

## The National Association of Social Workers

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## Violence and Bullying in Schools: Tips for Students and Social Workers

School violence and bullying may affect a student's physical, mental and social wellbeing. School social workers are becoming increasingly aware of the need for prevention and intervention to lessen the impact on learning, academic performance, and safety for children, teachers, mental health staff, parents, and all other school staff. School violence and bullying affect the students involved, the witnesses, the school climate, and the wider community.

### School Violence

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), school violence is a subset of youth violence. Youth violence occurs when young people intentionally use physical force to threaten or harm others. Participants in youth violence may be victims or witnesses. School violence usually occurs in the school community, which includes the school property, a child's route to school, and school-sponsored events. School violence acts may disrupt the learning process and have a negative effect on students, the school itself, and the broader community.

School violence may be physical or nonphysical (that is, passive). Passive school violence includes intimidation, ostracism, bullying, and threats.

Physical forms of violence include fighting (slapping, biting, kicking, punching); involvement with a gang; or assault with a weapon, including guns.

Another form of school violence is peer relationship violence. Peer groups can serve as negative or positive models for students in school. Students make decisions whether to belong to groups that are most popular or to groups where individuals are abusively controlling. Their preference to belong to a group may be influenced by things such as clothing, sexual behavior, belief in violence and use of illicit substances.

### Bullying

Bullying is a form of youth violence. The CDC defines bullying as any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners and that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth, including physical, emotional, social, or

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educational harm. A young person can take on the roles of a perpetrator, victim, or both.

#### Aggressive behaviors characterized as bullying may include

- Negative physical aggression such as hitting, tripping, and fighting
- Verbal name calling and teasing
- Relational social behaviors such as spreading rumors, excluding others from groups, forced isolation, and public embarrassment

Cyberbullying is common and takes place through the use of digital devices such as cell phones, computers, and tablets, and also on social media platforms.

#### Tips for Students to Help Prevent School Violence and Bullying

- Tell an adult when you see or hear about activities that may cause physical or emotional harm to you or anyone else. School is a place where students have a right to feel and be safe.
- NEVER allow anyone to take control of you (bullying). You are in charge of you.
- Resist peer pressure to act inappropriately.
- Take the time to learn what to do during a school crisis.
- Walk home with others or close to a group that is going your way, when possible.
- If you hear about a fight planned for before or after school, on the bus, or while walking to or from school, inform your teacher, school administrator, school social worker, or parent.
- If you see someone with a weapon, inform your teacher, school administration, resource officer, school security, or school social worker.
- Join clubs or groups that encourage positive activities such as sports, boys'/girls' clubs, fashion, school beautification, garden and drama clubs.
- If someone in your community or near your school is acting in an inappropriate way such as exposing themselves or trying to

force you to go where you don't want to go, scream FIRE, run for help, and/or call 911 on your cell phone.

- Avoid areas you are unfamiliar with. Inform parents and others where you are going when leaving home. Check in with parents if you are not going straight home after school.

#### Tips for School Social Workers to Help Prevent School Violence and Bullying

- Be present at back-to-school activities and inform students and parents of your role and how you may be helpful to them during the school year.
- Create a brochure that is placed in the main office, parent centers, and public places within the school about school violence, bullying, and resources for help, including your contact information and a picture of yourself so that students know who you are.
- Plan and implement class orientations about violence and bullying and how to report, seek help, and prevent it. Collaborate with teachers to implement an anti-bullying curriculum.
- Create a "Random Act of Kindness" bulletin board and invite students to submit posters. Projects such as this may help prevent negative thoughts that lead to violence.
- Recruit local businesses and colleges as partners to support any school violence and bullying activities and assemblies held at your school.
- Collaborate with the school librarian to feature a book of the month or week that addresses violence. (Example: The Bluford Series published by Townsend Press, [www.townsendpress.com/store/k-12/fiction-and-nonfiction/complete-bluford-series-all-21-books](http://www.townsendpress.com/store/k-12/fiction-and-nonfiction/complete-bluford-series-all-21-books).)
- Plan monthly lunches with a student or a group of students who are bullies or who are the victims of bullies.
- Organize and implement a "peer mediation team" based on your school levels and age of students.

- Attend professional social work conferences on school violence to improve your knowledge and professional skills.
- Be available for counseling services and referrals as needed.

## Resources

Beane, A.L. (2009). *Bullying prevention for schools: A step-by-step guide to implementing a successful anti-bullying program*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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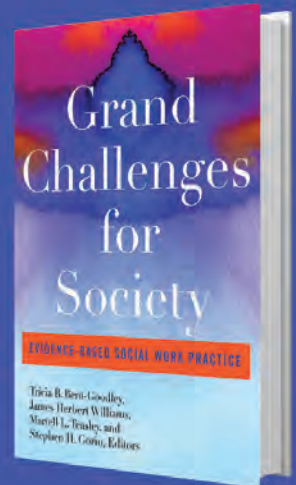
# Grand Challenges for Society

## EVIDENCE-BASED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Tricia B. Bent-Goodley, James Herbert Williams, Martell L. Teasley, and Stephen H. Gorin, Editors

Social workers face complex societal issues that often seem insurmountable. Pulled in many directions, sustainable progress can seem impossible. To help focus on what matters most, the American Academy for Social Work and Social Welfare has recently set out 12 grand challenges for social work and society, in three broad categories of individual and family well-being, social fabric, and social justice.

Social workers must strive toward social progress in these categories by relying on evidence-based methods, and the compendium of articles presented in this book highlights scholarship that provides a research base to address health disparities, social isolation, and financial capability, among others. Edited by the recent editors in chief of four NASW Press journals, *Social Work*, *Health & Social Work*, *Children & Schools*, and *Social Work Research*, this book is intended to be a primary resource for social work researchers, practitioners, policymakers, faculty, and students. *Grand Challenges for Society* not only provides the most up-to-date research, but also alerts the field to gaps in the literature that still need to be explored to achieve the aims of the Grand Challenges for Social Work.



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