PREVENTION UPDATE

Bullying and Cyberbullying at Colleges and Universities

Overview

According to StopBullying.gov, an official U.S. government Web site managed by the Department of Health and Human Services in partnership with the Department of Education and Department of Justice, definitions of bullying vary, but "most agree that bullying involves:

- Imbalance of Power: people who bully use their power to control or harm and the people being bullied may have a hard time defending themselves
- Intent to Cause Harm: actions done by accident are not bullying; the person bullying has a goal to cause harm
- Repetition: incidents of bullying happen to the same the person over and over by the same person or group"

Bullying can be verbal (name-calling, teasing), social (spreading rumors, leaving people out on purpose, breaking up friendships), physical (hitting, punching, shoving), and cyberbullying (using the Internet, mobile telephones, or other digital technologies to harm others).

At a White House Summit on Bullying in March 2011, Eduardo Ochoa, assistant secretary for postsecondary education in the Department of Education, said, "The issue of bullying is different in higher education than K–12. Once students reach the age of 18, new protections regarding bullying behaviors are afforded to them by law. But in college, most of the behaviors are not typically labeled as bullying."

At the same meeting, Charlie Rose, the Department of Education's general counsel, pointed out that the consequences for bullies are often harsher in college than for younger students, who are less likely to face legal repercussions. "Both the perpetrators and the victims are adults, so the legal framework is very, very different," he said.

Participants at the summit agreed that some measures, such as more intensive training programs for dormitory resident advisers, could help lessen the spread of bullying on campuses. They also discussed the importance of changing young people's attitudes and behaviors before they reach college to discourage bullying, and they agreed that better policies at the federal, state, and institutional levels would also be an important tool.

What the Evidence Tells Us

While most of the research on bullying and cyberbullying has focused on grade school (K–12) students, recent research conducted by professors at Indiana State University shows that bullying and cyberbullying doesn't come to an end with high school. The researchers found that almost 22 percent of college students reported being cyberbullied while 15 percent reported being bullied. Cyberbullying was defined as when new technology, such as social networking, text messaging, or instant messaging, is used to harass others with harmful text or images. Bullying was defined as when a person attacks another verbally, attacks another physically, makes obscene gestures, or intentionally isolates another from a social group. The study also showed that 38 percent of students knew someone who had been cyberbullied while almost 9 percent reported cyberbullying someone else. Comparatively, research on kindergarten through 12th grade students suggests that as many as 25 percent of school age children have reported being cyberbullied and also 25

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percent report that they have cyberbullied another student. Of college students who reported being cyberbullied, 25 percent reported being harassed through a social networking site and 21 percent reported that they received harmful text messages, with 16 percent receiving such harmful communication through e-mail and 13 percent through instant messages. In bullying, 42 percent reported seeing someone being bullied by another student while about 8 percent reported bullying another student. Additionally, almost 15 percent reported seeing a professor bully a student while 4 percent reported that they had been bullied by a professor.

Researchers in a 2004 report said, "[I]t appears that a substantial amount of bullying by both students and teachers may be occurring in college. Over 60 percent of the students reported having observed a student being bullied by another student, and over 44 percent had seen a teacher bully a student. More than 6 percent of the students reported having been bullied by another student occasionally or very frequently, and almost 5 percent reported being bullied by a teacher occasionally or very frequently, while over 5 percent of the students stated that they bullied students occasionally or very frequently. . . . These data do not follow the pattern of decreasing bullying with age that has been reported in the bullying literature on primary and secondary school students. The findings indicate instead that bullying graduates to college, consistent with studies which have shown that bullying is a fairly common occurrence among adults in the workplace."

Lessons Learned From Colleges and Universities
For the most part, colleges and universities that have specific policies and programs related to bullying and cyberbullying prevention address the problem within the context of harassment in general. For example, Danville Area Community College in Danville, Ill., addresses cyberbullying in its *Student Handbook* under Anti-Harassment in Education. It says, "Cyber Bullying is a form of harassment and a violation of the Student Code of Conduct. It *will not be tolerated.* Any student found responsible and in violation will be subject to *immediate disciplinary action* and *permanent suspension* from Danville Area Community College. Any case of cyber bullying that is determined to be of a criminal or legal nature will be referred to local authorities."

The *Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act,* named in honor of Rutgers student Tyler Clementi who took his own life in September 2010 following online harassment from his peers, was introduced in the U.S. Congress for the second time in March 2011. It would require all colleges and universities that receive federal student aid to have in place a policy to prohibit the harassment of students based on their perceived or actual race, color, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, sex, or gender identity.

Higher Education Center and Other Federal Resources
Publications
- *Catalyst* (Spring 2006) Vol. 7, No. 3: Violence Prevention
- *Preventing Violence and Promoting Safety in Higher Education Settings: Overview of a Comprehensive Approach*
- *Prevention Update: Primary Prevention of Violence—Stopping Campus Violence Before It Starts*
- *Prevention Update: Stalking and Cyberstalking*

Web Site
- StopBullying.gov

The Higher Education Center for Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Violence Prevention
http://higheredcenter.ed.gov   1-800-676-1730; TDD Relay-friendly, Dial 711