SCHOOL BULLYING

GUIDELINES FOR HEADTEACHERS

Introduction

Principals are a key agent in the prevention and intervention against bullying, a risk factor of early school leaving. Their main task is to promote and encourage the actions of other agents, that is teachers, families and students. They should also take into account the needs arising from such actions to address them. Some of these needs are sometimes related to the times and places, so that meeting and working together could be sometimes difficult. Also, they should recognize the work done in this area by teachers and other professionals. Therefore the headteachers, in order to act properly, should have a deep knowledge of the problem to be coped with, and they should be sensitive to the variety of groups involved, as well as to the different ways of confrontation. The following steps may be helpful, so that principals can promote appropriate interventions against bullying.

Understanding the Complexity of the Phenomenon of Bullying

Headteachers should understand the key concepts of bullying, so that they can discriminate it from other behavioral problems before taking any decision of action to contrast it. Bullying is a problem of psycho-social nature in which the responsibility is shared among different actors. In this respect, it is important to act early and divide responsibilities for action. Otherwise, with a problem of bullying among the pupils, it is more complicated to deal with such tasks, as guilt feelings could emerge among people. Traditionally, bullying has been analyzed as direct and indirect, but always face to face. However, over the last few years, a new form of bullying has appeared due to the use of the ICT and virtual social networks, which must also be taken into account. Accordingly, before acting against bullying, headteachers should understand: the characteristics of the phenomenon, the roles that are implied, the rules that facilitate and sustain it, and the direct and indirect forms that it may adopt.

Resources
From the I Am Not Scared Portal

- Case Studies on School Bullying
  On this web portal headteachers can find more than one hundred bullying stories developed in the framework of the "I am Not Scared" Project. This stories can help to headteachers understand the problem.

Making a Team to Develop an Anti-Bullying School Policy

Once the conceptual keys on bullying are known, headteachers should focus their efforts on creating a team. Research has shown that joint actions are much more effective than isolated ones. It is therefore necessary that team work is enhanced. Moreover, in this way, the agreement among teachers about ways of action is provided - which is one of the quality factors of the intervention against bullying and other psycho-social problems that may occur in educational settings. It is the headteacher who must motivate teachers, students and families to take action against bullying and raise awareness in them about the undesirability of the consequences.

Article

● No place for bullying
Here are essential elements for headteachers to get their school communities motivated to work together in tackling bullying.

Good Practices and Experiences Based on Evidence

When headteachers are aware of the problem and its complexity, it is common to feel the urgency to act rapidly. But, before taking actions, it is important that headteachers know which initiatives are successful and which are not, so they do not work from zero, but rather optimize resources and efforts. That is the reason why the first step of action must be to know what things are being done by each teacher when they have identified a bullying episode or an aggression among students. Actually, even if a school does not have a proper bullying program action, teachers have been working with it. So, they should be asked about what is effective and what is not, and how they know it. On this line, it is important to distinguish if a resource, program or material is good or not following the assumptions of evidence-based practices.

On-line Publication

● Don't Suffer in Silence
An anti-bullying set of materials for schools where you can find resources for the development of all lines of action and indications on how to work with all the groups involved.

Evaluating the School Situation from Different Points of View

Although it is known that bullying is present in all of the schools, it is necessary that each school check the level of prevalence of the problem in their particular school. Bullying is sustained by two rules: the rule of dominion-submission and the rule of silence. The rule of silence is a rule typical of peer relations, as it is of common thought that things that happen between pupils must be kept among them. Headteachers, thus, can not perceive the problem, but the problem can to be there. In order to verify the level of prevalence of the phenomenon, it is necessary to have right instruments and choose those that may offer relevant information for our action plan. Therefore, the steps to follow will be to choose the instruments or group of instruments to be used.

- to decide the target groups to whom they will be handed out: pupils, teachers and families.

- to design the conditions of data collection: whether individual or collective, and on a no name basis or not.

- to codify and synthesize the information provided by the different informants.

- to meet the group of teachers to present the results of the results and interpret the causes or factors that are facilitating the existence of the problem.

- to perform tutorial sessions in the classes with all of the pupils, so that they can help to complete the interpretation of the results and identify the reasons why the existence of this kind of phenomena is being facilitated.

- to inform and sensitize the families and to enable them to contribute to the interpretation of the results and the identification of the risk factors.

On-line Publication

Measuring Bullying Victimization, Perpetration, and Bystander Experiences: A Compendium of Assessment Tools
It is a book in which headteachers can find scales for only victims, only bullies, bully-victims, and bully, victim and bystanders. It has been edited by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and Division of Violence Prevention (Georgia).

Planning or Choosing Protocols of Action

To establish protocols of action it is necessary to clarify the responsibilities of each of the educators and the steps to be followed in a specific case of bullying. Although it is not common, in some places the educational administration provides a specific protocol. However, where such protocol is not provided, it is important that the procedure to follow further to the detection of a bullying event is put into effect. In both cases, it would be useful that the headteacher let teachers, students and families know them. The steps to be followed would be:

- To review the possible existence of a bullying protocol in the area

- In case there is a protocol, analyze and make it known among all of the teachers, families and students. To perform a simulation would be recommended

- In case there isn't any protocol, look for existing protocols, choose the one that is considered as the most suitable or design one protocol by yourself starting from the existing ones. Analyze the definitive protocol and make it known among all of the teachers, families and students. In this case, to perform a simulation is also recommended.

On-line Publication

Model Protocol for Bullying in DuPage County Schools
Good resource for designing your own protocol to be included in the Best Practices Handbook of this American area.

Giving Priority to Preventive Action Lines

Once the headteachers know about the conceptual and intervention key of bullying and they have a protocol of action selected or designed, it will be decided which aspects must be addressed in the short term and which might be left for the long term. In this respect, it is important to start taking into account the opinions and perceptions of teachers, families and students. Also, it would be important to take into account the results obtained in the evaluation phase (Step 4). Maybe it is necessary to address a specific – most urgent - problem. The general process should be progressive: starting with the easier proposals and continuing with the most difficult ones.

Websites

- **Abc's Of Bullying Prevention**
  Paper on prevention based on three key rules: Attitude + = Behavior Change. Besides the common aspects, it shows how to work with students at different levels of involvement.

- **Guidelines for preventing cyber-bullying in the school environment: a review and recommendations**
  This booklet is a product of Working Group 3 of COST Action IS0801 addressing Cyber-bullying, an emerging form of bullying, and perhaps it should be a priority for the proper intervention on it.

Establishing Programs for Students at Risk

Besides preventive action, it is necessary to implement programs to work with students who are not directly involved in bullying, but are at risk of becoming involved. For this purpose it is necessary to have prepared programs or activities aimed at pupils that, due to their behavior or personal circumstances, might be at risk of being involved in bullying or cyber-bullying, whether as aggressors or as victims. The steps to follow would be:

- To identify a boy or a girl at risk
- To identify the reasons why he/she is at risk
- To look for the appropriate program or action and the teacher who will develop it.
- To develop the program with a specific deadline with the avoidance of being permanent.

Websites

- **School Violence: Prevention Tools and Resources**
  Website of Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. It has a section on the prevention of school violence. In this portal web can find many resources and links to other programs that may be helpful for the design and development of prevention.

- **Why Do Kids Bully?**
  Website on education subjects. One section is about bullying and describes the main risk factors related to families and peers.

Implementing direct intervention programs

Although most overall teacher performance should be preventive, the whole school has to be prepared to address potential bullying episodes. Interventions will be needed with the aggressor and the victim. For such purposes, it is advisable that teachers have certain knowledge of programs designed for this kind of pupils, as the sooner the problem is identified the quicker the action is taken. The steps to follow would be:

- To design a database of resources to be used in the action with pupils directly involved: victims and aggressors

- To identify a boy or a girl directly involved

- To identify the reasons of the involvement

- To look for the most appropriate program or action and the teacher who will develop it.

- To develop the program with a specific deadline with the avoidance of being permanent.

Manual
Quality circles
Section of the book "Tackling Bullying in Your School: A practical handbook for teachers" that describes what are and how to develop the quality circles.

Evaluating the Process and the Outcomes, and Establishing Improvement Proposals

Prevention and intervention are important but they need to be evaluated in order to provide indicators of their effectiveness and to find the keys for improvement. It is essential that the headteachers help the educational community to plan the system to evaluate the actions in order to ascertain whether they have served to reach the planned objectives as regards the line of prevention, the action with pupils at risk or the intervention with pupils involved in bullying (victims or aggressors). The evaluation, although performed at the end of the process, must be designed from the beginning. The main methodological aim should be to follow the principles of evidence-based practices. It is desirable that the evaluation is carried out with instruments validated prior to the development of the intervention, also among pupils that will develop the intervention (known as experimental group) and among pupils that will not develop the intervention (known as control group). The purpose of this is to determine the changes that occur due to the intervention program.

On-line Publications

- School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization
  Report of the study by Professor Farrington and his team at the Campbell Systematic Reviews. The main effective intervention programs against bullying and their evaluation processes are collected.

- How Effective Are School Bullying Intervention Programs? A Meta-Analysis of Intervention Research
  Research article in which a meta-analysis of intervention programs with better results is carried out.

Publishing and Disseminating the Experience

Any initiative is likely to be a good resource for other headteachers. However, in many cases, good management practices fall into oblivion or registration of anecdotes. It is therefore important that all experience is told and published to other colleagues' advantage. The steps to follow would be:

- To register- in writing - all of the decisions that are taken before, during and at the end of the development of the program, and the reason for taking them.
- To look for potential readers that may be interested in the experience.
- To identify a magazine or website that allows the publishing of the experience and with a wide number of potential readers.
- To write a memorandum respecting the conditions of the magazine or the website.
- To create a school newspaper in which students, teachers, families and headteachers could tell their experiences.

Website

🌑 How to Create a School Newspaper in Elementary School
Ten steps for students to design a school newspaper.