

Adverse Childhood Experiences in Minnesota: Peer Violence, Bullying, Harassment, and School Safety

Peer violence, bullying, and harassment negatively impact youth in multiple ways. Experiencing peer violence or bullying as a victim, perpetrator, or a witness increases the likelihood of experiencing behavioral and mental health concerns, substance use, negative peer relationships and peer conflict, and academic disengagement; these negative impacts are even greater for those who are both victims and perpetrators (David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Stop Bullying, 2017a; United Nations Children’s Fund, 2022). There are several strategies that can be implemented to promote academic engagement, positive relationships between students and teachers, and to support students’ planning to reach their post-high school goals.

Similarly, ensuring school safety and a positive school climate has a wide range of benefits, including preventing negative peer interactions and substance use, promoting positive relationships, and improving academic outcomes (Cardillo, 2013; National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.; United States Department of Education, 2019). For the most current local data on bullying, harassment, and school safety, please visit MDH’s interactive [Adverse Childhood Experiences Data \(www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html\)](http://www.web.health.state.mn.us/communities/ace/data/index.html).

There are a wide range of effective strategies that can be implemented to promote positive peer relationships and school safety and reduce or prevent negative impacts from peer conflict and violence.

Effective strategies

Strategies for promoting academic engagement and positive relationships with teachers and school staff include:

- **Restorative practices, including those specific to discipline and conflict resolution.** These practices aim to promote positive relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address harmful behavior, improve school climate, and improve student well-being (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2014). They also often include responding to incidents in which a student harms another person by focusing on repairing the relationship, in which both parties share their experience of the incident, how they were impacted, and ways the harm could be resolved. Other activities may include peer mediation, conflict resolution processes, and circle discussions, in which students, teachers, and school staff are given the opportunity to speak and listen to one another in a safe setting. It is important to note that zero tolerance

Relevant indicator(s):

- School violence
- Bullying perpetration
- Bullying victimization
- Harassment at school
- Sense of safety at school

Strategies for promoting positive family relationships, youth mental well-being, academic engagement, and community connections and safety can also address peer violence and relationship concerns and promote positive peer relationships.

policies have been shown to be ineffective to address bullying (Schott Foundation for Public Education; Stop Bullying, 2017b).

- **Anti-bullying and school safety rules and policies**, with key features that include providing clear definitions of bullying behaviors, identifying locations covered by the policy, describing consequences for violations, and providing implementation guidance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; Stop Bullying, 2017b).
- **Anti-bullying and positive school climate programming**, such as discussion groups about bullying, discrimination, and related topics; training for teachers and school staff on how to address bullying; mentoring and support groups; and implementing programs and curricula that aim to build youth social, mental health, and problem-solving skills, such as social-emotional learning (David-Ferdon et al., 2016; Gaffney, Farrington, et al., 2021; Gaffney, Ttofi, et al., 2021; Stop Bullying, 2017;). Key skills include communication and conflict resolution, problem-solving, emotional regulation and coping, and self-esteem.
- **Opportunities to discuss identity and harassment** and process harassment incidents with a focus on students learning about their cultural backgrounds and developing a sense of pride in their identity/identities (Anderson et al., 2018; Brittian Lloyd & Williams, 2017; Comas-Díaz, 2016; Huff, 2021; Jones et al., 2020; Jones & Neblett, 2017; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017; National Education Association Center for Social Justice, 2021; Neblett et al., 2012). Additionally, youth benefit from supports to help them cope with and respond to harassment, such as helping identify coping strategies that work for them (e.g., engaging in advocacy or activism) and helping identify options and prepare for responding to these experiences.
- **Intensive and tailored supports**, such as mental health or case management services, which may be most beneficial for youth with significant behavior concerns (David-Ferdon et al., 2016).

Examples of Minnesota initiatives

More Resilient Robbinsdale and Robbinsdale Redesign

More Resilient Robbinsdale aims to increase understanding of ACEs, how to promote resiliency, how to serve youth in a trauma-responsive way, and how to promote a positive climate to prevent ACEs and mitigate their impact. As part of this work, Robbinsdale Redesign (Robbinsdale Area School's family service collaborative) facilitated ACEs trainings to all school staff and developed and implemented restorative practices in every school in the district. Other activities include author readings of books related to ACEs, a new pilot model for providing ACEs education to youth, and other opportunities for community members to learn about ACEs.

More information about [Robbinsdale Area Redesign \(www.rdale.org/community/robbinsdale-area-redesign\)](http://www.rdale.org/community/robbinsdale-area-redesign)

Hennepin Healthcare’s Next Step Program

Hennepin Healthcare’s Next Step program is a violence intervention program that serves youth who are in the hospital because of a violent injury. Next Step staff work individually with youth to provide social support, connect youth with resources, and provide tailored assistance according to youth needs, such as finding housing, employment, or trauma services. The program aims to support positive development and healing for youth affected by violence, prevent re-injury and re-hospitalization, and interrupt the cycle of violence.

For more information about Hennepin Healthcare’s [Next Step Program \(www.hennepinhealthcare.org/support-services/next-step-program/\)](http://www.hennepinhealthcare.org/support-services/next-step-program/)

Peacemaker Resources Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) trainings

Peacemaker Resources provides social and emotional learning trainings for teachers and students, including restorative classroom management practices. Trainings are grounded in five SEL core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. They cover a wide range of other topics, including listening, self-control, identifying feelings, empathy, effective communication, self-talk, and gratitude. Peacemaker Resources can also help schools navigate specific SEL curricula and other evidence-based practices and strategies.

For more information about [Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Teacher & Student Training \(www.peacemakerresources.org/sel.html\)](http://www.peacemakerresources.org/sel.html)

More information about the [CASEL Program Guide \(pg.casel.org/\)](http://pg.casel.org/)

More information from the Minnesota Department of Education on [SEL Implementation Guidance \(education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/social/imp/\)](http://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/social/imp/)

Examples of national initiatives

School Safety

The schoolsafety.gov website and the School Safety Readiness Tool are federal resources that schools and districts can use to inform the development of school safety policies and practices. They emphasize several elements critical to school safety, including designating key staff, creating report systems, developing an emergency operations plan, training staff, conducting exercises and drills, improving school climate, utilizing threat assessment strategies, training students, and developing recovery plans. It also includes an assessment to help schools understand and improve safety readiness.

More information about [Foundation Elements of School Safety \(www.schoolsafety.gov/foundational-elements-school-safety\)](http://www.schoolsafety.gov/foundational-elements-school-safety)

Trauma-sensitive schools

Trauma-sensitive schools provides a wide range of resources for educators, schools, and districts to implement trauma-informed policies and practices, including written guidance, videos, and a learning community to provide an opportunity to share ideas and troubleshoot problems.

More information about [Helping Traumatized Children Learn \(traumasensitiveschools.org/\)](https://traumasensitiveschools.org/)

Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) is one of the most well-known evidence-based and school-wide programs that aims to reduce and prevent bullying. OBPP involves a school assessment process, the formation of a committee to coordinate anti-bullying efforts, bullying education for youth, engaging teachers and caregivers in bullying prevention, defining rules and policies related to bullying, intervening when bullying occurs, and ensuring support for victims of bullying.

More information about the [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program \(olweus.sites.clemson.edu/index.php\)](https://olweus.sites.clemson.edu/index.php)

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