

## Making a Difference with *Bully-Free Schools: Circle of Support*

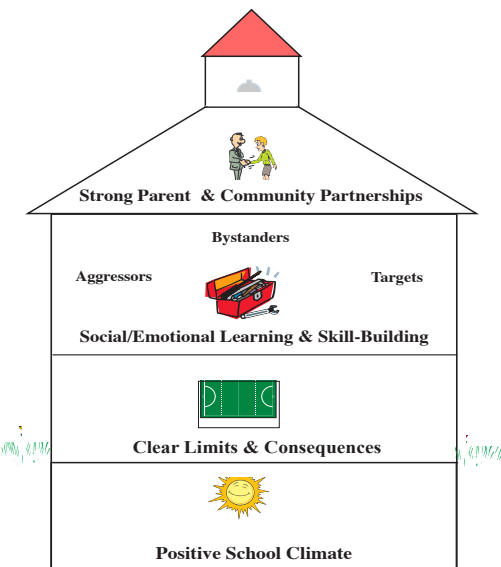
One of the goals of Coordinated School Health (CSH) is to provide students with an optimal learning environment—one that promotes physical and emotional safety for all students. *Bully-Free Schools: Circle of Support for Learning* (BFS) plays an integral role in creating a safe and supportive school climate in which students can learn. While it may never be possible to say a school is “free” of bullying and other forms of peer aggression, a Healthy School Environment is one that 1) actively promotes physical and emotional safety, and 2) responds with effective forms of intervention when students or adults engage in disrespectful or hurtful behavior.



Any efforts that a school invests in creating a safe school will also contribute to creating a Healthy School Environment. There are things everyone within a school can do to make a difference on both the *systems* level and the *individual* level. Each will be described below:

### Systems Level:

Effective bullying prevention, like a healthy school environment, requires a systems approach that impacts the climate and culture of a school as a whole. An effective comprehensive, systems approach includes the following four major components:



1. **Positive school climate**, characterized by “warmth, positive interest, and involvement by adults” and adults acting as “authorities and positive role models” (Olweus, 1993);
2. **Clear limits and consequences**, characterized by “firm limits to unacceptable behavior and non-hostile, nonphysical negative consequences” (Olweus, 1993), and consequences that teach alternative ways to solve problems and achieve goals;
3. **Social/Emotional Learning and Skill-Building**, characterized by the implementation of formal and informal strategies to a) develop sense of community, b) promote peer norms supportive of social justice, and c) teach friendship and other social/emotional skills to students (aggressors, bystanders, targets), and
4. **Parent and community partnerships**, characterized by open communication and shared efforts to promote the healthy youth development of students.

Efforts to create a safe and supportive school for all students will be optimized when the school functions as an aligned system where all the members, programmatic components, and policy and procedures are coordinated, guided by the same underlying principles, and working toward the same goals.

## Systems Level: Things your school can do to implement BFS...

### 1. Identify Leadership.

- **Obtain administrative support.**

Without administrative support, there cannot be an effective systems level implementation. Unless there is already administrative support, request a meeting with the administrator and key stakeholders in the school to explain the BFS approach and determine the school's level of readiness (e.g., counselor/social worker, and representative teachers and support staff members). This can be done as an informal meeting or a more formal awareness session.

- **Create a leadership team.**

It is important to have a diverse team to provide leadership throughout the implementation process and monitor progress thereafter. As a systems approach, BFS will have an impact on everyone's life within the school community—administrators, counselors/social workers, support staff members, recess monitors, bus drivers, parents, and board members, etc. Therefore, it is important to have representation from each of the key stakeholder groups on the leadership team. Be sure there is a formal connection with the School Improvement Team and Coordinated School Health, either as a subcommittee or with shared representation.

### 2. Collect baseline data.

It is important to gather baseline data prior to launching full implementation so efforts can be monitored and adjusted based upon progress. It may or may not be able to be completed prior to full staff training, but should be done as soon as possible once a school has committed to implementing the BFS approach. Identify existing forms of data, conduct the following surveys, and gather other forms of relevant data:

- *BFS Systems Level Survey* (This should be done prior to staff training.)
- *BFS Staff and Student Survey* (It is important to implement these surveys prior to implementation in order to have baseline data. It can be helpful to conduct these surveys prior to conducting an all-staff training as it can validate the need; however, if that is not possible, it can be conducted after the training.)
- Create a *Resource Map* of any related programs, strategies, initiatives that the school has in place.
- Once a school has received the *BFS Staff and Student Surveys Report*, it can be helpful to conduct focus groups with staff, parents, and students to get a deeper understanding of the data.

### 3. Build capacity.

The goal is to build the capacity of all school personnel to successfully implement the BFS approach. A systems approach of this scope requires a deep understanding of the underlying principles of effective prevention and proficiency in the required skill set. Therefore, **two days of training for the entire staff with ongoing technical support throughout the first year is recommended.** There are several training formats that can be used:

- *Train the leadership team* in a 2-day training that can be conducted for individual schools or multiple schools at regional trainings. Some schools have internal staff members who provide professional development within the district. With technical support and access to resources, these school personnel can train the rest of the staff.
- *Train the entire school staff.* This usually has to be done one day at a time. If a school is unable to fit a second day into their professional development schedule within the first few months, the second day can be provided in shorter segments. The second day can also be provided only to members of the leadership team, who can then pass the information on to their colleagues in staff meeting sessions.

Following are the objectives and essential components for BFS training and technical support:

**Establish the need:**

- Causes and long-term consequence
- BFS Systems Level Survey data, along with BFS Staff and Student Survey data if available

**Provide an overview of BFS Key Components and develop essential skills:**

1. Positive Climate and Growth Mindset Feedback (effort-based and behaviorally specific)
2. Clear Limits and Effective Consequences
3. Social/Emotional Learning for Aggressors, Targets, and Bystanders
4. Parent and Community Partnerships

**Develop an Evaluation Plan:**

- Resource mapping for range of prevention and intervention services
- All aspects of an overall plan (data collection, methodology, schedule, etc.)

*Note:* Periodic training and/or technical support after the program is up and running is also important in order to maintain momentum and trouble shoot problems, as well as to train new staff members.

**4. Develop a detailed action plan for each of the following.**

It is important for schools to have technical support while developing plans to implement the components of the BFS approach identified below. Align BFS with existing programs and strategies—with the goal being to institutionalize bullying prevention in the school. While groundwork can be laid for target and bystander empowerment, it is important to *begin the change process by developing the Clear Limits and Consequences and Positive School Climate* components in order to ensure student safety when they intervene with or report peer mistreatment.

**Clear Limits and Consequences**

- Peer Aggression Discipline Rubric (with staff input)
- Identification of Key Staff for Individual Intervention Process (IIP)
- Scheduled Times and Facility Arrangements for Reflection Room

**Positive School Climate**

- Staff Role Modeling
- Strategies to Increase Student Connectedness
- Frequent use of Growth Mindset Precision Feedback

**Social/Emotional Skill Building for:**

- Aggressors (IIP: Investigation and Reflection Process, Targeted Curricula and Services for Additional Levels of Intervention)
- Targets (Support, Connect, and Promote resiliency)
- Bystanders (Class Meetings and Universal Curricula)

**Parent and Community Partnerships**

- Develop partnerships with parents and community members /agencies

**Evaluation Plan (Schedule of Data Collection and Methodology)**

- Resource Mapping
- Sources of data staff, student, and parent data

**5. Launch the Implementation Plan**

- Provide awareness sessions for staff, parents, and students.

**6. Hold Periodic Leadership Team Meetings**

- Monitor progress to identify ongoing programmatic and staff needs.

### Individual Level: Things *you* can do to make a difference...



Irrespective of what is happening on the systems level, there are things that individuals within a school can do within their sphere of influence that will make a difference in the lives of students. A large body of research in resiliency tell us how the presence of just one, caring adult in the life of a distressed or at-risk child can literally change the trajectory of his or her life. It is all about relationships and creating connections for disconnected youth. Engage with them: Talk to them, listen to them, ask questions, validate them, support them, challenge them, learn from them, do things with them, joke with them and enjoy their company, and connect them to help if they need it!

1. If your school is not at the point of readiness to make a commitment to implement BFS, take action to initiate or promote a comprehensive, systems approach to creating a safe and supportive school.
2. If your school is not ready to undertake a comprehensive approach to creating safe and supportive schools, it does not mean that you, as an individual, cannot make a positive difference within your realm of influence and in the lives of the students with whom you have contact.

What can you do to make a positive difference in the lives of students with whom you interact while your schools builds momentum for a systems change—or, if your school decides *not* to implement a comprehensive approach?

### Planning for Big and Little Change—It *All* Makes a Difference!

1. Review notes and handouts from the day and consider ways in which you can initiate or promote implementation of BFS and/or how you can make a difference as an individual.
2. Write down key learning points on the handout “Creating Safe and Supportive Schools” in the “What?” column (i.e., insights, strategies, techniques). Think about things on both the systems level and the individual level.
3. Write how you will *apply* that learning in the “So What?” column (i.e., what will you do as a result of what you learned or relearned?).
4. Put a check mark next to three to four things that were most important to you.
5. Triads: share and compare top three.

# Creating Safe and Supportive Schools

## What?

Key Insights / Strategies / Techniques  
(What did I learn or relearn?)

## So What?

Application  
(What will I do as a result?)