

# HANDLING AGGRESSION AND BULLYING AT SCHOOLS

Friend to Friend

Professional Development  
Workshop



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Review the different forms of aggression
- Discuss developmental patterns of children and their levels of aggression
- Discuss problematic aggression of children in elementary schools
- Describe the negative impact of aggression and bullying at schools
- Introduce strategies that can be implemented on the individual, classroom and school-wide levels

# FORMS OF AGGRESSION

- Physical (Overt)
- Verbal (Overt)
- Social/Relational (Covert) - While relational aggression is more common among girls than physical aggression, boys engage in it too
- Cyber (Covert or Overt)

# DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS (LEFF ET AL. CHAPTER)

- In toddlers and preschoolers, **physical aggression** is the most prevalent type
- As children's verbal and social skills develop in elementary school, so do **verbal and social aggression**





# DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS CONT. (LEFF ET AL. CHAPTER)

- In late elementary school, **physical aggression** begins to decrease, and **relational aggression** increases (and continues to do so throughout middle school); this corresponds to kids' increasing social skills/sophistication/use of electronic devices.
- **Cyber aggression** (which is often relational in nature) begins late in elementary school and increases during middle school, staying about the same in high school. Both boys and girls engage in cyberbullying, though the medium they use may differ (e.g., boys bully via videogames more than girls do).



# PROBLEMATIC AGGRESSION (LEFF ET AL. CHAPTER)

- About **15%** of kids engage in moderate to frequent **physical aggression** during elementary school
- About **15%** of kids engage in (perpetrate) **bullying** during elementary school
- **Bullying is repeated, intentional aggressive behavior toward someone with less power (either physical or social power)**
- By middle school, about **33%** of all students **have been involved regularly in bullying** as either perpetrators, victims or bully-victims



# NEGATIVE IMPACT OF AGGRESSION AND BULLYING AT SCHOOL

- Kids who engage in frequent aggression and bullying are more likely to engage in “externalizing behavior” - acting out, defiant and disruptive behavior and in their teen years, delinquency
- Victims of bullying are more prone to trauma, depression and anxiety
- Bully-victims experience the worst outcomes, including depression, suicidality, drug use, and higher risk of carrying a weapon to school



# NEGATIVE IMPACT OF AGGRESSION AND BULLYING AT SCHOOL CONT.

- The social/emotional/behavioral issues associated with bullying take up a significant amount of a teacher and administrator's time and energy, and cause stress and distractions for the students
- In schools where aggression and bullying occur frequently, students (both victims and bystanders) report feeling unsafe - this is associated with high levels of stress, and lower educational engagement and achievement





# INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL STRATEGIES

- Carried out by parents, mentors, counselors, and teachers
- These individualized supports usually take place via pull-out meetings or referrals to school-based mental health programs or outside agencies, but teachers can also help individual students build their coping skills
  - Teach kids anger management strategies
  - Teach kids listening and communication skills
  - Train kids to assume that most people mean well (and do not mean them harm)
- **Counselor Specific (varies by school):**
  - Provide treatment for trauma, when needed
  - Provide therapy or psychiatric treatment for impulse control, irritability, and mood disorders

# CLASSROOM-LEVEL STRATEGIES

Practice calming and mindfulness strategies as a class several times per week. Building students' self-awareness and self-regulation has a positive impact on their social interactions and increases their ability to cope with stress. Here is one you can use with your students:

***Please take a deep breath in slowly as if you are smelling your favorite food. Now breathe slowly out as if you are blowing out your birthday candles.***

Do this up to 3 times.

# CLASSROOM-LEVEL STRATEGIES CONT.

Teach the class techniques for recognizing emotions and calming down—then use that common vocabulary often, until the students adopt the skills.

Class techniques to consider:

## Feelings Vocabulary:

- Notice and comment on a student's face and body clues, as you check in with him or her about his or her emotions

## Calming Strategies:

- Deep breaths, positive self-talk, relaxing imagery, or counting to or down from 10

## Feelings Charades:

- Practice reading each other's facial expressions and body language



# CLASSROOM-LEVEL STRATEGIES CONT.

Make it a goal to build your students' empathy for others. This can be done through the books you read with them, journaling, discussions of different perspectives and points of view, and through teachers showing empathy toward their students.

## Books

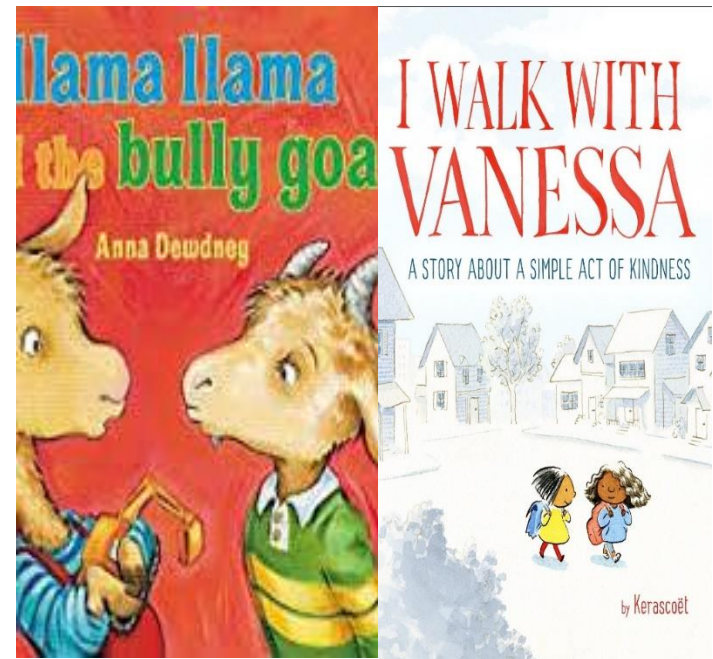
- Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun by Maria Dismondy
- The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes
- I Walk With Vanessa by Kerascoët
- You Are Special by Max Lucado
- Llama Llama and the Bully Goat by Anna Dewdney

## Incentives

- Example: School cash, homework pass any school-based reward system

## De-escalation Techniques

- Steps to Calming Down





# SCHOOL WIDE STRATEGIES

Create a committee of school staff (teachers, lunch-recess staff, admin, and students) to work on policies and initiatives for preventing aggression and responding to aggression with trauma informed strategies (e.g., within a PBIS system).

The committee should consider working on the following initiatives/issues:

- Identify locations where aggression is most common and increase adult presence and supervision there
- Train teachers and aides (and school resource officer) in de-escalation and clearly communicate the plan for handling aggressive students, whether it's verbal or physical aggression
- Incentivize NOT fighting - Train kids to be positive bystanders in their classes, halls, and on the playground



# CONCLUSION

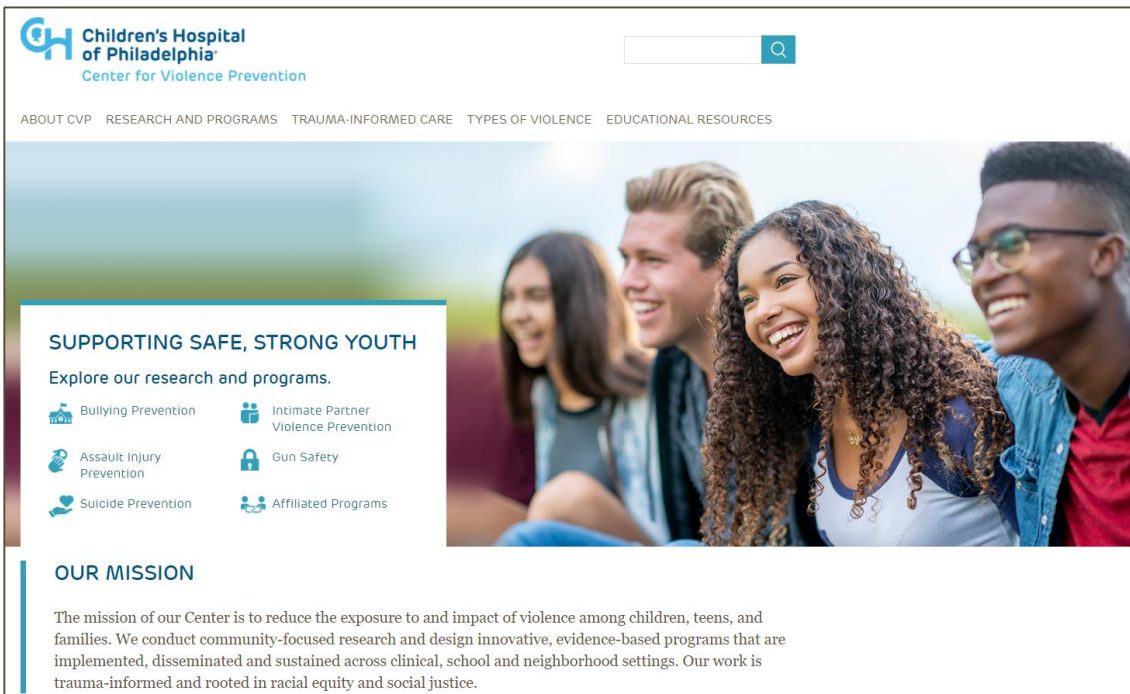
- There are multiple ways to work on aggression and bullying (i.e., individual level, classroom level, and school level)
- It is worth investing time and energy in reducing bullying and aggression
  - Improves students' academic outcomes
  - Improves school climate
  - Helps change the trajectories for individual students at risk of negative outcomes

# CITATIONS

- Bradshaw, C.P. & Waasdorp, T.E. (2019). Preventing Bullying in Schools. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Leff, S.S., Waanders, C., Waasdorp, T.E., Paskewich, B.S. (2014). Bullying and Aggression in School Settings. In H.M. Walker & F.M. Gresham (Eds.), *Handbook of Evidence-Based Practices for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Applications in Schools* (pp. 277-291). New York: Guilford Press.

# LEARN MORE

For additional information about Friend to Friend or to access more bullying prevention resources, please visit [violence.chop.edu](https://violence.chop.edu)



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