Target Bullying Intervention Program

Program Description, October, 2013.

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The Target Bullying Intervention Program (T-BIP; Swearer & Givens, 2006) is an individualized program for students who have already engaged in bullying perpetration. This program provides individualized instruction and counseling to students who have been identified as bullying others on more than one occasion. The program is designed to supplement school-wide bullying prevention and early intervention efforts by providing an intervention for students who engage in the most severe bullying behaviors (see the Bullying Prevention and Bullying Intervention Strategy Briefs for more information on strategies to address bullying at a school or classroom level). That is, the T-BIP is intended to provide intervention to those students who have already shown a pattern of bullying behaviors. The program consists of a one-on-one session between the student and a counselor, psychologist, or therapist. This is because group interventions with aggressive youth often lead to negative outcomes, as participants engage in deviant talk that influences one another to participate and accept antisocial behaviors (Dishion & Owen, 2002; Piehler & Dishion, 2007; Swearer, Wang, Collins, Strawhun, & Fluke, in press)

Tier 3 Intervention
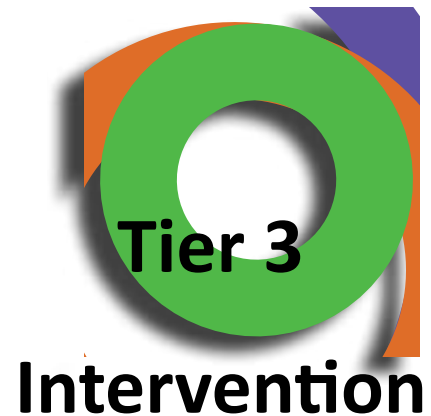
What is the Targeting Bullying Intervention Program?

The T-BIP is an individual, three-hour cognitive-behavioral intervention for students who have displayed a history of physical, verbal, relational, or cyber bullying behaviors (Meints, 2007). The T-BIP is administered by a trained graduate student therapist. Swearer and colleagues (2010) maintain that, in schools that use the T-BIP, parents of students who have office referrals for repeated instances of bullying are given the choice of suspension or participation in the T-BIP intervention. Parents of these students are also incorporated in the intervention through surveys, as well as a feedback meeting with the therapist, school staff (e.g., the student's teacher or counselor), and student which provides specific and practical recommendations to reduce bullying behaviors (Swearer et al., 2010).

Implementing the Intervention

The T-BIP intervention takes place in a single session consisting of assessment, psychoeducation, and feedback (Berry & Swearer, 2013). Students first complete several questionnaires designed to measure the bullying they have perpetrated, witnessed, and experienced; internalizing symptoms (i.e., anxiety, depression); self-perception; cognitive distortions; and perceptions of school climate. The therapist then shows the student a developmentally appropriate

PowerPoint presentation that is used to explain bullying behaviors, debunk myths about bullying, and generate discussion regarding reasons behind bullying. The student also completes a quiz over the Power Point to verify his or her understanding of key concepts. Lastly, the participant completes several worksheets from the Bully Busters program with assistance from the therapist (Newman-Carlson, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000; see the Examples of Bullying Prevention and Intervention Programs Strategy Brief for more information on the Bully Busters program), and watches an anti- bullying video.

Following the session, the therapist writes a report summarizing the assessment results and the discussion he or she had with the student and makes recommendations for successful pro-social behaviors. In this manner, parents can become more aware of their child's misbehavior in school and target similar behaviors for improvement in the home context. Furthermore, parent meetings build relationships and communication skills between parents and staff, fostering future instances of collaboration between home and school.

What Do We Know About the Target Bullying Intervention Program?

PThe T-BIP is a Tier 3 intervention that has shown preliminary effectiveness due to its intensive, one-on-one sessions, which allow for the therapist and student to identify and address cognitive distortions, as well as the environmental factors that maintain the bullying behaviors. Furthermore, although the T-BIP is a time intensive program, by replacing suspension it allows students to actually spend more time in the classroom. Ideally, schools choosing to implement the T-BIP will do so in conjunction with effective primary and secondary behavioral modifications (Swearer et al., in press). Following the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support model, a school may, for example, choose to implement the "Steps to Respect" curriculum as universal support, run small social skills groups as support for at-risk students, and implement the T-BIP as an individualized intervention for students exhibiting more severe bullying behaviors (see the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support Strategy brief).

Meints (2007) performed an initial, preliminary examination of the effectiveness of the T-BIP on office referral reduction with a sample of 17 elementary and middle school students. These initial findings suggested no significant differences in office referrals between pre and post intervention, yet office referrals did decrease following the T-BIP. Students also completed weekly questionnaires to evaluate the sustainability of the intervention's outcomes over time. The majority of the students included in the

study reported that they did not bully others after completing the T-BIP.

According to a more recent analysis conducted by Swearer et al. (in press) with 78 students who participated in the T- BIP from the academic years 2005 to 2010, the number of student office referrals decreased significantly after the T-BIP intervention. Among the 78 students, based on students' self-report, 20 students self-identified as bullies, 12 as victims, 38 as bully/victims, three as bystanders, and four as not-involved. Similar promising results have been derived from parent and teacher report using treatment evaluation surveys. Most parents have found the T-BIP as an acceptable treatment. Specifically, 47.1% of the parents who completed the survey rated the T-BIP as "very acceptable" for their general reaction to this intervention and 37.1% of the parents rated the T-BIP as "very acceptable" for the students' problem behavior. Likewise, positive perceptions have been reported for teachers. In particular, 47.8% of the teachers rated the T-BIP as "very acceptable" for their general reaction to this intervention and 44.7% of the teachers rated the T-BIP as "very acceptable" for the students' problem behavior (Swearer et al., in press).

A related follow up investigation lends further support for T-BIP effectiveness, particularly in decreasing instances of suspension. In a sample of 58 students who have completed the T-BIP, Berry and Swearer (2013) reported reductions in office referrals following the intervention, as well as a decrease in the number of days suspended from pre to post intervention. These findings suggest that the T-BIP is an effective method of reducing the frequency of suspension and increasing the time that students spend at school, as well as decreasing instances of bullying. More time in the classroom is the first step in promoting student engagement, affiliation, and adult-student relationships, all protective and resilient factors against school dropout.

Future investigations of this intervention should be conducted by independent researchers who are not affiliated with the creation or implementation of the T-BIP. Additional research, potentially including longitudinal research, should also be undertaken with larger samples of students from areas outside of Nebraska. Furthermore, Swearer and associates (2010) suggest that research on the T-BIP should examine the intervention's effectiveness with "pure" bully/victim status groups (i.e., students who do not identify as both bullies and victims). Similarly, the intervention's ability to decrease ancillary issues related to bullying, such as depression, anxiety, and cognitive distortions, should be examined.
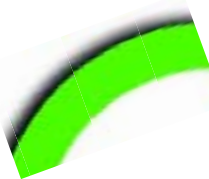
Costs of Implementation

The T-BIP is a free intervention delivered by graduate students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for any student enrolled in Lincoln Public Schools (LPS). Trained therapists bring worksheets, technology systems, and other materials with them to the session. Efforts are currently under way by the Target Bullying Research Lab to train counselors in LPS buildings to implement the intervention. The primary costs would entail the training and staff time involved in the intervention. Since the meeting with each targeted student is minimal, the cost to schools would also be relatively small.

Conclusion

The T-BIP is a cost effective, individual, three-hour cognitive-behavioral intervention for students who have displayed a history of physical, verbal, relational, or cyber bullying behaviors. Components include assessment of bullying behaviors and related symptoms, pre and post quizzes, a PowerPoint presentation, video, and a feedback meeting with the student, teachers, and parents. Recent analyses suggest that the T-BIP is an effective method for reducing office referrals and bullying perpetration. Schools interested in implementing the T-BIP are encouraged to contact Dr. Susan Swearer through her website listed below.

Resources

Target Bullying

The website below describes the Target Bullying Research Lab, led by Dr. Susan Swearer which is responsible for the development and implementation of the T-BIP. Also available on this website is information about Dr. Swearer's ongoing research projects and other initiatives.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Target Bully Intervention Lab: **http://empowerment.unl.edu.**

Bullying Research Network

This website is the home of the Bullying Research Network, an international professional group of researchers who study bullying and peer victimization. The BRNET website includes descriptions of current bullying research projects in development, evaluations of evidence-based bullying interventions, and links to published research on bullying prevention and intervention. http://brnet.unl.edu

Bullying Prevention and Intervention

For further information about bullying prevention and intervention programs, see the other Strategy Briefs available through the Student Engagement Project at http://k12engagement.unl.edu and listed here. The first focuses more on prevention programs or programs which address both prevention and intervention, while the second one describes bullying intervention programs for bullies and victims. The third provides descriptions of several well-known and evidence-based bullying prevention and intervention programs:

- Lembeck, P. T., O'Connor, A., Fluke, S. M., & Peterson, R. L. (2013, October). *Bullying prevention and intervention. Strategy brief.*
- Strawhun, J., Fluke, S. M., & Peterson, R. L. (2013, October). *Interventions for bullying behaviors. Strategy brief.*
- Strawhun, J., Fluke, S. M., & Peterson, R. L. (2013, October). *Examples of bullying prevention and intervention programs. Resource brief.*

Recommended Citation:

Strawhun, J., Fluke, S. & Peterson, R. (2013, October). *The Target Bullying Intervention Program, Program Brief.* Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education. http://k12engagement.unl.edu/target-bullying

Target Bullying Intervention Program References

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Dishion, T. J., & Owen, L. D. (2002). A longitudinal analysis of friendship and substance use: Bidirectional influence from adolescence to adulthood. Developmental Psychology, 38, 480-491. doi: 10.1037//0012-1649.38.4.480

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Newman-Carlson, D., Horne, A. M., & Bartolomucci, C. L. (2000). Bully Busters: A teacher's manual for helping bullies, victims, and bystanders. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Piehler, T. F., & Dishion, T. J. (2007). Interpersonal dynamics within adolescent friendships: Dyadic mutuality, deviant talk, and patterns of antisocial behavior. Child Development, 78, 1611-1624. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01086.x

Swearer, S. M., & Givens, J. E. (2006). Designing an alternative to suspension for middle school bullies. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Association of School Psychologists, Anaheim, CA.

Swearer, S., Givens, J., Wang, C., Collins, A., Berry, B., & Lembeck, P. (2010, August). The Bullying Intervention Program: Real world implementation issues. Poster presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Diego, CA.

Swearer, S. M., Wang, C., Collins, A., Strawhun, J., & Fluke, S. (in press). The prevention of bullying: A school mental health perspective. In M. Weist, N. Lever, C. Bradshaw, & J. Owens (Eds.), The handbook of school mental health (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Springer.