



# Widener University

## **Harassment, intimidation, bullying and social media: Counselor responses and strategies**

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### **HIB and social media are EVERYWHERE**

- All 50 U.S. states require schools to have a bullying prevention policy
- No one is left out . . . highest-performing schools, under-resourced schools, urban|suburban, charter, private|public
- Compounded with access to social media platforms

### **Psychological and psychosocial affects all in HIB events**

- Victims Poor psychosocial adjustment
- Bullies Perpetrators of bullying behavior also suffer in the long-term
- Bystanders Witnesses to bullying include students, parents, and teachers

### **HIB in schools**

- Physical
- Relational
- Cyber|social media
- Victims of cyber bullying are often also victims of traditional off-line bullying.

### **HIB and iGens**

- iGens . . . Information generation
- iGens exist in an online environment
- Social media is a hub for harassment, intimidation and bullying
- 24|7 access
  - Pings, alerts . . .

### **Social media usage in COVID-19**

- A 10.5% usage increase nationally [July 2020]
- Blurring of information vs. *entertainment*
- Posts MUST be entertaining to attract views
- Accuracy less important
- Headline ‘grabbing’ is norm

### Challenges to existing practices

- Most bullying prevention programs focus on raising awareness of the problem and administering consequences
- Punishment and zero tolerance not effective in the US; *often disproportionately target students of color.*
- Peer mediation can *increase* bullying!
- Bystander intervention

### Approaches that are evidence-based to address HIB

- Building a *POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE*
- Advancing *SOCIAL and EMOTIONAL LEARNING*

### Positive school climate fundamentals

- Felt sense' of being in a school [*feelings and relationships*]
- Welcome and greeting
- Power and how it is expressed
- How problems are resolved
- How people work together
- Character
- Fosters healthy development
- Conversely, a *negative* school climate is associated with higher rates of student bullying, aggression, victimization, and feeling unsafe.

### Social norm 'engineering'

- A conscious process that builds a positive culture among student peers and school adults that becomes self-reinforcing.

### More training and support for teachers needed

- Teachers **seem unprepared** to deal with bullying
- Students consistently report that teachers miss most incidents of bullying and fail to help students when asked to do so
- Some teachers **bully students** themselves, or show **a lack of empathy** toward children who are bullied
- WU's CNED program offers a 12-credit certificate: '**Counselor Coach**' for classroom teachers and school personnel is a resource to address this unpreparedness

### Collaborating with school leadership

- Leadership is key to a positive climate.
- Educate if bullying is minimized vs. the harmful peer abuse that it is?
- Recognize lifelong challenges
- Encourage commitment to promoting all children's positive psychological health vs y over-reliance on punishing misbehavior?
- Discern between typical developmental processes that need guidance versus bullying that needs assertive intervention?
- Value empathy and student's feelings

- Involve all stakeholders—*students, support staff, nurse, librarian, paraprofessionals, faculty, parents and administrators*
- Identify the school’s specific issues to be addressed
- Consider climate assessments periodically to track the impact of improvements

### **Social and emotional learning [SEL] is well known**

- Teaching SEL skills
  - *Self-awareness*
  - *Self-management*
  - *Social awareness*
  - *Responsible decision making*
  - *Relationship management*
- Build strong relationships between adults and young people
- Focus on repairing harm and teaching social and emotional skills, not administering consequences
- Model the desired behavior

### **Ideas from the *Social Dilemma* Netflix documentary**

- Recognize social media problem
- Social media is addictive
- Children are at-risk
- Pressure
- Government doing little to solve problem
- WE can [and must] nurture and promote change

### **Tips for parents at home**

- Open doors
- Listen
- Device-free meals
- Encourage ‘outdoor’ time
- Family chores together
- Reassurance, reassurance
- Be the ADULT, PARENT
- Problem solve together

### **Taking today’s presentation and making changes in your school**

- What is the top priority at your school?
- What are the issues to address at your school?
- What obstacles might you encounter?
- Remember . . . EVERYWHERE, EVERYONE!

## References and resources

- Resources on WU's school counselor page [www.widener.edu/counselors](http://www.widener.edu/counselors)
- Educational materials for teaching problem-solving skills to children up to age 8. <http://actagainstviolence.apa.org>
- Ahmad, A.R. & Murad, H.R. [2019]. J..*Med Internet Res* 2020 22[5]: e19556
- Bullying and cyberbullying: What every educator needs to know--Elizabeth Kandel Englander
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia [CHOP]
- Cinelli, M., Quattrocioni, W., Galeazzi, A., et al. The COVID-19 social media infodemic. *Sci Rep* 10, 16598 [2020]. <http://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-73510-5>
- Connected Kids: Safe, Strong, Secure  
A clinical guide and 21 handouts aimed at building resilience.  
[www.aap.org/connectedkids](http://www.aap.org/connectedkids)
- Exploring the Nature and Prevention of Bullying  
An online course about implementing bullying prevention programs in school.  
[www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/bullying](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/training/bullying)
- Gretchen Brion Meisels [2019] & Harvard Graduate School of Education
- Olweus Bullying Prevention Program  
Cited by the AAP as one of the most effective intervention models, this program targets bullies, victims, and bystanders.  
[www.olweus.org](http://www.olweus.org)
- Snyder, F. [2020]. *Business.com*
- *Social dilemma* documentary [Netflix].
- Stop Bullying Now!  
Provides information (in English and Spanish) for children, parents, and school staff. [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov)

## Contact information

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