



Bullying Prevention in Indian Country

Violence among youth, including bullying, is more than just individual aggression. It is learned behavior that happens within the context of the larger society and community. Many things influence bullying behavior, including school and community climates; family dynamics; a dominant society that “glorifies” violence and aggression; and, in Indian Country, historical trauma. There is research on bullying and its effects in the general population, but the research of bullying’s effects in the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population is nearly non-existent.

What is known from research in the general population, and anecdotally from AI/AN communities, is that bullying is prevalent, varies from community to community, and has short- and long-term consequences. Some of these consequences can be very serious. In one study, being bullied in childhood predicted later suicide attempts and deaths by suicide for girls, though not for boys.¹ In another study, boys who had been bullied were at increased risks of suicidal thoughts and attempts in young adulthood.²

Bullying Hurts Everyone Involved

Bullying affects bullying victims, witnesses, and bullies themselves. AI/AN youth who are bullied generally show higher levels of insecurity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and unhappiness, as well as other physical, emotional, and mental health symptoms. AI/AN youth who bully others are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs, get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school. They are likely to engage in early sexual activity, have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults, and abuse others at higher rates than adults. AI/AN youth who witness bullying are more likely to have increased tobacco, alcohol, or other drug use; mental health problems; and school absences.³

What to Do about Bullying

Addressing bullying in Indian Country starts with raising awareness and strengthening protective factors that build resilience. Collaboration with existing community resources is an important aspect of bullying prevention in AI/AN communities. In addition, school-based, anti-bullying best practices are applicable in Indian Country.

Bullying, youth violence, and suicidal behaviors are interrelated parts of community violence that plague AI/AN communities.

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Bullying Prevention Approaches

Protective Factors

The following elements contribute to successful prevention efforts in Indian Country:

- Involving elders in an oversight panel, AI/AN youth activities, and meetings
- Providing life skills training and other AI/AN youth development activities
- Engaging AI/AN youth in culturally based activities, such as drumming and culture camps
- Involving tribal leaders in bullying and suicide prevention at local, state, regional, and national levels

¹ Klomek, A.B., Sourander, A., Niemelä, S., Kumpulainen, K., Piha, J., Tamminen, T., Almqvist, F., & Gould, M.S. (2009, March). Childhood bullying behaviors as a risk for suicide attempts and completed suicides: a population-based birth cohort study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 48(3), 254-61. doi: 10.1097/CHI.0b013e318196b91f

² Copeland, W.E., Wolke, D., Angold, A., & Costello, E.J. (2013, April). Adult Psychiatric Outcomes of Bullying and Being Bullied by Peers in Childhood and Adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry* 70(4), 419-26. doi: 0.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.504

³ <http://www.stopbullying.gov>



School-Based Anti-Bullying Strategies

Following are the most effective elements of school-based bullying prevention programs:⁴

- Providing school climate training
- Consistently applying school bullying and discipline policies
- Using parent training activities, meetings, and information on bullying
- Providing high levels of playground supervision
- Implementing consistent disciplinary methods in schools
- Developing classroom management strategies
- Creating classroom and school-wide rules related to bullying
- Sufficiently training school staff

Culture, as a protective factor in tribal communities, has been shown to be effective. The provision of cultural knowledge means implementing culture-based interventions.

Effective Evidence-Based Interventions in Indian Country*

Following are evidence-based interventions that have been successful in tribal communities:

Mental Health Promotion

- American Indian Life Skills Development curriculum: <http://legacy.nreppadmin.net/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=81>
- Question, Persuade, and Refer training: <http://www.qprinstitute.com>
- Reconnecting Youth program: <http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/programs/reconnecting-youth>

Suicide Risk and Assessment

- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills training: <https://www.livingworks.net/programs/assist>

Bullying Prevention

- Second Step Bullying Prevention Unit: <http://www.cfchildren.org/bullying-prevention#purchasenow>

Substance Use Prevention

- Project Venture program: <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=235>

⁴Ttofi, M.M. & Farrington, D.P. (2011). Effectiveness of School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying: A Systematic and Meta-Analytic Review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 7.

About the Tribal TTA Center

The Tribal Training and Technical Assistance Center (Tribal TTA Center) is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The Tribal TTA Center uses a culturally relevant, holistic approach to deliver TTA on mental and substance use disorders, suicide prevention, and mental health promotion. TTA is offered to a broad audience of all tribal communities, a focused audience of SAMHSA tribal grantees, and an intensive audience of selected AI/AN tribes each year.

Resources*

Please review the following resources to help in your bullying prevention efforts.

- A Sweetgrass Method of Bullying Prevention for Native American Youth: <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/kicjir/vol3/iss1/1>
- stopbullying.gov: <http://www.stopbullying.gov>
- Stand Up Against Bullying In Indian Country from stopbullying.gov: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/videos/2011/12/bullying-in-indian-country.html>
- SAMHSA's Bullying Prevention Resource Center: <http://www.samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac/resources/bullying-prevention>
- SAMHSA's webpage: <http://www.samhsa.gov>

For More Information

Please visit the Tribal TTA Center's website to access past webinar recordings and other helpful resources at <http://www.samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac/resources/webinars>.

To request more information about the Tribal TTA Center, or to submit a technical assistance request, call (301) 257-2967 or visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac>.



* This publication lists non-Federal resources to provide additional information to consumers. The views and content in those resources have not been formally approved by HHS. Listing of the resources is not an endorsement by HHS or its components.