

Burger Law 2020 Scholarship Winner | Tiffany

The alarming correlation between bullying and suicide should create red flags for school districts, but constantly, they turn a blind eye to such incidents hoping this problem would just disappear. A Yale University study found that victims of bullying are between two to nine times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims. Additionally, at least half of suicides among young people are related to bullying according to a British study. The rise in social media use among young adolescents and teenagers have also made bullying much more accessible online and in-person. Since students between grades six and 12 spend a large amount of their time in a school setting, schools play a vital role in curbing bullying.

I would implement role-playing scenarios in class settings to allow for discussions about bullying. Each month, classes will switch off in providing students a learning opportunity to recognize the signs and understand the effects of bullying. The school will bring in actors and actresses who will act out multiple different scenarios of bullying, demonstrating some of the severe effects of bullying including skipping school, depression and anxiety, and even suicide. Also, students are encouraged to participate as they can improvise different scenarios to show some of the effects and signs of bullying. This will ultimately place the problem of bullying into perspective as these students can relate to these situations. I would also have key stakeholders sit in on these discussions, including teachers, administration, and school psychologists. I would have the psychologist lead the discussion to offer guidance to the students, while the teachers and administration observe from the side. Placing teachers and administration in the center can affect how students respond to certain questions, such as those about their experiences of being the victim or the bully.

Role-playing scenarios also open the dialogue of bullying. At the end of the role-play scenarios, students and actors discuss the scenes and how bullying can cause harmful and long-term effects on a person. This would also reveal the negative behaviors and characteristics that might develop from someone who is bullying. Some questions that can open this discussion can include: How did you feel about the activity? Can you relate to any of the bullying scenes? Where can people who are bullied find help and support? What are some of the reasons that people bully others?

Furthermore, developing a mentorship program by pairing a middle school or high school student with a mentor will empower students to lead peer-lead inclusion events and discussions. Mentors can be studying in college, college graduates, full-time employees, or even people who have retired. Older individuals who may have experienced bullying can mentor someone who is either being bullied or someone who is bullying others. A mentor can also provide some insight into the consequences for someone who bullies or the detrimental health effects of someone who is being bullied.

Mentors can also create powerful change by establishing rules around bullying behaviors and reinforcing that certain behaviors are unacceptable. They may also supervise areas where

youth congregate and look for bullying behaviors. Mentors can also step in and stop bullying behavior when it is recognized. By building a trustworthy relationship between the mentor and the mentee, mentors can deliver emotional support to victims as students can reveal personal matters to their mentors. Mentors can also speak to their middle school or high school students and give them strategies for reducing bullying in the future.

The most emotionally effective way to curb bullying in schools is to speak to individuals who have personally been affected by bullying. I would invite people who have been bullies or victims of bullies to speak to these students. Additionally, I would also invite family members of victims of bullying, suicide victims due to bullying and those who have bullied. Speaking to those who have experienced the determinants and consequences of such actions allow students to understand the severity of the problem and how many people are affected by bullying to this day.

Some of the most serious consequences due to bullying include suicide due to bullying for victims and incarceration for those who bully. Many people do not believe that something can happen to them until they are able to relate to people who have gone through similar situations. Thus, individuals and families can provide advice and fresh perspectives to those who may be facing similar challenges.

My methods to curb bullying are proactive instead of reactive. Harsh punishments for bullies have been known to lead to resentment. These proactive methods will allow bullies to take responsibility for their actions and work on their issues to correct their behavior. Furthermore, telling victims to fight back, address the issue on their own, or to just ignore the bully disregards the power imbalance between the bully and the victim. Placing the responsibility for addressing bullies on the victims and blaming the victims for not coming forward will only make them feel more isolated and let down by the adults and institutions they are looking to for support. These methods that would be effective in curbing bullying in middle school and high school will not only allow bullies to take ownership for their own actions to correct their behaviors, but they also provide victims an outlet to voice their problems and feelings in a safe setting.