

A Bully-Free World

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### Introduction

Bullying is repeated, unwanted, and aggressive behavior among school aged children (USDHHS, 2017). Recent national statistics indicate that 28% of U.S. students in the 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade experience bullying, 30% bully others, 70.6% have seen bullying at school, and 9% experience cyberbullying (USDHHS, 2017). Additionally, 70.4% of school staff have seen bullying (USDHHS, 2017). Johannes and Hardman (2007) reported that out of 1,500 internet-using teens, 34% were victims of online bullying, and 16% admitted to cyberbullying others. Victims of bullying were most commonly females, individuals of the black race (not Hispanic or Latino ethnicity), and 6<sup>th</sup> graders (Lessne & Yanez, 2016).

Victims who are bullied may show psychological distress, poor social adjustment, and isolation (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun, & Niebergall, 2009). Richard, Schneider, and Mallet (2011) discussed that students who experienced bullying reported greater social problems, academic anxiety, impulsivity, and friendship conflict. Middle school students reported that the bullying experience caused negative feelings about self and appearance. Victims may also avoid specific places at school to avoid being bullied. Being a victim of bullying could eventually lead to suicide.

Youth who bullied others were more likely to abuse alcohol, use other drugs, get into fights, vandalize property, drop out of school, engage in early sexual activity, have criminal convictions, receive traffic citations as adults, and abuse other partners, spouses, or children as adults (USDHHS, 2017). However, there were several ways that parents or adults could help children cope with bullying. Some of the ways were to avoid the bully, use the buddy system, ease anger by using relaxation techniques, walk away/ignore, tell an adult, and talk about it (Kids Health, 2018).

Bullying is a major problem and concern for Mississippi. Approximately 93,600 school age children in Mississippi per year were involved in a bullying situation (High, 2000). This included victims of bullying (43,284), those who were both victims and who bully others (9,034), and children who only bully (41,282). To help reduce the consequences of bullying, youth need to learn about and practice different bullying coping strategies. A bullying prevention education program for students engaged in bullying behaviors could help them to see the severity of the problem.

### How it works

A curriculum, *A Bully-Free World*, was developed for 6<sup>th</sup> graders who engaged in bullying behaviors at a middle school in Mississippi. Through this curriculum, participants learned about the different forms of bullying, the effects of bullying, ways to cope with anger, and bystander intervention. Sixth graders who participated consisted of multiple races, both genders, and had been involved in bullying situations. The program consisted of: (1) contacting the school explaining the bullying education program; (2) communicating with the school counselor to identify 10 participants; (3) developing bullying curriculum (6 sessions, 6 days); (4) delivering the program twice a week (50 minutes for each session, for 3 weeks); (5) conducting process evaluation (participant satisfaction survey, observation of implementation, fidelity checklist); and (6) conducting outcome evaluation using a pre/posttest survey after each session.

### Results to date

Pre- and posttest quantitative data from the Bully-Free World program was analyzed to see if the program made a difference in understanding the effects of bullying. For *Session I*, 9 of 10 participants answered correctly the items on the pretest, indicating participants already had knowledge on these items before the program started. However, while only 2 participants knew that bullying mostly happens to youth who are age 12 – 18 years at pretest, all 10 knew this at posttest. For *Session II*, 5 of the 7 participants knew what verbal and social (relational) bullying meant before the program, and all 7 knew the definitions of physical bullying and cyberbullying. However, all 7 participants answered all the questions correctly on the posttest. For *Session III*, all 9 of the participants answered the questions on the social effects of bullying correctly on the pretest/posttest. Also on the pretest, 7 of the 9 participants answered questions regarding the physical and emotional effects of bullying correctly. The knowledge level about physical and emotional effects of bullying improved on the posttest. For *Session IV*, 8 of the 9 participants had a good understanding about anger coping strategies before and after the program. For *Session V*, 8 participants knew that they could intervene in a bullying situation, could tell an adult if someone being bullied, and could report a bullying incident on the pretest. The posttest showed that all participants' knowledge about bystander intervention improved after the session except for one item, "Never distract a bully." For *Session VI*, 7 of the 10 participants answered 2 questions correctly on the pretest. On the posttest, 9 to 10 out of the 10 participants answered all questions correctly. Overall, all participants were satisfied with the program.

### Future plans

*A Bully Free World* was effective at increasing knowledge about bullying. Since many participants answered questions correctly at pretest, there may be other topics that could be added to the curriculum. Talking with the students about what they still wanted to know about bullying could provide suggestions for these additional topics. Piloting the program and reviewing the evaluation data allowed the Extension agent to consider other changes that could enhance the program's success. The Extension agent could implement the program throughout the year to other 6<sup>th</sup> grade students that may benefit from the program. Since only 10 students participated in the pilot, there could be other students at the school who have been a victim of bullying but have not reported it. Other Extension agents could pilot the curriculum in their own counties to teach middle school 4-Hers, youth in the community, or at local middle schools in the county. When the curriculum has been demonstrated to be successful through more rigorous evaluation, this program could be expanded across the state.

### Costs

The following are the expense that were incurred in developing the program: direct costs included a Laptop (\$300), Flip chart (\$15.98), Expo markers 4 pk (\$3.37), Pencils Pre-sharpened 30 ct (\$5.97), Copy paper 1 pk (\$3.68), Printer (\$34.00), and Printer ink black (\$18.89) for total direct costs of = \$381.89; Indirect costs including securing the classroom. The development of this project took approximately 6 months/480 hrs. (80 hrs per month x 6 mo. = 480 hrs.) to write, organize (journals & internet sources), develop, implement, and analyze the data collected in this program.

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