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## Anti-bullying programs work

*This user abstract presents the following Campbell systematic review:  
Farrington, D. P., Ttofi, M. M. School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and  
Victimization. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2009:6. DOI:10.4073/csr.2009.6.*

*This article was written by Anne-Sofie Due Knudsen, SFI Campbell and has been approved  
by the authors of the systematic review.*

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Bullying is becoming an ever more pressing issue for schools, daycare centers, politicians and the public. Everyone agrees that bullying is a serious problem and initiatives are urgently called for to stamp it out. A new systematic review from the Campbell Collaboration has studied the effects of anti-bullying programs in schools. The conclusion is that programs generally work and bullying is reduced on average by around 20%.

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### CHILDREN BULLY AND ARE BULLIED

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Victims of bullying may be harmed physically as well as psychologically, and the consequences may be long-lasting. Therefore, bullying has increasingly become a worldwide topic of public concern and for research. This is evident in the number of studies on bullying, which has risen markedly over the past 20 years. The researchers behind this systematic review wanted to know if anti-bullying programs are effective, and what elements of an anti-bullying program can predict the reduction in bullying?

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### BULLYING AS A CONCEPT

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There are many definitions of bullying. In this context bullying is defined as physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear or harm to the victim. There is an imbalance of power, either psychological or physical, where the more powerful child oppresses the less powerful child. Bullying involves repeated incidents between the same children over a prolonged period. Bullying can occur in school or on the way to or from school.

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### PROGRAMS DO WORK

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The systematic review concludes that school-based anti-bullying programs are generally effective in reducing bullying and victimization. On average, bullying decreased by 20% – 23% and victimization decreased by 17% – 20%.

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## **PARENTS ARE IMPORTANT**

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Sharing information with parents is an key element of any anti-bullying program. Information is often given in parent-teacher meetings at the school about the school's strategy towards bullying. The researchers recommend that future anti-bullying programs should focus beyond the school itself; the focus should also be directed at parents.

Other elements of anti-bullying programs that are found to be effective are:

- Punitive and non-punitive disciplinary methods
- Improved playground and schoolyard supervision
- Technology, such as films about bullying and computer games to raise students' awareness and knowledge about bullying

Involving peers in conflict resolution is associated with a significant *increase* in victimization in the studies examined.

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## **FOCUS ON OLDER CHILDREN**

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The systematic review also focuses on how anti-bullying programs work in relation to different age groups. The older the students are when the anti-bullying program is implemented, the better it works.

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## **DURATION AND INTENSITY ARE CRUCIAL**

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Results of the analysis show that a good program is intensive and long-lasting. The duration (number of days) and intensity (number of hours) of training teachers to deal with bullying are directly linked to the decrease in bullying and victimization. The same applies for the children. The duration and intensity of the program for children are positively related to the reduction of bullying and victimization.

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## **NEW ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS**

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The researchers recommend that new anti-bullying programs are developed with inspiration from existing successful programs, and should be modified to include the most effective elements. Furthermore, the researchers recommend that new anti-bullying programs go beyond the scope of the schoolyard and that the family be more included in the effort to reduce bullying.

The researchers believe that future anti-bullying initiatives should bring together leading experts, so all their expertise can be used in the fight against bullying. Furthermore, the systematic review clearly states that future evaluations should

measure the children's situation before and after an anti-bullying program. This should apply to the experimental group as well as the control group to get the most accurate results possible. Finally, the researchers suggest that cost-benefit analyses of anti-bullying programs should be carried out to investigate how much money is saved by having less bullying compared to the costs of the programs.

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## **FACTS ABOUT THE REVIEW**

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The researchers behind the systematic review found a total of 89 reports of sufficient quality to be included in the systematic review. The 89 reports describe 53 different studies. However, nine studies did not provide enough data to allow the calculation of an effect size and were, therefore, not included in the final meta-analysis. The overall analysis is therefore based on a total of 44 studies. The 44 different studies were carried out between 1983 and mid-2009 and came from 16 different countries. The included studies were either randomized controlled trials, quazi-randomized trials, age-cohort studies or other controlled studies. The researchers behind the systematic review stress that the various designs all have advantages and problems.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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