

## **The School Counselor and the Promotion of Safe Schools through Conflict Resolution and Bullying/Harassment Prevention**

(Adopted 1994/2000, Revised 2005, 2011)

### **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

School counselors recognize the need for all students to attend school in a safe, orderly and caring environment. To promote this type of environment, comprehensive school counseling programs include anti-bullying/harassment and violence-prevention programs along with comprehensive conflict-resolution programs to foster a positive school climate.

### **The Rationale**

A safe school environment is essential for effective learning. Incidents involving bullying, harassment, violence, weapons or gang behavior threaten student and staff safety (Van Velsor, 2009). Students, parents/guardians, staff and policy makers recognize the need to provide a safe school environment. Students who experience positive relationships with school personnel and can identify at least one trusted adult at school feel safe and validated (Davis, 2005).

Prevention activities are integral to creating a safe school environment that is free of fear, bullying, harassment and violence. Delivered by school counselors, teachers, administrators and qualified community experts, prevention programs increase the opportunity for improved academic achievement, appropriate behavior, positive relationships, successful resolution of conflicts, safe school climate and increased attendance. Participating in prevention activities empowers and encourages students to take responsibility for their behavior and for the climate of their school and community.

### **The School Counselor's Role**

School counselors collaborate with others in the school and community to promote safe schools and confront issues threatening school safety. School counselors encourage the development of policies supporting a safe school environment, and they provide leadership to the school by assisting in the design and implementation of schoolwide prevention activities and programs. Additionally school counselors recognize differentiated interventions are needed for bullying and resolving a conflict. Comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment/violence-prevention and conflict-resolution programs require data-driven decision making, coordination, instruction and program evaluation. These programs are most effective when incorporated into the academic curriculum by all members of the school community (Young, Hardy, Hamilton, Biernesser, Sun, & Niebergall, 2009). The school counselor includes prevention programs as a part of the comprehensive school counseling program and ensures these programs include training in:

- communication skills
- conflict-resolution skills
- decision-making skills
- development of cultural competence
- acceptance of differences
- intervention strategies for bullying/harassment
- recognition of early warning signs of violence
- prevention/intervention services
- crisis response
- appropriate use of technology and social media
- community involvement
- parent/guardian and faculty/staff education
- evaluation of program effectiveness
- building positive staff and student relationships

**Summary**

School counselors understand the need for all students to attend safe, orderly and caring schools. Through participation in prevention programs and activities aimed at bullying, harassment and violence prevention, students learn communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills that help them achieve their goals and also establish successful relationships. School counselors collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents/guardians and the community to deliver prevention programs that encourage student growth and achievement and ensure a safe school climate.

**References**

Davis, S. (2005). *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*. Research Press: Champaign, IL.

Van Velsor, P. (2009). School counselors as social-emotional learning consultants: Where do we begin? *Professional School Counseling*. 13:1. 50-58.

Young, A., Hardy, V., Hamilton, C., Biernesser, K., Sun, L., & Niebergall, S. (2009). Empowering students: Using data to transform a bullying prevention and intervention program. *Professional School Counseling*. 12:6. 413-420.