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Problem-Oriented Guides for Police

No. 12

Bullying in Schools

Rana Sampson

Center for
Problem-Oriented Policing

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About the Problem-Specific Guides Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. Neither do they cover all of the technical details about how to implement specific responses. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who:

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series of *Problem-Solving Tools* guides has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)
- **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.
- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem. (A companion series of *Response Guides* has been produced to help you understand how commonly-used police responses work on a variety of problems.)

- **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
- **Are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public bodies, including other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual citizens. An effective problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular individuals or groups in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that individuals and groups other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so. Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*, provides further discussion of this topic.

The COPS Office defines community policing as "a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime." These guides emphasize *problem-solving* and *police-community* partnerships in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate problem-solving and police-community partnerships vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.

These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs, and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

Each guide is informed by a thorough review of the research literature and reported police practice, and each guide is anonymously peer-reviewed by a line police officer, a police executive, and a researcher prior to publication. The review process is independently managed by the COPS Office, which solicits the reviews.

For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at www.popcenter.org. This website offers free online access to:

- The *Problem-Specific Guides* series
- The companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series
- Special publications on crime analysis and on policing terrorism
- Instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics
- An interactive problem-oriented policing training exercise
- An interactive *Problem Analysis Module*
- Online access to important police research and practices
- Information about problem-oriented policing conferences and award programs

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The project team that developed the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein (University of Wisconsin Law School), Ronald V. Clarke (Rutgers University), John E. Eck (University of Cincinnati), Michael S. Scott (University of Wisconsin Law School), Rana Sampson (Police Consultant), and Deborah Lamm Weisel (North Carolina State University).

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Karin Schmerler, Rita Varano, and Nancy Leach oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Megan Tate Murphy coordinated the peer reviews for the COPS Office. Suzanne Fregly edited the guides. Research for the guides was conducted at the Criminal Justice Library at Rutgers University under the direction of Phyllis Schultze by Gisela Bichler-Robertson, Rob Guerette, and Laura Wyckoff.

The Problem of Bullying in Schools

There is new concern about school violence, and police have assumed greater responsibility for helping school officials ensure students' safety. As pressure increases to place officers in schools, police agencies must decide how best to contribute to student safety. Will police presence on campuses most enhance safety? If police cannot or should not be on every campus, can they make other contributions to student safety? What are good approaches and practices?

Perhaps more than any other school safety problem, bullying affects students' sense of security. The most effective ways to prevent or lessen bullying require school administrators' commitment and intensive effort; police interested in increasing school safety can use their influence to encourage schools to address the problem. This guide provides police with information about bullying in schools, its extent and its causes, and enables police to steer schools away from common remedies that have proved ineffective elsewhere, and to develop ones that will work.†

Bullying is widespread and perhaps the most underreported safety problem on American school campuses.[1] Contrary to popular belief, bullying occurs more often at school than on the way to and from there. Once thought of as simply a rite of passage or relatively harmless behavior that helps build young people's character, bullying is now known to have long-lasting harmful effects, for both the victim and the bully. Bullying is often mistakenly viewed as a narrow range of antisocial behavior confined to elementary school recess yards. In the United States, awareness of the problem is growing, especially with reports that in two-thirds of the recent school shootings (for which the shooter was still alive to report), the attackers had previously been bullied. "In those cases, the experience of bullying appeared to play a major role in motivating the attacker."[2, ‡]

International research suggests that bullying is common at schools and occurs beyond elementary school; bullying occurs at all grade levels, although most frequently during elementary school. It occurs slightly less often in middle schools, and less so, but still frequently, in high schools.§ High school freshmen are particularly vulnerable.

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† Why should police care about a safety problem when others, such as school administrators, are better equipped to address it? One can find numerous examples of safety problems regarding which the most promising part of the police role is to raise awareness and engage others to effectively manage the problems. For example, in the case of drug dealing in privately owned apartment complexes, the most effective police strategy is to educate property owners and managers in effective strategies so they can reduce their property's vulnerability to drug markets.

‡ It is important to note that while bullying may be a contributing factor in many school shootings, it is not the cause of the school shootings.

§ For an excellent review of bullying research up through 1992, see Farrington (1993).

Dan Olweus, a researcher in Norway, conducted groundbreaking research in the 1970s exposing the widespread nature and harm of school bullying.[3] Bullying is well documented in Europe, Canada, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, providing an extensive body of information on the problem. Research from some countries has shown that, without intervention, bullies are much more likely to develop a criminal record than their peers,[†] and bullying victims suffer psychological harm long after the bullying stops.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying has two key components: repeated harmful acts and an imbalance of power. It involves repeated physical, verbal, or psychological attacks or intimidation directed against a victim who cannot properly defend him- or herself because of size or strength, or because the victim is outnumbered or less psychologically resilient.[4]

Bullying includes assault, tripping, intimidation, rumor-spreading and isolation, demands for money, destruction of property, theft of valued possessions, destruction of another's work, and name-calling. In the United States, several other school behaviors (some of which are illegal) are recognized as forms of bullying, such as:

- Sexual harassment (e.g., repeated exhibitionism, voyeurism, sexual propositioning, and sexual abuse involving unwanted physical contact)
- Ostracism based on perceived sexual orientation
- Hazing (e.g., upper-level high school athletes' imposing painfully embarrassing initiation rituals on their new freshmen teammates)[5]

Not all taunting, teasing and fighting among schoolchildren constitutes bullying.[6] "Two persons of approximately the same strength (physical or psychological)…fighting or quarreling" is not bullying. Rather, bullying entails repeated acts by someone perceived as physically or psychologically more powerful.

† As young adults, former school bullies in Norway had a fourfold increase in the level of relatively serious, recidivist criminality (Olweus 1992). Dutch and Australian studies also found increased levels of criminal behavior by adults who had been bullies (Farrington 1993; Rigby and Slee 1999).

Related Problems

Bullying in schools shares some similarities to the related problems listed below, each of which requires its own analysis and response. This guide does not directly address these problems:

- Bullying of teachers by students
- Bullying among inmates in juvenile detention facilities
- Bullying as a means of gaining and retaining youth gang members and compelling them to commit crimes

Extent of the Bullying Problem

Extensive studies in other countries during the 1980s and 1990s generally found that between 8 and 38 percent of students are bullied with some regularity,† and that between five and nine percent of students bully others with some regularity. Chronic victims of bullying, bullied once a week or more, generally constitute between 8 and 20 percent of the student population.[7]

In the United States, fewer studies have been done. A recent study of a nationally representative sample of students found higher levels of bullying in America than in some other countries. Thirteen percent of sixth- through tenth-grade students bully, 10 percent reported being victims, and an additional six percent are victim-bullies.[8] This study excluded elementary-age students (who often experience high levels of bullying) and did not limit bullying to school grounds. Several smaller studies from different parts of the country confirm high levels of bullying behaviors, with 10 to 29 percent of students reported to be either bullies or victims. [9, ‡]

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† A South Carolina study found that 20 percent of students bully others with some regularity (Limber et al. 1998). In an English study involving 25 schools and nearly 3,500 students, 9 percent of the students admitted to having bullied others by sexual touching [Glover and Cartwright, with Gleeson (1998)].

‡ In some of the studies, lack of a common definition of bullying potentially distorts the estimates of the problem (Harachi, Catalano and Hawkins 1999). In addition, in the United States, the lack of a galvanized focus on bullying has resulted in a lack of large-scale school research efforts (such as those in Scandinavia, England, Japan, and Australia). Thus we have only limited insights into the problem of bullying here.

Clearly, the percentage of students who are bullies and victims varies by research study, often depending on the definition used, the time frame examined (e.g., ever, frequently, once a week)† and other factors.‡ Despite these differences, bullying appears to be widespread in schools in every country studying the problem.§

A Threshold Problem: The Reluctance To Report

Most students do not report bullying to adults. Surveys from a variety of countries confirm that many victims and witnesses fail to tell teachers or even parents.[10] As a result, teachers may underestimate the extent of bullying in their school and may be able to identify only a portion of the actual bullies. Studies also suggest that children do not believe that most teachers intervene when told about bullying.[11]

"If the victims are as miserable as the research suggests, why don't they appeal for help? One reason may be that, historically, adults' responses have been so disappointing."[12] In a survey of American middle and high school students, "66 percent of victims of bullying believed school professionals responded poorly to the bullying problems that they observed."[13] Some of the reasons victims gave for not telling include:

- Fearing retaliation
- Feeling shame at not being able to stand up for themselves
- Fearing they would not be believed
- Not wanting to worry their parents
- Having no confidence that anything would change as a result

† For the first time, during the 1997-98 school year, the United States participated in an international study of young people's health, behavior and lifestyles, which included conducting surveys on school bullying. (European countries have participated in the study since 1982.) Researchers gathered data on 120,000 students from 28 countries. Upwards of 20 percent of 15-year-old U.S. students reported they had been bullied at school during the current term. However, a 2000 U.S. Department of Education report on school crime (based on 1999 data), using a very narrow–and perhaps too limited–definition of bullying than the earlier report, showed that 5 percent of students ages 12 through 18 had reported being bullied at school in the last six months (Kaufman et al. 2000).

‡ The "Annual Report on School Safety," developed in response to a 1997 school shooting in West Paducah, Kentucky., did not until 1999 contain any data on school bullying. The 1999 school bullying data are aggregate, useful only in international comparisons, since specific types of bullying are not categorized. The report tracks thefts, weapons, injuries, threats, and physical fights, and some measures of harassment and hate crimes. However, the proportion of incidents that have their roots in bullying is not specified.

§ The words "bully" and "bullying" are used in this guide as shorthand to include all of the different forms of bullying behavior.

- Thinking their parents' or teacher's advice would make the problem worse
- Fearing their teacher would tell the bully who told on him or her
- Thinking it was worse to be thought of as a snitch†

The same is true of student-witnesses. Although most students agree that bullying is wrong, witnesses rarely tell teachers and only infrequently intervene on behalf of the victim. Some students worry that intervening will raise a bully's wrath and make him or her the next target. Also, there may be "diffusion of responsibility"; in other words, students may falsely believe that no one person has responsibility to stop the bullying, absent a teacher or a parent.

Student-witnesses appear to have a central role in creating opportunities for bullying. In a study of bullying in junior and senior high schools in small Midwestern towns, 88 percent of students reported having observed bullying.[14] While some researchers refer to witnesses as "bystanders," others use a more refined description of the witness role. In each bullying act, there is a victim, the ringleader bully, assistant bullies (they join in), reinforcers (they provide an audience or laugh with or encourage the bully), outsiders (they stay away or take no sides), and defenders (they step in, stick up for, or comfort the victim).[15] Studies suggest only between 10 and 20 percent of noninvolved students provide any real help when another student is victimized.[16]

Bullying Behavior

Despite country and cultural differences, certain similarities by gender, age, location, and type of victimization appear in bullying in the U.S. and elsewhere.

- Bullying more often takes place at school than on the way to and from school.[17]
- Boy bullies tend to rely on physical aggression more than girl bullies, who often use teasing, rumor-spreading, exclusion, and social isolation. These latter forms of bullying are referred to as "indirect bullying." Physical bullying (a form of "direct bullying") is the least common form of bullying, and verbal bullying (which may be "direct" or "indirect") the most common.[18] Some researchers speculate that girls value social relationships more than boys do, so girl bullies set out to disrupt social relationships with gossip, isolation, silent treatment, and exclusion. Girls tend to bully girls, while boys bully both boys and girls.

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† Similarly, many sexual assault and domestic violence victims keep their abuse a secret from the police. Police in many jurisdictions see increased reporting of these crimes as an important first step to reducing the potential for future violence, while victims often see it as jeopardizing their safety. Some of the same interests and concerns are found in the area of school bullying.

- Consistently, studies indicate that boys are more likely to bully than girls.
- Some studies show that boys are more often victimized, at least during elementary school years; others show that bullies victimize girls and boys in near equal proportions.[19]
- Bullies often do not operate alone. In the United Kingdom, two different studies found that almost half the incidents of bullying are one-on-one, while the other half involves additional youngsters.[20]
- Bullying does not end in elementary school. Middle school seems to provide ample opportunities for bullying, although at lesser rates. The same is true of the beginning years of high school.
- Bullying by boys declines substantially after age 15. Bullying by girls begins declining significantly at age 14.[21, †] So interventions in middle and early high school years are also important.
- Studies in Europe and Scandinavia show that some schools seem to have higher bullying rates than others. Researchers generally believe that bullying rates are unrelated to school or class size, or to whether a school is in a city or suburb (although one study found that reporting was higher in inner-city schools). Schools in socially disadvantaged areas seem to have higher bullying rates,[22] and classes with students with behavioral, emotional, or learning problems have more bullies and victims than classes without such students.[23]
- There is a strong belief that the degree of the school principal's involvement (discussed later in this guide) helps determine the level of bullying.
- There is some evidence that racial bullying occurs in the United States. In a nationally representative study combining data about bullying at and outside of school, 25 percent of students victimized by bullying reported they were belittled about their race or religion (eight percent of those victims were bullied frequently about it).[24] The study also found that black youth reported being bullied less than their Hispanic and white peers. Racial bullying is also a problem in Canada and England. "In Toronto, one in eight children overall, and one in three of those in inner-city schools, said that racial bullying often occurred in their schools."[25] In four schools–two primary, two secondary–in Liverpool and London, researchers found that Bengali and black students were disproportionately victimized.[26]

† Results from several countries, including Australia and England, indicate that as students progress through the middle to upper grades in school, they become more desensitized to bullying. High school seniors are the exception: they show greater alarm about the problem, just at the point when they will be leaving the environment (O'Moore 1999).

One of the things we do not yet know about bullying is whether certain types of bullying, for instance racial bullying or rumor spreading, are more harmful than other types. Clearly, much depends on the victim's vulnerability, yet certain types of bullying may have longer-term impact on the victim. It is also unclear what happens when a bully stops bullying. Does another student take that bully's place? Must the victim also change his or her behavior to prevent another student from stepping in? While specific studies on displacement have not been done, it appears that the more comprehensive the school approach to tackling bullying, the less opportunity there is for another bully to rise up.

Bullies

Many of the European and Scandinavian studies concur that bullies tend to be aggressive, dominant, and slightly below average in intelligence and reading ability (by middle school), and most evidence suggests that bullies are at least of average popularity.[27] The belief that bullies "are insecure, deep down" is probably incorrect.[28] Bullies do not appear to have much empathy for their victims.[29] Young bullies tend to remain bullies, without appropriate intervention. "Adolescent bullies tend to become adult bullies, and then tend to have children who are bullies."[30] In one study in which researchers followed bullies as they grew up, they found that youth who were bullies at 14 tended to have children who were bullies at 32, suggesting an intergenerational link.[31] They also found that "[b]ullies have some similarities with other types of offenders. Bullies tend to be drawn disproportionately from lower socioeconomic-status families with poor child-rearing techniques, tend to be impulsive, and tend to be unsuccessful in school."[32]

In Australia, research shows that bullies have low empathy levels, are generally uncooperative, and, based on self-reports, come from dysfunctional families low on love. Their parents tend to frequently criticize them and strictly control them.[33] Dutch (and other) researchers have found a correlation between harsh physical punishments such as beatings, strict disciplinarian parents and bullying.[34] In U.S. studies, researchers have found higher bullying rates among boys whose parents use physical punishment or violence against them.[35]

Some researchers suggest that bullies have poor social skills and compensate by bullying. Others suggest that bullies have keen insight into others' mental states and take advantage of that by picking on the emotionally less resilient.[36] Along this line, there is some suggestion, currently being explored in research in the United States and elsewhere, that those who bully in the early grades are initially popular and considered leaders. However, by the third grade, the aggressive behavior is less well-regarded by peers, and those who become popular are those who do not bully. Some research also suggests that "[bullies] direct aggressive behavior at a variety of targets. As they learn the reactions of their peers, their pool of victims becomes increasingly smaller, and their choice of victims more consistent."[37] Thus, bullies ultimately focus on peers who become chronic victims due to how those peers respond to aggression. This indicates that identifying chronic victims early on can be important for effective intervention.

A number of researchers believe that bullying occurs due to a combination of social interactions with parents, peers, and teachers.[38] The history of the parent-child relationship may contribute to cultivating a bully, and low levels of peer and teacher intervention combine to create opportunities for chronic bullies to thrive (as will be discussed later).

Incidents of Bullying

Bullying most often occurs where adult supervision is low or absent: schoolyards, cafeterias, bathrooms, hallways, and stairwells.[39] "Olweus (1994) found that there is an inverse relationship between the number of supervising adults present and the number of bully/victim incidents."[40] The design of less-supervised locations can create opportunities for bullying. For instance, if bullying occurs in a cafeteria while students vie for places in line for food, line management techniques, perhaps drawn from crime prevention through environmental design, could limit the opportunity to bully. A number of studies have found that bullying also occurs in classrooms and on school buses, although less so than in recess areas and hallways. Upon greater scrutiny, one may find that in certain classrooms, bullying thrives, and in others, it is rare. Classroom bullying may have more to do with the classroom management techniques a teacher uses than with the number of adult supervisors in the room.

Other areas also offer opportunities for bullying. The Internet creates opportunities for cyber-bullies, who can operate anonymously and harm a wide audience. For example, middle school, high school and college students from Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley area posted web site messages that were

> …full of sexual innuendo aimed at individual students and focusing on topics such as 'the weirdest people at your school.' The online bulletin boards had been accessed more than 67,000 times [in a two-week period], prompting a sense of despair among scores of teenagers disparaged on the site, and frustration among parents and school administrators.…One crying student, whose address and phone number were published on the site, was barraged with calls from people calling her a slut and a prostitute.[41]

A psychologist interviewed for the *Los Angeles Times* remarked on the harm of such Internet bullying:

> It's not just a few of the kids at school; it's the whole world.…Anybody could log on and see what they said about you.…What's written remains, haunting, torturing these kids.[42]

The imbalance of power here was not in the bully's size or strength, but in the instrument the bully chose to use, bringing worldwide publication to vicious school gossip.

Victims of Bullying

- Most bullies victimize students in the same class or year, although 30 percent of victims report that the bully was older, and approximately ten percent report that the bully was younger.[43]
- It is unknown the extent to which physical, mental or speech difficulties, eyeglasses, skin color, language, height, weight, hygiene, posture, and dress play a role in victim selection.[44] One major study found "the only external characteristics...to be associated with victimization were that victims tended to be smaller and weaker than their peers."[45] One study found that nonassertive youth who were socially incompetent had an increased likelihood of victimization.[46] Having friends, especially ones who will help protect against bullying, appears to reduce the chances of victimization.[47] A Dutch study found that "more than half of those who say they have no friends are being bullied (51%), vs. only 11 percent of those who say they have more than five friends."[48]

Consequences of Bullying

Victims of bullying suffer consequences beyond embarrassment. Some victims experience psychological and/or physical distress, are frequently absent and cannot concentrate on schoolwork. Research generally shows that victims have low self-esteem, and their victimization can lead to depression[49] that can last for years after the victimization.[50] In Australia, researchers found that between five and ten percent of students stayed at home to avoid being bullied. Boys and girls who were bullied at least once a week experienced poorer health, more frequently contemplated suicide, and suffered from depression, social dysfunction, anxiety, and insomnia.[51] Another study found that adolescent victims, once they are adults, were more likely than non-bullied adults individuals to have children who are victims.[52]

Chronic Victims of Bullying

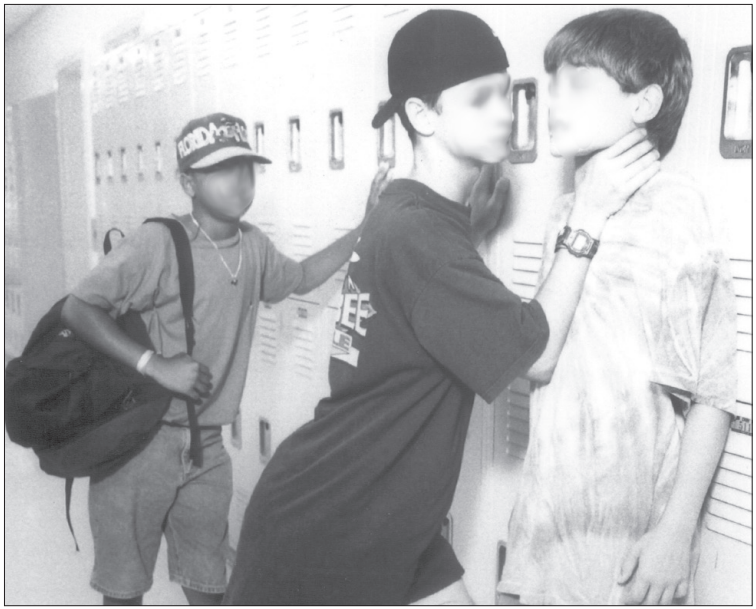
While many, if not most, students have been bullied at some point in their school career,[53] chronic victims receive the brunt of the harm. It appears that a small subset of six to ten percent of school-age children are chronic victims,[54] some bullied as often as several times a week.† There are more chronic victims in elementary school than in middle school, and the pool of chronic victims further shrinks as students enter high school. If a student is a chronic victim at age 15 (high school age), it would not be surprising to find that he or she has suffered through years of victimization. Because of the harm involved, anti-bullying interventions should include a component tailored to counter the abuse chronic victims suffer.

Several researchers suggest, although there is not agreement, that some chronic victims are "irritating" or "provocative" because their coping strategies include aggressively reacting to the bullying.[55] The majority of chronic victims, however, are extremely passive and do not defend themselves. Provocative victims may be particularly difficult to help because their behavior must change substantially to lessen their abuse.

† These figures are based on studies in Dublin, Toronto and Sheffield, England (Farrington 1993). Olweus, however, in his Norwegian studies, found smaller percentages of chronic victims.

Both provocative and passive chronic victims tend to be anxious and insecure, "which may signal to others that they are easy targets."[56] They are also less able to control their emotions, and more socially withdrawn. Tragically, chronic victims may return to bullies to try to continue the perceived relationship, which may initiate a new cycle of victimization. Chronic victims often remain victims even after switching to new classes with new students, suggesting that, without other interventions, nothing will change.[57] In describing chronic victims, Olweus states: "It does not require much imagination to understand what it is to go through the school years in a state of more or less permanent anxiety and insecurity, and with poor self-esteem. It is not surprising that the victims' devaluation of themselves sometimes becomes so overwhelming that they see suicide as the only possible solution."[58, †]

Teri DeBruhl



School bullying takes many forms including assault, tripping, intimidation, rumor-spreading and isolation, demands for money, destruction of property, theft of valued possessions, destruction of another's work, and name-calling. In this photo, a bully assaults the victim as another student watches. Studies suggest only between 10 and 20 percent of noninvolved students provide any real help when another student is victimized.

† A handful of chronic victims make the leap from suicidal to homicidal thoughts. Clearly, access to guns is also an issue.

In the United States, courts appear open to at least hearing arguments from chronic victims of bullying who allege that schools have a duty to stop persistent victimization.[59] It has yet to be decided to what extent schools have an obligation to keep students free from mistreatment by their peers. However, early and sincere attention to the problem of bullying is a school's best defense.

Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of bullying in schools. You must combine this general information with a more specific understanding of your school's problem. Analyzing a school's problem carefully will help you design a more effective response strategy. Police who work with schools may even find that many of the thefts, assaults and batteries, hate crimes, and threats on school campuses (elementary, middle, and high school level) are symptoms of bullying and are perpetrated by a small percentage of chronic tormentors.

Asking the Right Questions†

The following are some critical questions you should ask in analyzing your particular problem of bullying in schools, even if the answers are not always readily available. The answers to these and other questions will help you guide the school in choosing the most appropriate set of responses later on.

The School

- Does the school believe it has a problem with bullying?
- Is the school aware of the long-term harms associated with bullying and chronic victimization?
- Is the school aware of the different types of behavior that constitute bullying?
- Does the school know how often bullying occurs on the campus each year?
- How does the school's level of bullying compare with that of other schools that have examined bullying?
- Does the school have a policy to guide teachers and other staff in handling incidents of bullying?

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† The problem of bullying requires extensive surveying of those affected. It is recommended that police link with local colleges, universities, or researchers to prepare and pretest survey instruments. Internationally valid questionnaires, adapted from Olweus' questionnaires, are available to survey students, classroom teachers, and other staff involved in managing bullying problems. These have been used as part of a comparative project in Japan, Norway, England, the Netherlands, and the state of Washington, and require written permission for use from Dan Olweus (Research Center for Health Promotion, Christies Gate 13, N-5015, Bergen, Norway). The value of using these questionnaires is the ability to make comparisons among a wide range of other sites. If you use anonymous written surveys of students, it is important to develop some other means for gathering information from students on the specific identities of chronic victims and chronic bullies. Once gathered, compare this information with that in school records and with teachers' observations to see if there is some agreement. For additional information on bullying surveys, also see the European Commission's TMR Network Project on bullying, involving collaboration among five European countries.

- How does the school identify bullies? Are records kept? Are they adequate? Are school counselors in the loop?
- What insights do teachers have about bullying? Can they identify some of the chronic victims and bullies?
- How are others (e.g., parents, police) brought into the loop, and at what point?
- Given that most bullying occurs in areas where there are no teachers, is the current method for identifying bullies adequate?

Offenders

- Where do bullies operate at the school?
- What are the consequences for bullying at the school? Are they applied consistently?
- Does the bullying stop? How is this determined?

Victims and Victimization

- Does the school know all the victims of bullying?
- How does the school identify victims? Given that most victims and witnesses do not report, is the current system for identifying victims adequate? Who are the chronic victims? What has the school done to protect them?
- What are the most common forms of bullying victimization? Does the school policy address them?
- Does the school have a policy regarding the reporting of bullying and the role of bystanders?

Locations Where Bullying Occurs

- Where does bullying most often occur? Do data support this?
- When does bullying occur at those locations?
- Are those who supervise the locations during those times trained to identify and appropriately handle bullying incidents?
- Has the school made changes to the locations to minimize bullying opportunities?

Measuring Your Effectiveness

You should encourage the school to measure its bullying problem before implementing responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and after implementing them, to determine whether they have been effective. Measurement allows school staff to determine to what degree their efforts have succeeded, and suggests how they might modify their responses if they are not producing the intended results. For more detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see the companion guide to this series, Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers. The following potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to bullying should be taken using before-and-after surveys:

- Percentage of victims, by type of bullying
- Number of repeat victims
- Number of chronic bullies
- Frequency of victimization (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly)
- Percentage of bullying incidents reported to parents or authorities
- Number of students who are knowledgeable about bullying and how they should respond
- Percentage of students who witness bullying who report it to teachers or parents
- Willingness of students to step in and help someone being bullied
- Attendance, tardiness, behavior, and disciplinary reports of chronic victims and bullies
- Bullying rates at specific bullying hot spots (e.g., bathrooms, cafeteria, schoolyard)

Responses to the Problem of Bullying in Schools

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of, among other things, the extent of the problem, including the level of bullying and the identification of bullying hot spots, chronic victims, and chronic offenders. Outlined below are approaches used to address bullying, along with information about their effectiveness.

General Requirements for an Effective Strategy To Counter Bullying in Schools

1. **Enlisting the school principal's commitment and involvement.** The school principal's commitment to and involvement in addressing school bullying are key. In fact, in comparing schools with high and low bullying rates, some research suggests that a principal's investment in preventing and controlling bullying contributes to low rates.[60] A police officer's knowledge of and interest in the problem may serve to convince a principal to invest the time and energy to collaboratively and comprehensively tackle it.

2. **Using a multifaceted, comprehensive approach.** A multifaceted, comprehensive approach is more effective than one that focuses on only one or two aspects of school bullying. A multifaceted, comprehensive approach includes:
   - Establishing a schoolwide policy that addresses indirect bullying (e.g., rumor spreading, isolation, social exclusion), which is more hidden, as well as direct bullying (e.g., physical aggression)
   - Providing guidelines for teachers, other staff and students (including witnesses) on specific actions to take if bullying occurs
   - Educating and involving parents so they understand the problem, recognize its signs and intervene appropriately
   - Adopting specific strategies to deal with individual bullies and victims, including meeting with their parents
   - Encouraging students to report known bullying
   - Developing a comprehensive reporting system to track bullying and the interventions used with specific bullies and victims
   - Encouraging students to be helpful to classmates who may be bullied

- Developing tailored strategies to counter bullying in specific school hot spots, using environmental redesign, increased supervision, (e.g., by teachers, other staff members, parents, volunteers) or technological monitoring equipment
- Conducting post-intervention surveys to assess the strategies' impact on school bullying

Specific Responses To Reduce Bullying in Schools

3. **Using the "whole-school" approach.**†Olweus developed and tested the whole-school approach in Scandinavia. It contains elements listed under requirement 1 and 2 above (school principal's involvement and the multi-faceted, comprehensive approach) and it has undergone repeated evaluations in other countries, including the United States, with a range of successful results, including a 50 percent reduction in bullying in 42 schools in one area of Norway. However, most other applications of this approach achieve improvements in the 20 to 30 percent range, which is significant.[61] In some studies, the results are achieved primarily in the second year. This approach can reduce the level of bullying and other antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy, and improve the "social climate," order and discipline in class.

   The whole-school approach is somewhat easier to implement in elementary schools, due to their size and structure. Students in these schools generally interact with only one or two teachers a year, guaranteeing higher levels of consistent messages from teachers to students.[62] However, significant gains can also be achieved in middle and high schools.[63] Research tells us that the whole-school approach requires renewed effort each year (reinforcing anti-bullying strategies with returning students, their parents, and school staff), which may be at odds with a school's, or even a police department's, concern about tackling the latest hot topic. However, one-time efforts will be less effective. Thus, schools must prepare themselves to maintain momentum for anti-bullying initiatives year after year.

4. **Increasing student reporting of bullying.** To address the problem of students' resistance to reporting bullying, some schools have set up a bully hot line. One in England received thousands of calls shortly after it was established. Some schools use a "bully box"; students drop a note in the box to alert teachers and administrators about problem bullies. Other approaches to increase reporting are also used. In one

† Some research refers to the whole-school approach as the "schoolwide" approach or "organizational" approach. The three are identical, requiring interventions at the school, class and individual level.

Kentucky town, a police officer, keen to increase reporting, developed a short in-class segment titled "Hero vs. Snitch," in which he discussed why reporting is heroic behavior, not tattling.

5. **Developing activities in less-supervised areas.** In these areas (e.g., schoolyards, lunchrooms), trained supervisors spot bullying and initiate activities that limit opportunities for it. Such activities must be of interest to bullies and curb their behavior.

6. **Reducing the amount of time students can spend less supervised.** Since much bullying occurs during less-supervised time (e.g., recess, lunch breaks, class changes), reducing the amount of time available to students can reduce the amount of bullying.

7. **Staggering recess, lunch and/or class-release times.** This approach minimizes the number of bullies and victims present at one time, so supervisors have less trouble spotting bullying. However, supervisors must be mindful that most bullies are in the same grade as their victims.

Sean Lynch

The photo on the left illustrates a school hallway during class release time. The photo on the right shows two of the strategies the school adopted to reduce bullying behavior in the hallways: staggered class release times (evidenced by fewer students in the hallway) and teacher monitoring of hallway behavior during class release time.

8. **Monitoring areas where bullying can be expected** (e.g., bathrooms). Adult monitoring can increase the risk that bullies get caught, but may require increased staffing or trained volunteers.

9. **Assigning bullies to a particular location or to particular chores during release times.** This approach separates bullies from their intended victims. Some teachers give bullies constructive tasks to occupy them during release times. Careful victim monitoring is required to ensure that bullies do not pick on victims at other times.

10. **Posting classroom signs prohibiting bullying and listing the consequences for it.** This puts would-be bullies on notice and outlines the risks they take. Teachers must consistently enforce the rules for them to have meaning. Schools should post signs in each classroom and apply age-appropriate penalties.

11. **Providing teachers with effective classroom management training.** To address bullying, schools should ensure that all their teachers have effective classroom management training. Since research suggests that classes containing students with behavioral, emotional, or learning problems have more bullies and victims, teachers in those classes may require additional tailored training in spotting and handling bullying.

12. **Having high-level school administrators inform late-enrolling students about the school's bullying policy.** This removes any excuse new students have for bullying, and stresses the importance the school places on countering it.

Responses With Limited Effectiveness

13. **Training students in conflict resolution and peer mediation.** A number of schools adopt conflict resolution and peer mediation training to address bullying (and other) problems. "Because bullying involves harassment by powerful children of children with less power (rather than a conflict between peers of relatively equal status), common conflict-resolution strategies or mediation may not be effective."[64] In fact, they may actually further victimize a child.[65] The training often offers too little for those students who really need it, and too much for those who already have the skills. The whole-school approach, in contrast, does not assume that students alone can solve the bullying problem; interventions at all levels are required: school, class, individual, teacher, parent, and peer.[†]

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† In terms of peer mediation, one Flemish study found that elementary- and many middle school-age students lack confidence in successfully intervening (Stevens, Van Oost, and De Bourdeaudhuij 2000). In another study, researchers found that only small numbers of students were willing to go to peer-support training, and that it was harder to get boys or male teachers involved (Naylor and Cowie 1999). In one study in Australia, however, Peterson and Rigby (1999) found a tremendous number of peer interventions, as part of a whole-school approach. The result was a modest decline in reported bullying of students in their first year of high school, but not in the other years. The authors still found this significant because the transition year into high school can be intense for bullying.

14. **Adopting a "zero tolerance" policy.** Some schools, in their rush to "do something" about bullying, adopt a "zero tolerance" policy against it, without an in-depth analysis of their specific problem or the comprehensive involvement of administrators, teachers, other staff, student-witnesses, parents, bullies, and victims at the school, class, and individual level. This approach may result in a high level of suspensions without full comprehension of how behavior needs to and can be changed. It does not solve the problem of the bully, who typically spends more unsupervised time in the home or community if suspended or expelled. Zero tolerance may also ultimately have a chilling effect on reporting of bullying.

15. **Providing group therapy for bullies.** Some schools provide self-esteem training for bullies. This may be misdirected: research suggests that most bullies do not lack in self-esteem.[66]

16. **Encouraging victims to simply "stand up"to bullies.** Without adequate support or adult involvement this strategy may be harmful and physically dangerous for a victim of bullying.[67]

Appendix A: Summary of Responses to Bullying in Schools

The table below summarizes the responses to bullying in schools, the mechanism by which they are intended to work, the conditions under which they ought to work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
General Requirements for an Effective Strategy To Counter Bullying in Schools					
1	21	Enlisting the school principal's commitment and involvement	Police officers convince the principal of the importance of tackling bullying	…officers are aware of best practices	Officers may need to engage others, such as parents, to help influence the principal; unfortunately, in some cases, only a crisis will galvanize the principal's attention
2	21	Using a multifaceted, comprehensive approach	Once baseline surveys are completed, the school adopts a comprehensive series of strategies to address the specific survey findings	…the principal assigns a high-level project (or team) manager to ensure the full implementation and progress of the strategies	Sometimes it is difficult to isolate the effectiveness of individual interventions

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
Specific Responses To Reduce Bullying in Schools					
3	22	Using the "whole- school" approach	Reveal the details of the problem; interventions are implemented at the school, class, and individual level	…school administrators are fully committed to addressing the problem, and are knowledgeable of the components of the approach†	Availability and use of local resources, such as university researchers, to assist in survey development and testing, or alternatively, use of Olweus' survey; parental permission may be needed to survey students; community's and school's commitment to uncovering the full details of the problem
4	22	Increasing student reporting of bullying	Increases bullies' risk of getting caught	…students are convinced that reporting is appropriate behavior	Some schools establish a hot line, while others install a bully box where students can leave notes alerting school personnel to bullying; non-anonymous reporting should be encouraged to lessen student fear of reprisal
5	23	Developing activities in less-supervised areas	Increases the effort bullies must make by decreasing their opportunity to bully	…the activities interest bullies and are designed to limit their ability to victimize others	Requires staff or volunteers (students, parents, seniors) and age-appropriate programming

† For examples of policies for the school, class, students, and parents, see Glover and Cartwright, with Gleeson (1998).

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
6	23	Reducing the amount of time students can spend less supervised	Increases the risk that bullying will be exposed and reduces the amount of time for it to occur	…supervisors are trained to spot and respond to bullying	Requires scheduling changes
7	23	Staggering recess, lunch, and/or class-release times	Ensures fewer bullies and victims are together at the same time, increasing supervisors' ability to spot bullying	…bullies and victims are not in the same classes or, if they are, supervisors are well trained to spot and respond to bullying	If some bullies are in the same classes with their victims, other remedies are also needed
8	23	Monitoring areas where bullying can be expected (e.g., bathrooms)	Increases bullies' risk of getting caught	…it is done frequently enough to make the risk real	May require increased staffing or trained volunteers
9	24	Assigning bullies to a particular location or to particular chores during release time	Increases the effort bullies must make to bully because this separates bullies from victims	…careful consideration is given to which of the two approaches is more appropriate for each particular bully	Isolating bullies may further anger them and cause additional problems for their victims
10	24	Posting classroom signs prohibiting bullying and listing the consequences for it	Removes the excuse of ignorance and underscores the risks	…signs are posted in all classrooms	Signs and consequences should be age-appropriate

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
11	24	Providing teachers with effective classroom management training	Increases bullies' risk of getting caught in classrooms, and decreases victims' risk of harm	…teachers are committed to stopping classroom bullying, and those teaching higher-risk classes are given additional specialized training	Identifying those teachers who need extra assistance must be handled delicately, although it should be noted that most U.S. teachers receive no instruction on classroom management techniques, so it is not surprising that some have fewer skills in these
12	24	Having high-level school administrators inform late-enrolling students about the school's bullying policy	Decreases late-enrolling students' risk of bullying or being bullied	…done at the time of enrollment and by someone perceived as having a high level of authority	Schools may consider having late-enrolling students sign "bully-free agreements" acknowledging the rules and the consequences for violations
13	24	Training students in conflict resolution and peer mediation	Allows students to play the key role in resolving bullying problems	…conflicts are between students of relatively equal status, and not between bullies and weaker victims	May be more appropriate for problems other than bullying (e.g., conflicts between peers of equal power or status)
14	25	Adopting a "zero tolerance" policy	Guarantees that bullies who get caught will be penalized on the first offense	…used as a last resort, after other responses have failed	Bullying is too widespread, longstanding, and complex for it to stop simply due to such a policy

Response No.	Page No.	Response	How It Works	Works Best If…	Considerations
15	25	Providing group therapy for bullies	Intended to build self-esteem of bullies	…bullies suggest that they have low self-esteem and it is the cause of their bullying	Most bullies do not have low-esteem
16	25	Encouraging victims to simply "stand up" to bullies	Directly pits victim against bully	…accompanied by adequate support or adult involvement	May be harmful or physically dangerous

Appendix B: Sample Brochure Educating Parents About School Bullying†

The _____ School District is collaborating with the _____ Police Department to implement the Bullying Prevention Program to address bullying among children in grades ____ to ____.

What is bullying?

Bullying occurs when one child or group of children repeatedly hurts another child through actions or words. Bullying may involve physical aggression, such as fighting, shoving or kicking; verbal aggression, such as name-calling; or more subtle aggression, such as socially isolating a child.

Why focus on bullying?

All of us are concerned about the levels of violence among young people in our communities and schools. Studies have shown that 60 percent of children identified as bullies in middle school go on to have arrest records. We need to address these children's behavioral problems at an early age, before they become even more serious. In addition, victims of bullies may have problems with depression, poor school attendance, and low self-esteem. It is important to help create a school environment where all children feel safe and can learn to the best of their abilities.

† This brochure is copied (with minor changes) with the permission of its author, Susan Limber, Clemson University, Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life. This particular brochure is most appropriate for parents of elementary or middle school students.

What does this program involve?

The Bullying Prevention Program involves the total effort of all school staff (teachers, principals, guidance counselors, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, etc.), as well as students, parents, and other community members, to reduce bullying.

The school's efforts will include:

- Identifying bullies and their victims to address individual problems and needs
- Establishing schoolwide rules and applying consistent sanctions against bullies
- Holding regular classroom meetings to discuss bullying with children
- Increasing supervision of children at school
- Rewarding children for good social behaviors
- Holding schoolwide assemblies on bullying
- Using videos, books, and other resources on bullying

Will this program help?

Studies have shown that the Bullying Prevention Program can be very effective in reducing bullying and related antisocial behavior among schoolchildren. In places where this program has been used, bullying has been reduced by 25 to 50 percent. Fighting, vandalizing, drinking, and other antisocial behaviors also have decreased, and children and school personnel involved in the program have reported that they felt more positive about school.

How can parents get involved?

- Through mailings, PTA meetings, and other school events, we hope to inform you about the Bullying Prevention Program and the many problems associated with bullying.
- We will discuss ways to determine whether your children may be bullies or victims of bullying, and we will suggest strategies and resources for you.
- We will encourage you to become involved in a variety of creative projects developed by your school to raise awareness of the problems of violence and of efforts to reduce bullying at school and in the community.

How can I tell if my child is being bullied?

Your child may be the victim of bullying if he or she:

- Comes home from school with torn or dirty clothing, or damaged books
- Has cuts, bruises, or scratches
- Has few, if any, friends to play with
- Seems afraid to go to school, or complains of headaches or stomach pains
- Doesn't sleep well or has bad dreams
- Loses interest in schoolwork
- Seems sad, depressed, or moody
- Is anxious or has poor self-esteem
- Is quiet, sensitive, or passive

If your child shows several of these warning signs, it's possible he or she is being bullied. You may want to talk with your child to find out what is troubling him or her, and schedule a conference to discuss your concerns with school staff.

How can I tell if my child is bullying others?

Your child may be bullying others if he or she:

- Teases, threatens, or kicks other children
- Is hot-tempered or impulsive, or has a hard time following rules
- Is aggressive toward adults
- Is tough or shows no sympathy for children who are bullied
- Has been involved in other antisocial behavior, such as vandalism or theft

If your child shows several of these warning signs, it's possible that he or she is bullying others. You may want to spend some extra time talking with your child about his or her behavior, and schedule a conference to talk about the issue with school staff.

For more information about the Bullying Prevention Program, please contact _____ at _____.

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About the Author

Rana Sampson

Rana Sampson has been an international crime consultant. Her work took her throughout the United States and to China, Canada, the U.K., Northern Ireland, Chile, Mexico, and Norway. She spent more than 25 years working with police, city administrators, schools, universities, community members, and community groups on problem-oriented policing. She is the author of numerous U.S. Department of Justice publications on reducing specific crime and safety problems, such as domestic violence, bullying in schools, acquaintance rape of college students, drug dealing in privately owned apartment complexes, and even false burglar alarms. Sampson is a founding member of the Center for Problem Oriented Policing—the national "go to" Center for crime reduction strategies—she co-coordinated the annual POP Conference for many years, and was a judge for the Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing for as long as she can remember. Sampson was even an NYC police officer, many years ago. Today she is the Vice President of Development for the San Diego Center for Children, a nonprofit that helps children thrive whose trauma, abuse, or mental health challenges have delayed their ability to succeed. She is active in the San Diego community and is involved with a number of volunteer efforts in support of children, as well as the arts. Sampson has a B.A. from Barnard College, Columbia University, and a law degree from Harvard Law School.

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