

# School policies can help prevent bullying

**I'm concerned that my daughter's middle school isn't addressing bullying very effectively. What sorts of things should schools be doing to reduce the problem?**

That's a great question. Too often, schools spend time and resources on efforts that research has shown to be ineffective at combating the problem of bullying.

And the problem is significant. About 30 percent of kids in grades 6 through 10 are involved in bullying, with victims experiencing a number of problems including depression, anxiety and, in rare but tragic instances, suicide.

In Ohio in 2007, the legislature mandated that the Ohio Department of Education come up with a model to guide school districts in developing an effective policy against bullying. You can see information about that in the Safety and Violence Prevention Curriculum online here: [http://bit.ly/ohio\\_safe\\_learning](http://bit.ly/ohio_safe_learning).

Interestingly, a 2012 study conducted by researchers with Ohio State University's Ohio Bullying Prevention Project found that 90 percent of Ohio's school districts do have some type of policy in place to prohibit bullying, with almost all implementing specific strategies to prevent or reduce bullying in their schools.

Unfortunately, many schools are using strategies that researchers say don't work very well. In fact, efforts that focus on punishing bullies are among the least effective. For example, research has shown that suspending students accused of bullying (whether out-of-



school or in-school suspension or detention) just doesn't make much of a difference. Neither do zero-tolerance policies, peer-mediation or "teen courts" run by students. The same can be said for one-time efforts, such as an annual school assembly, a guest speaker or classroom presentation, with no repetition or follow-up.

Experts say the best efforts are holistic in nature, examining the overall school climate and reaching out to parents and community organizations to form partnerships on bullying prevention.

Best practices in bullying prevention for schools include:

- Focusing on the social environment of the school to help students achieve better interpersonal relationships.
- Conducting an assessment of the bullying problem and of the overall school culture.
- Seeking support from parents and the community stakeholders to help create a consistent message that bullying is always unacceptable.
- Including all teachers and staff in training, and encouraging them to support each other.
- Focusing class time on bullying prevention when appropriate.
- Continuing efforts over the entire school year.

*Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



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**For the month of  
October 2013**

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