

Intervention Tips for Law Enforcement Officers

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

- **An Imbalance of Power:** Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- **Repetition:** Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Research Your State Laws

Even though your state may not have an anti-bullying law, there are usually many laws that are applicable to dealing with bullying behaviors, including theft, assault, battery, and extortion.

Complete the Investigation before Contacting Parents

Complete a thorough investigation of a bullying incident before contacting parents of involved students. Contact the parents of the child who was bullied and seek suggestions for reparation before contacting the parents of the child who was bullying.

When speaking to the parent of the child who bullied, make it clear that (1) you have conducted an investigation that included getting their child's account of the incident, and (2) witnesses and physical evidence clearly indicate that their child was bullying. Stress that their child violated a school rule, policy, or a law.

Consider These Factors before Making Arrests

Not all fights are the result of bullying situations, but when they are, do not routinely arrest both parties just because it appears that they were both fighting. The child who is being bullied is most likely not a willing participant. Boys who are bullied are typically smaller and weaker than their peers and may fear being hurt. Children who bully usually have two or three supporters. Children who bully and their

supporters may lie about their behavior and shift the blame to the child who was bullied (Olweus, 1993).

Understand the Effect of the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Students with an IEP who bully may not be subjected to conventional school rules and discipline. An IEP is a legal document and specifies what consequences can be administered for misbehavior. However, a student IEP does not restrict the action of law enforcement officers. If a law is violated and state law permits an arrest, that student can be arrested.

Discourage Mediation of Bullying Incidents

- Bullying is a form of victimization, not conflict. It is no more a “conflict” than are child abuse or domestic violence.

- Mediating a bullying incident may send inappropriate messages to the students who are involved (such as, “You are both partly right and partly wrong.” or “We need to work out this conflict between you.”). The appropriate message to the child who is bullied should be, “No one deserves to be bullied and we are going to do everything we can to stop it.” The message for children who bully should be, “Your behavior is inappropriate and must be stopped.”
- Mediation may further victimize a child who has been bullied. It may be very upsetting for a child who has been bullied to face his or her tormenter in mediation.
- There is no evidence to indicate that conflict resolution or peer mediation is effective in stopping bullying.

References and Resources

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*. NY: Blackwell.