

# Behavioral prevention model appears to reduce bullying, peer rejection

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A widely used universal behavioral prevention model in schools appears to be associated with lower rates of teacher-reported bullying and peer rejection, according to a report in the February issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

National concern has increased over bullying, which can lead to academic, interpersonal, physical health and mental health problems. Despite the concern, relatively few school-based programs have shown to be effective at preventing bullying, and zero-tolerance policies adopted at many schools have not been shown to be effective either, researchers write in the study background.

An alternative to zero-tolerance policies is positive schoolwide prevention efforts. Tracy E. Waasdorp, Ph.D., of the Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, and colleagues evaluated one such widely used model called the School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS).

SWPBIS, which recent research suggests may help prevent bullying, aims to alter the school environment by creating improved systems (for example, discipline and data management) and procedures (for example, office referral and behavioral reinforcement) that promote positive changes in staff and student behaviors, the authors explain.

"SWPBIS teaches behavioral expectations through direct instruction,

positive reinforcement and consistent consequences, promoting acceptable social and classroom behaviors. This in turn is theorized to reduce the likelihood of engaging in and rewarding bullying behavior," the authors note.

Data for the study came from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial of the universal SWPBIS model conducted in 37 Maryland public elementary schools to determine the impact on discipline problems and the school environment. The sample included 12,344 children.

"The hierarchical linear modeling results indicated that children in the SWPBIS schools displayed significantly less bullying behavior and experienced lower levels of rejection over time vs children in the comparison schools," the study results indicate.

Researchers called the potential effects of SWPBIS on bullying encouraging and in line with policymakers' and researchers' emphasis on school climate and culture for bullying [prevention](#) as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies.

"These findings suggest that a universal SWPBIS model is a promising approach for preventing bullying. Although the rates of [bullying](#) tend to be the highest in middle school, when SWPBIS is implemented in elementary [school](#), it may help children better prepare for the transition into adolescence," the researchers conclude.

**More information:** *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2012;166[2]:149:156.

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