

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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Prevention and Intervention: Multi-tiered Approaches to Bullying

What is Multi-tiered Systems of Support?

The Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework includes school-based interventions or services that address different “levels” of supports needed to deal with the range of learning, mental health, and emotional-behavioral health concerns that a student may have. It is also used in bullying prevention and intervention. Multi-tiered service delivery involves providing universal and selective prevention services, as well as indicated intervention services.

How does MTSS Work to Prevent Bullying?

Universal Prevention

Universal bullying prevention efforts, the first tier in the MTSS model, are designed to reduce risk and increase resilience for specific populations within a school community. These prevention strategies reach all students, regardless of their risk; and benefit the whole school community. Some of the most effective bullying prevention efforts work to improve the overall social and emotional climate of a school, and foster positive social or inclusive behavior among all students. Another prevention tactic schools can take is to hold classroom meetings that reinforce positive behavior expectations and provide guidance on how to respond to bullying. Services are designed to address student needs and academic challenges, and they are often supported by state or national educational initiatives (e.g., bully prevention curricula, positive behavioral intervention supports [PBIS], social emotional learning [SEL]).



Research shows that both students and educators benefit from bullying prevention efforts. Results from a comprehensive and systematic review of research on the effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying show that they effectively reduce bullying by 20 to 23 percent and victimization by 17 to 20 percent.

Selective Prevention

The second tier in MTSS is an additional layer of support, where school staff delivers selective prevention and intervention services to youth who may have greater needs than those of the general student body who receive universal services. Selective interventions often focus on youth who are at higher risk of engaging in bullying or students who are at-risk for being the target of bullying. For youth who bully others, selective prevention may include reinforcing consequences for bullying, and using teacher or counselor mediation to deal with interpersonal conflict. To reduce the social benefits related to bullying, students may be encouraged to

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defend classmates who are the targets of bullying. For youth at-risk of being bullied, selective services may include assertiveness training and developing peer support groups.

There is growing empirical support for use of peer support groups and active bystander training for students who disrupt bullying incidents. One study found that peer and teacher support buffers against the negative impact of being bullied. Another study found that teacher support was associated with decreases in student-reported bullying. Several other studies suggest that preparing students to be active bystanders is one of the most effective ways to prevent or stop bullying when it is occurring.

How is MTSS used for effective intervention?

MTSS is effective for bullying intervention when youth with various academic, behavioral, and health needs are involved. The components of most MTSS intervention models include:

- Use of universal screening
- Early intervention service delivery
- Collaborative problem solving
- Progress monitoring
- Application of intervention services across different levels of intensity

Indicated Interventions

The third tier of multi-tiered service delivery involves implementing indicated interventions to students whose needs are not adequately addressed by the previous two tiers of service delivery. When third-tier interventions are provided, supports are more intense and tailored to specific needs, usually for a small number of students. These interventions often address mental health concerns, behavior issues, and academic performance. These may involve working with administrators, multiple teachers, school resource officers, family members, and others who have a strong impact on a student's life. For example, a school-based mental health professional might use trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) – a type of mental health intervention used to reduce symptoms related to violence exposure – to help a student with emotional or behavioral concerns while coordinating with other school personnel to provide other academic and social supports. Although research on the specific use of indicated interventions for bullying is still emerging, a considerable body of research supports the use of these interventions for related problems and concerns in school settings, such as conflict with peers. The MTSS model enables educators and mental health professionals to provide a range of services to students who display varying degrees of risk, with flexibility in how they address the specific needs of students to support them in achieving inclusion and success.



Source and Research Limitations

The information discussed in this fact sheet is based on the comprehensive review of bullying research presented in the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's report entitled [Preventing Bullying Through Science, Policy, and Practice](#).

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This report includes the most up to date research on bullying, but it is important to note that this research has several important limitations. Most of the research is cross-sectional, which means it took place at one point in time. This type of research shows us what things are related to each other at that time, but cannot tell us which thing came first or if one of those things caused the other to occur.

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