

The School Counselor and the Promotion of Safe Schools through Conflict Resolution and Bullying/Harassment Prevention

(Adopted 1994/2000, Revised 2005, 2011, 2016)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

School counselors recognize the impact a safe, orderly and caring environment has on student achievement and social/emotional development. To promote this type of environment, comprehensive school counseling programs promote the inclusion of anti-bullying/harassment and violence-prevention programs, schoolwide positive behavior interventions and support, along with comprehensive conflict-resolution programs to foster a positive school climate.

The Rationale

Research shows promoting a positive school climate and developing positive relationships with caring adults is key to improving school success and reducing bullying, harassment and excessive disciplinary problems (Davis, 2005). Academic success and test scores go up, and discipline problems go down when there is a positive school environment (Doll, 2010). Incidents involving bullying, harassment, violence, weapons or gang behavior threaten student and staff safety (Van Velsor, 2009). Students, parents/guardians, staff and policy makers recognize the need to provide a safe school environment.

Prevention activities are integral to creating a safe school environment that is free of fear, bullying, harassment and violence. Delivered by school counselors, teachers, administrators and qualified community experts, prevention programs increase the opportunity for improved academic achievement, appropriate behavior, positive relationships, successful resolution of conflicts, safe school climate and increased attendance. Participating in prevention activities empowers and encourages students to take responsibility for their behavior and for the climate of their school and community.

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors collaborate with others in the school and community to promote safe schools and confront issues threatening school safety. School counselors encourage the development of local policies supporting a safe school environment, and they provide leadership to the school by assisting in the design and implementation of schoolwide prevention activities and programs. School counselors also advocate for state and national policies supporting these efforts. Additionally school counselors recognize differentiated interventions are needed for bullying and resolving a conflict. Comprehensive anti-bullying/anti-harassment/violence-prevention and conflict-resolution programs require data-driven decision making, coordination, instruction and program evaluation. These programs are most effective when incorporated into the academic curriculum by all members of the school community (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun, & Niebergall, 2009). The school counselor includes prevention programs as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program and ensures these programs include training in key skills in peacefully resolving issues such as:

- communication skills
- conflict-resolution skills
- decision-making skills
- development of cultural competence
- acceptance of differences
- intervention strategies for bullying/harassment
- recognition of early warning signs of violence
- prevention/intervention services
- crisis response
- appropriate use of technology and social media
- community involvement
- parent/guardian and faculty/staff education
- evaluation of program effectiveness

- building positive staff and student relationships
- mental health awareness training
- bystander training (e.g., QPR, SOS)

Summary

School counselors understand positive effects of a safe, orderly and caring school environment. Through participation in prevention programs and activities aimed at anti-bullying, anti-harassment and violence prevention, students learn communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills that help them achieve their goals and also establish successful relationships. School counselors collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents/guardians and the community to deliver prevention programs encouraging student growth and achievement and ensuring a safe school climate.

References

Davis, S. (2005). *Schools where everyone belongs*. Research Press: Champaign, IL.

Doll, B. (2010). Positive school climate. *Principal Leadership*. Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/School_ClimatePLDec10_ftsp.pdf.

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Young, A., Hardy, V., Hamilton, C., Biernesser, K., Sun, L., & Niebergall, S. (2009). Empowering students: Using data to transform a bullying prevention and intervention program. *Professional School Counseling*, 12(6), 413-420.