



Early Childhood Roots of Bullying

Early Childhood Investigations Webinar

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Kristen's background



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About Child Trends

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We . . .

1. take a whole child approach
2. study children in the real world
3. want children to flourish
4. value objectivity and rigor
5. pursue knowledge development *and* knowledge transfer

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Early Childhood Bullying: Why We're Interested

- Rates of bullying may be going down, but are still high!
- Few bullying programs focus on prevention
- Most research focuses on school-age youth, even though these behaviors emerge in early childhood



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Today's Presentation

1. Overview of research on early childhood roots of bullying
2. Share promising practices and evidence-based interventions for early childhood practitioners



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Polls 1 & 2

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What do we mean by “bullying” in early childhood?



- For older children:
- Repeated aggression
 - Imbalance of power
 - Direct and indirect forms
 - Different roles (see next slide)

- With young children:
- Development of aggression
 - How aggression can become bullying
 - Warning signs

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Bullying Roles

- **Kids who bully:** Exerting power, aggression, and mean behaviors towards others
- **Kids who are bullied:** Targets of bullying
- **Kids who assist/reinforce:** Support, encourage kids who bully
- **Outsiders:** Witness the bullying, separate from the situation
- **Kids who defend:** Assist or comfort the one being bullied
- Some kids play multiple roles (e.g. have bullied others *and* been bullied themselves)



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Importance of Not Labeling Kids

- Avoid calling the kids who bully others "bullies" and those who are targeted "victims"
- Instead of labeling the children involved, focus on the behavior, e.g.
 - "the child who bullied"
 - "the child who was bullied"
 - "the child who was both bullied and bullied others"

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/roles-kids-play/>

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The "bully" in the block area...

Jacob and Stella are building an elaborate castle for the family of farm animals they have gathered.

Stella is the self-appointed architect and foreman of the construction, while Jacob hands over the materials and cheers Stella on as the towers go precariously skyward.

Sam wanders over to admire their project.

Cool!" he says. "Can I help?" He picks up a yellow block and Stella quickly snatches it from his hands.

"NO!" she yells. "We don't want you to help!"

"Yeah!" chimes Jacob. "You can't play with us. Go away!"

Sam begins to cry for his teacher as he slowly backs away.

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Development of aggression in young children

- Patterns of aggression are noticeable as early as 17 months of age
- Aggression over time predicts bullying behavior in elementary school
- Kids at risk of engaging in bullying can be identified in early childhood
- Not all aggression is, or becomes, bullying



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Risk factors

Parent and Family System

- Poor caregiver attachment
- Certain parent behaviors and characteristics
- Maltreatment



Environment

- Early care and education settings
- Early exposure to bias
- Media exposure
- Additional environmental factors (e.g. peers, neighborhood safety, socioeconomic status)

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Caregiver Attachment

Theory: Parent/child attachment style may be linked to difficulties with interpersonal relationships



What does the evidence say?

- Research focuses mostly on middle childhood or early adolescence
- Avoidant attachment style may be a risk factor for *being* bullied
- Attachment style not directly related to aggression in preschoolers

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Bullies in the Block Area:
The Early Childhood Origins of "Mean" Behavior

Parent Behaviors and Characteristics

Theory: Poor relationships with parents increase the risk of behavioral and emotional problems



What does the evidence say?

- Parenting styles of mothers may relate to relational bullying in preschool
- Little research exists on the role of fathers
- Discipline techniques may have an influence
- Parents' skills and role modeling are critically important
- Parental involvement and engagement matters

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Maltreatment

Theory: Physical abuse relates to aggressive behavior in children; maltreatment also negatively affects brain development



What does the evidence say?

- Child victims of physical or sexual abuse have higher risk of bullying or aggression
- Quality of relationships between the child and adults influences the effects of maltreatment
- Persistent maltreatment alters the brain and leads to developmental problems

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Early Care and Education Settings

Theory: Amount of time in child care may cause behavior problems



What does the evidence say about non-parental care?

- 1 study: Child care increased behavior problems
- 2 studies: NO connection to behavior problems
- 4 studies: High-quality child care prevents or minimizes later behavior problems

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Early Exposure to Bias

Theory: Social environments shape the development of bias, prejudice, and stereotypes



What does the evidence say?

- Gender stereotypes emerge from ages 3-6
- Racial discernment ("in group" preference) emerges early but is developmental in nature
- More research exists for older children
- Young children's preferences should not be interpreted as "discrimination"

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Media Exposure

Theory: How much time a child watches TV is related to later bullying behavior



What does the evidence say?

- More time watching TV is linked to:
 - Increased bullying, even if content is not violent
 - Increased relational aggression for girls, and physical aggression for boys

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Media Exposure, continued

Hypothesis: What children watch on TV can help improve social skills



What does the evidence say?

- *Sesame Street*: cooperation, helping, and sharing behaviors
- *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*: pro-social behaviors
- *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood*: empathy, confidence, and emotion-recognition when supported by adult interactions and conversations
- What children are watching is as important as how much time they spend watching TV

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Professional Recommendations on Media Use by Young Children

Technology...

1. ...can be a tool for learning
2. ...should be used to increase access to learning opportunities for all children
3. ... may strengthen relationships among parents, families, early educators, and young children
4. ... is more effective for learning when adults and peers interact or co-view with young children

(U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education Joint Policy Brief on the Use of Technology with Young Children, October 2016)

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Summary of the evidence for early childhood bullying risk factors

There is **research evidence** for the influence of:

- Parenting style
- Child maltreatment
- Media exposure

Findings are mixed and **further research is needed** on:

- Caregiver-child attachment
- Influence of early care and education settings
- Effects of early exposure to bias and prejudice
- Additional environmental factors (e.g. peers, neighborhood safety, or socioeconomic status)

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How can early bullying be prevented and addressed?

*"The early years present a unique opportunity to take advantage of a variety of caregiver-child relationships and social settings (at home, in preschools, daycares, playgrounds, etc.), in which modeling, teaching, and reinforcing pro-social behaviors, empathy, and kindness can take place."
(Bullies in the Block Area, p.11)*

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Polls 3 & 4

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So what can you do to prevent or redirect mean and aggressive behavior in young children?



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Promising Practices and Strategies



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Promoting safe and welcoming classrooms

Vivian Paley's *You Can't Say You Can't Play*

- Storytelling and group discussions
- Helps children become aware of peer exclusion and learn to be more friendly and accepting
- <http://www.childtrends.org/programs/you-cant-say-you-cant-play/>

The Anti-Bullying and Teasing Book for Preschool Classrooms

- Written for teachers
- Helps prevent exclusion and teach empathy
- Available from many booksellers
- YouTube book review available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBRtbjgyqQA>



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Promoting safe and welcoming classrooms, continued

Welcoming Schools

- A project of the Human Rights Campaign
- Lessons help kids understand diversity in family structure, teach tolerance, and address bias
- <http://www.welcomingschools.org/>



Early Childhood Friendship Project

- Classroom program for 3-5 year olds using puppets, art projects, and role plays
- Addresses physical and relational aggression and victimization, and prosocial behavior
- <http://www.childtrends.org/programs/10229/>

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Guidance and problem-solving



- i.e. actively helping children learn to solve their problems and differences constructively
 - **"Guidance Matters" column (NAEYC journal *Young Children*)**
 - Helps early childhood practitioners support cooperative behavior and deal with aggression and serious conflicts among children
 - "Fostering Resilience: Teaching social-emotional skills" (July 2014)
 - "Aggression, the Prequel: Preventing the need" (November 2011)
 - "Swearing and Words That Hurt" (November 2007)
- <https://www.naeyc.org/yc/columns/guidance>

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Promoting kindness and compassion

- **The Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media**
 - Features the accumulated work of Fred Rogers
 - Promotes using media to establish interpersonal connections
 - Personal connections are important when dealing with early bullying behavior
 - <http://www.fredrogerscenter.org/>
- **Making Caring Common Project, Harvard University**
 - Provides 5 strategies to raise "moral caring children"
 - Promotes parental role modeling and school frameworks to encourage caring among students
 - <http://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/>



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Evidence-Based Interventions



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- For children ages 3-8
- Teaches kids how to express feelings appropriately, control impulses, show empathy, establish friendships, and solve problems peacefully
- Goals
 - Address bullying behavior and peer rejection
 - Help children on the receiving end of bullying
 - Teach children who are bullied to assert themselves
 - Encourage bystanders to speak up and show they care
- <http://wingspanworks.com/healthy-al/>

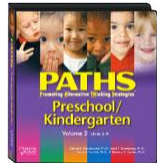
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- A set of training programs
- Designed for parents, teachers, and children ages 0-12
- Helps children with ADHD or conduct/behavioral disorders
- Works to improve parent-child interactions & attachment
- Teaches children prosocial skills
- Supports classroom management skills for teachers
- <http://incredibleyears.com/>

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Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) Preschool/Kg



- For children 3-6 years old
- Supports the development of self-control, positive self-esteem, emotional awareness, basic problem-solving skills, social skills, and friendships
- Uses the “turtle technique” to teach self-control
- <http://www.pathseducation.com/what-is-paths/paths-curriculum>

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Adults and Children Together (ACT) Against Violence Raising Safe Kids



- 16 hour course (8 two-hour lessons)
- For parents and caregivers of children ages birth - 8
- Designed for families at risk for child maltreatment
- Promotes positive parenting approaches
- <http://actagainstviolence.apa.org/>

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- Classroom-based social-skills program
- For children ages 4-14
- Created by the Committee for Children
- 28 lessons in the early learning kit
- Teaches social-emotional skills to help reduce impulsive and aggressive behavior while increasing social competence
- <http://www.cfchildren.org/second-step>



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Which program is right for you?

| Intervention | Who delivers curriculum? | Special training needed? | Cost? |
|------------------|--|--|---|
| AI's Pals | Teachers | Yes | Kit: \$685 Training: Contact developer |
| Incredible Years | Varies (teachers or other group leaders) | Training recommended (self-study offered) | Materials and training costs vary |
| PATHS | Educators and counselors | Yes | \$839 per classroom module Contact for more info. on training. |
| ACT | Trained facilitator | Yes | Varies |
| Second Step | Teachers | Recommended (on-line or in-person options) | \$440 for EC kit |

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Next Steps for Researchers



- Understand the developmental course of bullying
- Understand the root causes of bullying
- Investigate risk and protective factors to help plan bullying prevention efforts
- Provide additional guidance to practitioners

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Bullies in the Block Area



Bullies in the Block Area: The Early Childhood Origins of "Mean" Behavior

<http://www.childtrends.org/publications/bullies-in-the-block-area-the-early-childhood-origins-of-mean-behavior/>

Understanding and Addressing the Early Childhood Origins of "Mean" Behavior and Bullying: Resources for Practitioners

<http://www.childtrends.org/publications/understanding-and-addressing-the-early-childhood-origins-of-mean-behavior-and-bullying-resources-for-practitioners/>

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Additional Resources for Practitioners

Bullying: Can It Begin in Preschool? (High Scope, 2011)
http://www.highscope.org/file/newsandinformation/extensions/extvol25no3_low.pdf

To Prevent Bullying, Focus On Early Childhood (Temkin & Snow, 2015)
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deborah-temkin/to-prevent-bullying-focus_b_8000436.html

Why social and emotional skill building in early childhood matters (Darling-Churchill, 2016)
<http://www.childtrends.org/why-social-and-emotional-skill-building-in-early-childhood-matters/>

Dual Language Learners and Social-Emotional Development: Understanding the Benefits for Young Children (2014)
<http://www.childtrends.org/dual-language-learners-and-social-emotional-development-understanding-the-benefits-for-young-children/>

Too Young for Technology? (Kristin Anderson Moore Lecture, 2014)
<http://www.childtrends.org/multimedia/too-young-for-technology/>

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Links to Professional Recommendations on Media Use by Young Children

NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center Joint Position Statement on Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8 (Jan 2012)

http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PS_technology_WEB2.pdf

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Policy Statement: Media and Young Minds (October 2016)

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/10/19/peds.2016-2591>

U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education Joint Policy Brief on the Use of Technology with Young Children (October 2016)

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/joint-policy-brief-on-the-use-of-technology-with-young-children>

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Thank You! Questions?

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