Anchorage Collaborative Coalitions Group Recommendations for Drafting a Bullying Prevention Policy FAQs

Why provide a uniform definition of bullying?

Bullying prevention research consistently recommends adopting a shared understanding of bullying behavior and its impact. The Center for Disease Control defines bullying as "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." Distinguishing bullying from other types of aggression between youths is critical because the unique characteristics of bullying included in many definitions, such as repeated aggression and a power imbalance favoring the aggressor, may make bullying more harmful to experience than similar forms of aggression. It is also important to remember that bullying can take multiple forms. Physical bullying involves hurting a person or their property. Verbal bullying means saying or writing mean things. Social bullying involves hurting a person's relationships or reputation. Cyberbullying involves using electronic technology. For more information visit: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-definitions-final-a.pdf

Why should bullying be differentiated from harassment?

Bullying and harassment can overlap. Unlike bullying, harassment does not need to involve repeated aggression and a power imbalance. When harassment or bullying includes discrimination of a person based on race, national origin, color, sex, age, disability, or religion it raises complex federal law issues and may require an organization to follow federally mandated reporting procedures. https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/federal/
Harassment cases may be violations of civil rights, hate crime laws, or other prosecutable offenses. For more information visit https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/federal/

Why should the definition reference a real or perceived imbalance of power?

The inclusion of a power differential in the definition is important because it serves to clarify when evaluating an incident. There are many reasons youth exhibit bullying behavior; frequently they will attempt to gain or maintain status or popularity. The real or perceived differential may include but is not limited to: size, age, circle of friends, gender, economic status, and physical or emotional challenges. For more information visit: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-definitions-final-a.pdf

Why is a zero tolerance policy not recommended?

Research shows that zero tolerance policies are not effective and may make reporting bullying less likely. Experts recommend the most effective strategies institute mandatory reporting, have consistent investigation procedure, and use progressively stronger, clearly stated range of consequences. For more information visit: https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/educate/misdirections-in-prevention.pdf

Why should policies indicate that they are not limited to enumerated characteristics and apply whether or not the individual belongs to or identifies with the characteristic?

Enumeration may help youth and adults in recognizing bullying behavior; however, it must be made clear that all bullying behavior is not tolerated regardless who the target is. In some cases an individual may be targeted for a characteristic that he or she does not personally identify with. For more information about the mixed opinions of enumerating characteristics visit:
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/anti_bullying_policies_infobrief.pdf

Why should bullying prevention training and information be available to youth and parents and mandatory for staff?

Education is a key element to reducing bullying. Rolling out new bullying policy and procedures needs to include a plan to provide training to youth, parents and staff. Training may be accomplished through multiple methods including: meetings, activities, emails, brochures, and/or online tutorials.

One of the top reasons given by bystanders and staff for not intervening, is lack of knowledge to effectively handle the situation. Mandatory training has been shown to reducing bullying within organizations. For more information visit: https://www.nap.edu/catalog/23482/preventing-bullying-through-science-policy-and-practice (pg 22)

Additional work group recommendations:

Why might the policy include incidents that may occur away from the program, activity or facility?

If a youth is unable to participate in an activity or an activity is disrupted due to a bullying incident that occurred outside of program activity, an organization may initiate their bullying procedures to resolve the issue and ensure full participation and safety.

Why should it be mandatory for staff to report witnessing bullying behavior?

Research shows that if an adult or bystander does not intervene during an event of bullying or do not act with a report of an event, it is seen as acceptance or approval of the behavior. This may cause the target to experience additional pain and reinforce negative effects/outcomes. For more information visit:
https://www.stopbullying.gov/respond/on-the-spot/index.html

Why should there be consistent, situation appropriate levels of discipline that balance consequences with need for youth to participate?

An organization should have transparent and explicit discipline consequences outlined. These policies and procedures should be consistently followed to avoid favoritism or unequal treatment of participants. Some incidents are more severe than others so responses should be appropriate to the episode.

Why might youth be included in developing bullying prevention policies?

When youth participate in the policy making of an organization, it facilitates "buy in" and acceptance. Youth can offer unique insight into a program they participate in. Organizations have the ability to create a particular culture by including their youth in the process. Youth offered valuable insights and perspectives in developing the recommended policies within these documents.