Bullying is a form of peer abuse that impacts a child's physical, social, emotional or cognitive development. Children of all ages should experience healthy learning environments, without fear of aggression or cruelty. As a society, it is our collective responsibility to prevent bullying from happening either at school, in the community, and/or through technology.   To achieve this, we must promote a coordinated system of services from birth through high school that build social emotional competencies and positive relationship skills.   We also must advocate for research to confirm which strategies are the most effective for which populations and policies that support these services.

Prevent Child Abuse America Advocates for:

o **A comprehensive and integrated approach to preventing bullying utilizing social emotional learning (SEL) principles**

The present array of stand alone, targeted or curricula based bullying prevention programs produce marginal, if any, positive results contributing to a fragmented approach to prevention.[1] Ecologically based strategies engaging, families, schools and communities offer a better chance at producing significant, sustainable changes.

Through family, school and community partnerships, children and adults can develop the social emotional learning skills necessary to effectively manage themselves and their relationships with others. Home visitation programs and other parent support efforts serve as critical entries for assuring that children and youth learn about social emotional learning skills at home and then have these values reinforced at school.   A recent analysis of over 213 evaluation studies of SEL in schools found improvements in student behavior and academic achievement, reporting a 22% increase in social emotional skills, a 9% increase in positive attitudes and pro-social behavior, a 9% decrease in conduct problems, 10% decrease in emotional distress and an 11 percentile increase in test scores following implementation of evidence based social emotional learning curriculum.[2]

Any bullying prevention effort also needs to consider the social context in which bullying occurs and the group dynamics that may either perpetuate or prevent bullying behavior. More recent school based programs are examining ways to build the capacity of witnesses to intervene.[3] There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that when school climate is improved, children are more likely to remain engaged in learning and stay in school. School climate is defined as the "norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe."[4] In a study of schools in Virginia, schools with higher rates of bullying maintained drop- out rates nearly 30% above the state average, while schools with lower levels of bullying showed drop-out rates nearly 30% below the state average.[5] Positive school climate serves as a buffer from potentially negative peer influences and/or lack of parental involvement and positive role modeling.

o **<u>Research to better understand the context and scope of the problem and to build an evidence base for effective strategies</u>**

Further research is needed to inform policy, educational practice, and prevention programs. Among the questions to be addressed are:
- How does the definition of bullying behaviors impact reporting rates;
- How does the proliferation of cyber bullying, as well as the overlap between bullying behavior and other forms of child maltreatment affect the standard definition;
- What are the qualitative differences in bullying behaviors across race, gender, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity;
- What are the most effective strategies for developing a comprehensive approach to prevention that includes support and education for parents and community members, targeted curriculum for youth, and broader school climate change?

o **<u>Improved laws designed to protect children from bullying behavior</u>**

Of the 49 states that have passed laws related to bullying, there is dramatic variation in scope and implementation. While the US Department of Education identified eleven key components for state level anti-bullying legislation, nearly a third of states' laws concentrate on identification and punishment of the perpetrator. Others call for mandatory bullying prevention education programs in the schools but have no resources allocated to support such programming. At the federal level, the Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Act of 2013 (HR1875) calls for principal, teacher and classroom training designed to provide the knowledge, attitudes and skills associated with social, emotional competencies. In addition to academics, these skills are necessary for success in school and 21st century living.

<u>Background</u>

Definition of Bullying/Peer Abuse
To provide consistent terminology, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in partnership with the Department of Education (ED) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) developed the following uniform research definition of bullying:

 "any unwanted, aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves a real or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may result in harm or distress on the targeted youth, including physical, psychological, social or educational harm." (For a more comprehensive definition of the modes and types of bullying, along with further delineation of the key terms – refer to the CDC's list of Key Terms. [6])

2

Young people may perpetrate bullying behavior, witness or support such behavior or become a target of bullying behaviors over the course of their school age years.

Bullying behavior occurs both in-person and indirectly, through threats and rumors. Bullying behavior also occurs through technology or cyber space, when an individual or group uses an electronic medium to engage in deliberate, repeated and hostile communication exchanges with the intent to harm others.   Cyber-bullying may include: email, chat rooms, instant message, websites, text message or other social media.[7]

Scope of Bullying
Bullying takes place throughout the school age years, across gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. The range of bullying definitions in use, coupled with the range in measurement techniques presents challenges for determining the true prevalence of bullying.   According to a 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 20% of high school students experienced bullying behaviors on school property once in a twelve-month period. Also in 2011, the School Crime Supplement reported 28% of students, ages 12-18 experienced bullying behaviors at school during a school year. [8] When peers who witness bullying behaviors are also included, the number increases dramatically. With over 70% of students reporting witnessing bullying within a month, it is likely that most youth are impacted at some point each school year.[9]

Bullying behavior takes on various forms including physical aggression, verbal and relational abuse.   Among the most common are verbal (18%;), - making fun of someone or name-calling] and (18%;)- subject of rumors], followed by (8%) pushed, shoved or tripped, (6%) excluded from an activity on purpose and (6%) threatened with harm.[10]

Nature of Bullying
There is no single predictor of bullying behavior.   Rather, a complex set of individual, family, peer, school and community factors all contribute to a social environment that is either likely or not likely to foster bullying behavior.[11]
Among the children found to be at highest risk as targets of bullying behavior are those with special cognitive, physical or health care needs; those struggling with weight issues; as well as those identifying as lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered or questioning (LBGTQ.)   [12],[13]

While some children who engage in bullying behavior have experienced violence in their home or are socially isolated and disengaged at school, children defined as popular by their peers, who play a powerful role in their peer group, also participate in bullying behavior. Bullying is best understood as a group phenomenon, also involving youth who neither initiate bullying nor are targets, but act as witnesses. Their reactions, as well as those of the adults and the greater social climate affect the incidence and experience[14].

Consequences of Bullying
Children whom experience bullying may suffer short and long term physical and mental health difficulties, as well as academic problems. [15]Possible effects include: depression and anxiety; decreased interest in activities that used to bring pleasure; changes in diet and sleep; lower school achievement and attendance.   Many of these issues might

continue into adulthood, later resulting in substance abuse, criminal convictions and domestic violence or child abuse.[16] Studies also have found that exposure to violence during childhood is associated with telomere erosion.   Telomeres are the protective ends of DNA strands, which are shortened with each cellular division and contribute to aging. Children who experience physical abuse have advanced erosion and a combination of physical abuse and exposure to bullying or domestic violence cause the most erosion, increasing the risk for a decreased life span and early onset of disease.[17]

Despite these consequences, very few youth have suicidal thoughts or attempt to commit suicide. Bullying behavior is one of many risk factors that might result in suicide; however, there is no causal link.[18]

For more information contact Prevent Child Abuse America at 312-663-3520 or at mailbox@preventchildabuse.org

[1] Merell, K.W., Gueldner, B.A., Ross, S.W., &Isava, D.M. (2008). How effective are school bullying intervention programs? A meta-analysis of intervention research. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23, 26-42.
[2] Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P. Dymnicki, A.B. Taylor, R.D., &Schellinger, K.B. (2011). The Impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405-432.
[3] Hanish, l.D.,Bradshaw, C.P., Espelage, D.L., Rodkin, p.C., Swearer, S., &Horne, A. (2013). Looking toward the future of bullying research: recommendations for research and funding priorities. *Journal of School Violence*, 12:283-295.
[4] National School Climate Council. (2007). *The School climate challenge: Narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education policy.*
[5] Cornell, D., Gregory, A., Huang, F. & Fran, X. (2013). Perceived prevalence of bullying and teasing predicts high school dropout rates. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(1), 138-149.
[6] Gladden, R.M., Vivolo-kantor, A.M., Hamburger, M.E., &Lumpkin, C.D. (2014). *Bullying Surveillance Among Youths: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements*, Version 1.0. Atlanta, GA; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Department of Education.
[7] David-Ferdon, C, Hertz MF. (2009). *Electronic media and youth violence: A CDC issue brief for researchers.* Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
[8] Robers, S., Zhang, J., &Snyder, T. (2012) *Indicators of school crime and safety:2011*, National Center for Education Statistics.
[9] Bradshaw, C.P., Sawyer, A.L. & O'Brennan, L.M. (2007). Bullying and peer victimization at school: perceptual differences between students and school staff. *School Psychology Review*, 36, 361-382.

[10] National Center for Health Statistics, *Indicators of school crime and safety (2012*). NCES.ed.gov., U.S. Department of Education

[11] Swearer, S.M., Espelage, D.L.,Vaillancourt, T., and Hymel, S. (2010). What can be done about School Bullying? Linking research to educational practice*. Educational Researcher, Vol.39, (1) pp 38-47.*

[12] Rose, C.A., Espelage, D.L., Aragon, S.R., & Elliott, J. (2011). Bullying and victimization among students in special education and general education curricula. Exceptionality Education International, 21(2).

[13] Espelage, D.L. Aragon, S.R., Birkett, M. & Koenig, B.W. (2008). Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influences do parents and schools have? *School Psychology Review*, 37, 202-216.

[14] Bradsahaw et. al. (2007). Fried, S. & Sosland, B. (2011). Banishing bullying behavior: transforming the culture of peer abuse. Lanham, MD: Rowman &Littlefield.

[15] Copeland, W.E., Wolke, D., Angold, A., & Costello, E.J. (2013). Adult psychiatric outcomes of bullying and being bullies by peers in childhood and adolescence. *JAMA Psychiatry.*

[16] Schuster, M.A. and Bogart, L.M. (2013). Did the ugly duckling have PTSD? Bullying, it's effects and the role of pediatricians. *Pediatrics;* originally published online http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/131/1/e288.full.html. Stop Bullying.gov. (2014). Effects of Bullying. http://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/effects/index.html.

[17] Shalev, I, Moffitt, TE, Sugden, K. Williams, B., Houts, R.M., Danes, A., Mill, J. Arseneault, I., Caspi, A. (2012). *Molecular Psychiatry doi:10.1038/mp.2012.32.*

[18] www.stopbullying.gov/blog/2014/02/10/What is Bullying? A New Uniform Definition for Research.

Prevent Child Abuse
America