Bullying Prevention Is Crime Prevention

A research brief by FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS

This brief is based on a report by FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, an anti-crime group of over 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, victims of violence, youth violence experts and leaders of police associations. The report’s authors are: James Alan Fox, The Lipman Family Professor of Criminal Justice, Northeastern University; Delbert S. Elliott, Director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado; Seattle Chief of Police R. Gil Kerlikowske; and FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS’ president Sanford Newman and research director William Christeson. For the full report and citations for this brief, see www.fightcrime.org.

One in Six Students are Victims of Bullying

Bullying is commonly defined as aggressive behavior or intentional “harm doing,” carried out repeatedly, and targeted towards someone less powerful. A national survey found that nearly one in six American children in sixth through tenth grade—more than 3.2 million children—are moderate to frequent victims of bullying each year. And 3.7 million bully other children “sometimes” to “several times a week.”

How miserable does bullying make its victims? Compared to their peers, kids who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed. Bullied boys are four times more likely to be suicidal; bullied girls are eight times more likely to be suicidal.

But recent research shows that successful programs can prevent half or more of bullying. They also reduce the risk of future crime.

Bullies and Crime

Around the world, bullying is an early warning sign that children and youths may be headed down a path to more serious antisocial behavior. A large U.S. study found that the most serious bullies (those who frequently bullied others both in and out of school) were seven times more likely to report they had carried a weapon to school in the prior month.

And a study conducted in Sweden showed that nearly 60 percent of boys who researchers classified as bullies in grades six through nine were convicted of at least one crime by age 24. Even more dramatic, 40 percent of the boys who were bullies had three or more convictions by age 24.

A Secret Service study of school shootings found that the victims of bullying sometimes lash out and that “almost three-quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked or injured
by others prior to the incident.”

Acting decisively to stop bullying and teach bullies new ways to interact with their peers will prevent much suffering now while reducing future crime.

**Proven Programs Can Cut Bullying in Half — and Sharply Reduce Crime**

Research clearly shows that half or more of all bullying can be prevented. Thus far, three model programs that were rigorously designed and tested have been proven to be highly effective.

**The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program**—First developed in Norway after the suicide of a number of boys who had been bullied, the program has now been implemented in several hundred schools in the United States and around the world. It produced a 50 percent reduction in bullying in Norway and a 20 percent reduction in a South Carolina test.

**Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)**—LIFT shows long-term results are possible from a ten-week anti-aggression program. Compared to LIFT participants, fifth graders whose schools did not receive the program were 59 percent more likely to drink alcohol regularly by eighth grade, and two times more likely to have been arrested during middle school than those who received the program.

**The Incredible Years**—Originally designed for children ages two to eight with high levels of aggressive behavior, the program trains parents and children in problem-solving skills and non-aggressive social skills. It has stopped the high levels of aggression for approximately two-thirds of the families receiving help. (For contact information on these three programs see: http://www.fightcrime.org/bullyingcontacts.php).

**Money Well Spent**

Bullying prevention programs are relatively inexpensive for the results they deliver. The upfront training and supply cost for delivering both the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and LIFT programs throughout a school district are only a few thousand dollars. Safe and Drug-Free Schools coordinators, who are currently funded in almost every school district in America, could administer The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Modest funds will typically be needed to implement LIFT and The Incredible Years programs.

These investments will more than pay for themselves by reducing special education costs and future crime. For example, special education classes for 12 years for one child with emotional problems can cost $100,000 more than regular schooling. Professor Mark A. Cohen of Vanderbilt University estimated that each high-risk juvenile prevented from adopting a life of crime could save the country $1.7 million.

Law enforcement leaders and researchers agree: bullying is not just sad, it’s dangerous. Every school should adopt a proven bullying prevention program to save money and lives.

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**Serious Bullies More Likely to Carry Weapons to School**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carried a weapon at school in the last month</th>
<th>58%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Never bullied others</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullied others at least once a week in school and outside of school</td>
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Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine

**Serious Bullies More Likely to Carry Weapons to School**


Source citation and other research are available at www.fightcrime.org


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Endnotes:

One in Six Students are Victims of Bullying

Definition of bullying:

One in six American children in sixth through tenth grade are moderate to frequent victims of bullying:

Kids who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed; boys are four times more likely to be suicidal; girls are eight times more likely to be suicidal:

Bullies and Crime

Secret Service study findings:

U.S. study findings:

Swedish study findings:

Proven Programs Can Cut Bullying in Half—And Sharply Reduce Crime

Bullying Prevention Program research results:
Limber, S. (2003, August). Youth development program: