


Imagine Newsletter

A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention

Information for Parents

Issue # 15

Bullying: What's Happening in Waterloo Region Elementary Schools?



In the winter of 2007, a survey on bullying was done with catholic elementary school students in grades 4-7, their parents, and school staff at 10 local schools before these school communities began fully using the *Imagine...A School Without Bullying* Framework. These ten schools represented a variety of school communities—urban, rural, inner-city, suburban, smaller, larger, multicultural. The reason for the survey was to find out how much bullying is happening, what types happen most, to whom, and how students, staff and parents see the problem of bullying in our local schools.

Each school's survey results were different. When all the results for the ten schools were put together, the data said that:

- Sixty-seven per cent (67%) of students surveyed said they had been bullied at least once in the four weeks before the survey; forty-two per cent (42%) reported they had bullied others at least once
- About one in five students was involved in a serious bullying situation: nineteen per cent (19%) of students reported being bullied on a weekly basis, and six per cent (6%) reported bullying others on a weekly basis
- Students who reported being bullied in the four weeks before the survey felt less safe and less respected than students who had not reported being bullied; the more frequently students were bullied, the less they felt safe, respected and included in school
- Social and verbal bullying was reported to have happened more often than physical bullying
- School staff, school administrators and parents were much less aware of bullying than students
- Students in the lower grades were more likely to be bullied; the proportion of students who felt they had to stay at home to avoid being bullied was twice as high in grade 4 as in grade 7 (10% vs.5%)
- Boys were less caring toward children who had been bullied and more likely to agree with pro-bullying statements; there was an increase in pro-bullying attitudes as children moved up in grades, especially in boys
- As the students moved up in grades, there were less students reporting being "bullied only", and more students reporting they "bullied others only"

So what does this information mean for parents and for school communities? First, it means that bullying is a real and important issue locally, with **nineteen percent of children reporting being bullied on a weekly basis**. In past newsletters, the impact of bullying has been



For more information, contact Region of Waterloo Public Health 519-883-2003 ext. 5356

www.region.waterloo.on.ca/bullying



Imagine Newsletter

A School Climate Approach to Bullying Prevention

Information for Parents

discussed, especially if bullying happens often and over a period of time. The more often students were bullied, the less they reported feeling safe, respected and included in school. These kinds of feelings have been proven in other research to affect learning. Clearly, this level of bullying behaviour is affecting the ability of local children to learn and develop to their potential.

Most of the bullying that occurred was in social or verbal form, which is sometimes harder for adults to pick up on. This fact may help to tell why school staff and parents are not as aware as the students are of the amount of bullying. If adults are not aware, support is less likely to be offered e.g. class lessons, skill building opportunities, counselling, etc. Also, adults may find it harder to help when there is no physical proof of bullying, and so they may not act on a child's report of bullying. When adults don't take action, children may lose trust and won't report bullying another time.

The data also seems to say that there is a lack of connection and understanding between the older students and the younger students and that students just "toughen up" as they get older instead of learning better relationship skills, especially in boys.



What can parents and school communities do to help?

School communities need to share and discuss their own school's data on bullying to increase awareness and commitment to stop and prevent bullying at their school. The survey findings in this newsletter can be said to reflect only the situation in elementary schools in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board. However, all school communities are encouraged to find out what is happening within their own school. There are surveys in the *Imagine* Resource Binder that can be used, or there are online surveys that can be done, or schools can come up with their own way of getting data about bullying.

All school communities who receive this newsletter have had some training and experience with the *Imagine...A School Without Bullying* Framework. It is best practice for a committee of staff, parents and students to be formed each new school year to continue on with planning and carrying out activities to improve school climate, prevent bullying and improve student relationships. Parents can volunteer to be part of this committee, help run activities and events or participate in them.

Most importantly, as children grow, parents need to keep talking and listening to them about bullying and healthy friendships. Children need help in learning how to help themselves or others when they are part of a bullying incident. They need help in learning what behaviour is healthy and acceptable in a relationship. Children need parents to show them how to care for people who have been hurt. Finally, they need to be believed and supported when they tell an adult about a bullying situation.

It will take time to see big changes to bullying behaviour in schools. Everyone has a part to play to help make a school culture where bullying behaviour is not thought of as "normal". Keep going what you can do to help!



For more information, contact Region of Waterloo Public Health 519-883-2003 ext. 5356

www.region.waterloo.on.ca/bullying