More time in child care may cause behavior problems

What does the evidence say about non-parental care?

- 1 study: Child care increased behavior problems
- 2 studies: NO connection to behavior problems
- 4 studies: High-quality child care prevents or minimizes later behavior problems

Early exposure to bias

Theory: Social environments shape the development of bias, prejudice, and stereotypes

What does the evidence say?

- Gender stereotypes emerge from ages 3 to 6
- Racial discernment (“in group” preference) emerges early but is developmental in nature
- More research exists for older children
- Young children’s preferences should not be interpreted as “discrimination”
**Media exposure**

**Theory:** How much time a child watches TV is related to later bullying behavior

**What does the evidence say?**
More time watching TV is linked to:
- increased bullying, even if content is not violent
- increased relational aggression for girls, and physical aggression for boys

**Media exposure, cont.**

**Hypothesis:** What children watch on TV can help improve social skills

**What the evidence says:**
- *Sesame Street*: cooperation, helping, and sharing behaviors
- *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*: pro-social behaviors
- *Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood*: empathy, confidence, and emotion-recognition when properly supported
- What children are watching is as important as how much time they spend watching TV
Professional recommendations on media use by young children

• Media can be a tool for learning
• Technology can increase access to learning opportunities
• Better results when peers interact or adults co-view with young children
• May strengthen relationships between adults and children

(U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education Joint Policy Brief on the Use of Technology with Young Children, October 2016)

The evidence for early childhood bullying risk factors

There is research evidence for the influence of:
- Parenting style
- Child maltreatment
- Media exposure

Further research is needed on:
- Caregiver-child attachment
- Influence of early care and education settings
- Effects of early exposure to bias and prejudice
- Additional environmental factors (e.g. peers, neighborhood safety, or socioeconomic status)
How can early bullying be prevented and addressed?

“The early years present a unique opportunity to take advantage of a variety of caregiver-child relationships and social settings (at home, in preschools, daycares, playgrounds, etc.), in which modeling, teaching, and reinforcing pro-social behaviors, empathy, and kindness can take place.”

(Bullies in the Block Area, p.11)

How often do you deal with children being mean or aggressive toward one another?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Once in awhile
- Almost never

Do you use a behavior or social-emotional skills curriculum or program?

- Yes
- No
- Not yet
- N/A
So what can you do to prevent or redirect mean and aggressive behavior in young children?

Promoting Safe and Welcoming Classrooms
Promoting safe and welcoming classrooms

Documents process of...
• helping children become aware of peer exclusion
• teaching children to be more friendly and accepting

• Child developed rules:
  • Is it fair?
  • Will it work?


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Promoting safe and welcoming classrooms

• Written for teachers
• Helps prevent exclusion and teach empathy
• Materials for families
• Themes:
  • Community
  • Feelings
  • Friendship
  • Teasing & Bullying
• YouTube book review: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBRtbigyqOA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBRtbigyqOA)
Promoting safe and welcoming classrooms, continued

Guidance and problem solving = actively helping children learn to solve their problems and differences constructively

“Guidance Matters” column of the NAEYC journal Young Children
- “Fostering Resilience: Teaching social-emotional skills” (July 2014)
- “Aggression, the Prequel: Preventing the need” (November 2011)
- “Children Who Have Serious Conflicts” (March & July 2011)
  - https://www.naeyc.org/yc/columns/guidance
Promising Programs

Adults and Children Together (ACT) Against Violence
Raising Safe Kids

- For parents and caregivers of children ages birth - 8
- 16 hour course (8 two-hour lessons)
- Community-based
- Designed for families at risk for child maltreatment
- Promotes positive parenting approaches
Conscious Discipline

- Social emotional learning (SEL) program
- Modifies teacher and child behaviors
- Promotes safety, connection, and problem solving
- Relates behaviors to brain state (executive function, emotions, survival)
- Builds self-regulation skills
- [http://consciousdiscipline.com/](http://consciousdiscipline.com/)

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**EARLY CHILDHOOD**

**FRIENDSHIP PROJECT**

- Addresses physical and relational aggression and victimization, and prosocial behavior
- Classroom program for 3 - 5 year olds using puppets, art projects, and role plays
- Contact Jamie Ostrov: jostrov@buffalo
Evidence-Based Programs (EBPs)

Goals

- Teach children to express feelings, control impulses, show empathy, make friends, and solve problems
- Address bullying behavior and peer rejection
- Teach children to assert themselves
- Encourage bystanders to speak up
A set of training programs for parents, teachers, and children up to age 12
Helps children with behavior problems
Works to improve parent-child interactions & attachment
Teaches children prosocial skills
Supports classroom management skills for teachers
http://incredibleyears.com/

Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Preschool/Kg
For children 3 to 6 years old
Supports the development of self-control, positive self-esteem, emotional awareness, basic problem-solving skills, social skills, and friendships
Uses the “turtle technique” to teach self-control
http://www.pathseducation.com/what-is-paths/paths-curriculum
Research-based Developmentally Informed Classroom (REDI-C) and Parent Program (REDI-P)

REDI-C
- Integrates social-emotional, language, and pre-literacy skill development
- Supplements the Preschool PATHS program

REDI-P
- Home visiting program
- Promotes child oral language, emergent literacy, social-emotional and self-regulation skills
- Supports positive parenting strategies
- [https://sites.psu.edu/redi/](https://sites.psu.edu/redi/)

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secondSTEP
Skills for Social and Academic Success - Early Learning Through Grade 8

- Classroom-based social-skills program
- For children ages 4 to 14
- 28 lessons in the early learning kit

- Teaches social-emotional skills to reduce aggressive behavior and increase social competence
- [http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step](http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step)
Which program is right for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Who delivers curriculum?</th>
<th>Special training needed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Trained facilitator</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al's Pals*</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Friendship Project</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscious Discipline</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incredible Years*</td>
<td>Varies (teachers or other group leaders)</td>
<td>Self-study offered, training recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATHS*</td>
<td>Educators and counselors</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REDI-Classroom*</td>
<td>Head Start Staff</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REDI-Parent*</td>
<td>Head Start Home Visitors</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Step*</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Recommended (on-line or in-person options)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Evidence Based Program (EBP)

Research to practice!

Support the development of:
- Social competence
- Emotional competence
- Self-regulation

How?
- Help children develop language skills, including emotion vocabulary
- Teach emotion management (e.g. calming down)
- Develop strong, trusting relationships
- Avoid harsh discipline
- Respect children and families unique circumstances
- Take care of yourself
Action Plan

1. New learning or idea
2. How this new information is relevant to your work
3. Goal statement
4. Action steps
5. Accountability partner
6. Plan to review your action plan

Questions?

Please fill out an evaluation form to help me better serve you in the future!
Thank You!

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http://www.childtrends.org/staff/kristen-e-darling-churchill/

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Additional Resources for Practitioners

Bullying: Can It Begin in Preschool? (High Scope, 2011)

To Prevent Bullying, Focus On Early Childhood (Temkin & Snow, 2015)
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deborah-temkin/to-prevent-bullying-focus_b_8000436.html

Why social and emotional skill building in early childhood matters (Darling-Churchill, 2016)

Dual Language Learners and Social-Emotional Development: Understanding the Benefits for Young Children (2014)

Too Young for Technology? (Kristin Anderson Moore Lecture, 2014)
http://www.childtrends.org/multimedia/too-young-for-technology/
Professional Recommendations on Media Use by Young Children

NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center Joint Position Statement on Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8 (Jan 2012)

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Policy Statement: Media and Young Minds (October 2016)
http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/10/19/peds.2016-2591

U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education Joint Policy Brief on the Use of Technology with Young Children (October 2016)