CHAPTER 1

Bullying Prevention, MTSS, and Implementation Science

BULLYING, PREVENTION, AND INTERVENTION

When the late Dan Olweus first published his book *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* in the United States in 1978, the academic study of bullying was nascent. The book itself was based on the research Olweus had completed earlier that decade. There were no peer-reviewed journals dedicated to bullying prevention, no international conferences focused on how to reduce bullying, and certainly no broad understanding of bullying as a concept by school staff across most of the western world. The mere concept of something like cyberbullying wouldn't even be investigated for decades. Today, studies are conducted on bullying across the world, and there is even a journal, *International Journal of Bullying Prevention,* specifically dedicated to preventing bullying and cyberbullying at any stage in the process (O'Higgins & Hinduja, 2019).

Since the birth of bullying prevention science, there have been a multitude of approaches to curb its existence and impact. Olweus himself developed a bullying prevention approach that has been implemented since mid-1980s in the United States. As the research on bullying began to clarify its unique form of aggression and consequences, bullying prevention practices began to take shape. It wasn't until the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 that the field of education began to view bullying in a significantly different light (R. M. Thomas, 2006). In the over 20 years since that tragedy, there have been dozens of approaches to prevent bullying and cyberbullying. What has become clear, however, is that a comprehensive approach addressing the myriad of factors influencing bullying (e.g., school climate, policy, effective implementation) is necessary to see its sustained elimination (Gaffney, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

BASICS OF BULLYING

Definition of Bullying

The definition of bullying has been debated among scholars for decades. In their 1987 article, Dodge and Coie suggest that bullying is "unprovoked" aggression. Olweus (1993, 1994) put forth that not only does bullying involve aggressive behavior, but behavior that is also intentional, repetitive, and characterized by an imbalance of power between the target and the perpetrator. More recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) weighed in on the definition of bullying by convening a group of expert bullying prevention researchers. As described by Gladden, Vivolo-Kantor, Hamburger, and Lumpkin (2014), this multiyear endeavor culminated with a "uniform definition" of bullying that attempted to navigate common critiques of the definition of bullying, specifically, the fact that a single act can be considered bullying. The three factors that differentiate bullying from other forms of aggression according to the CDC definition is that the aggression is (1) unwanted, (2) marked by a real or perceived imbalance of power, and (3) repeated or is highly likely to be repeated.

The third factor in the definition of bullying is especially prevalent when considering cyberbullying. Indeed, when bullying occurs through an electronic medium, it is almost instantaneously repeated given the fact that social media posts or texts can be so easily shared. As defined by Hinduja and Patchin (2023), cyberbullying is deliberate, repeated harm through the use of electronic devices. Although not overt, the authors further suggest that cyberbullying is typically also characterized by an imbalance of power. This imbalance of power through an electronic medium can look different from what occurs in face-to-face bullying. For example, if one student has possession of embarrassing photos or videos of another, that student can be considered to have power over the other. With the ever-changing nature of online media, it can be also be difficult for educators to even speak the same language as their younger students when it comes to cyberbullying. If a student tells their teacher that they were "catfished," and the teacher mistakes the conversation as one about angling without realizing that the student is referring to an online interaction, the teacher could easily miss an opportunity to address that student's concerns. On their website, *cyberbullying.org*, Hinduja and Patchin (2023) provide a regularly updated glossary of online terms related to cyberbullying that educators should know. A copy of this glossary can also be found in Appendix A.

One of the most important aspects of preventing bullying in schools is understanding what bullying *is* and what bullying *is not*. For example, bullying and conflict are separate acts that require separate responses on the part of school staff. Whereas bullying is defined by an imbalance of power, conflict often includes students of relatively equal power who are having a disagreement or argument. Moreover, if students who are in a conflict realize that they are causing harm, they will stop the conflict in most cases. Harassment is another term that some use interchangeably with bullying even though they are two different concepts. As outlined by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights in 2010, bullying can be deemed "discriminatory harassment" if the bullying is based on a federally protected class (e.g., race, sex, gender) (Ali, 2010). It should be noted, though, that not all harassment is bullying since harassment does not have to be repeated or marked by an imbalance of power (see Table 1.1).

It is also important to understand the different roles students embody when bullying occurs. The first role is that of the *perpetrator*, or the student who engages in the act of bullying. The *target* is the one on the receiving end of the perpetrator's bullying. A *bystander* is a student who witnesses bullying occurring. Research suggests that there is at least one bystander in over 80%

TABLE 1.1. Bullying, Conflict, and Harassment

Bullying	Conflict	Harassment
Unwanted.	Disagreement or argument.	Unwanted.
Marked by real or perceived imbalance of power.	Those involved have relatively equal power.	Those involved may have equal or unequal power.
Repeated or likely to be repeated.	Although conflict may be ongoing, it generally stops if those involved perceive they are hurting someone.	Conduct is based on a federally protected class.

of bullying incidents (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001; Pepler, Craig, & O'Connell, 2010) and that bullying prevention programs can increase the degree to which bystanders act to intervene in these incidents (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012).

Although some bystanders attempt to prevent bullying, others do not. Research originating from the work of Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, and Kaukiaimen (1996) has found four different types of bystanders. The first two types support the perpetrator of bullying. An *assistant* is a student who actually gets involved in the bullying incident. For example, an assistant may watch out for teachers or block the path of a target so they can't leave. A *reinforcer* is a student who encourages the bullying by laughing or providing other forms of attention that supports the perpetrator. The third type of bystander is a *defender*. Sometimes referred to as an *upstander*, this is a student who comes to the aid of the target. The last type of bystander is known as the *passive bystander*, a student who witnesses bullying occurring, but neither supports nor defends the target. Although this role may seem neutral, by staying silent and doing nothing, passive bystanders implicitly reinforce the idea that bullying is acceptable in the school culture.

Although not typically differentiated within the empirical literature, we suggest that there is a difference between a target of bullying and a victim of bullying. In bullying research, the term *victim* is commonly used to describe a student who is the target of bullying, regardless of whether or not that student actually suffered negative consequences from the bullying. Not every attempt at bullying is successful. When bullying does not cause harm or when we simply do not know if the bullying led to negative consequences, we owe it to students to avoid labeling them as victims. If we refer to students as victims, we encourage them to self-identify as victims. Researchers and practitioners alike can empower the targets of bullying by avoiding the label of victim unless it is truly warranted. See Table 1.2 for a summary of the roles within bullying.

Types of Bullying

Even when educators understand the components of bullying and how it differs from conflict or harassment, it can still be difficult to know if a behavior is bullying when seen in the moment. This is why it can be helpful to also know what the different types of bullying look like. As part of the work by Gladden and colleagues (2014) on a uniform definition of bullying, the different types of bullying were also enumerated and defined. You may notice that cyberbullying is not listed as a type of bullying. This is because it is technically viewed as a location where bullying occurs (Gladden et al., 2014).

TABLE 1.2. Roles within Bullying

Role	Definition
Perpetrator	The aggressor during a bullying incident. This person has more power than the target of the bullying.
Target	The individual for whom bullying is intended. This person has less power than the perpetrator of the bullying.
Bystander	The individual(s) who witnesses a bullying incident.
Perpetrator-target	An individual who is in the role of both a perpetrator and target.
Victim	An individual who is targeted for bullying and experiences negative consequences (e.g., anxiety, dropping grades) as a result.

Physical Bullying

This type of bullying is what many view as the traditional form of bullying. It involves the use of physical force against the bullying target. It can include, but is not limited to, hitting, spitting, pushing, and kicking. These incidents of bullying are usually the easiest to spot. An example of physical bullying from popular culture can be seen in the movie *The Karate Kid*. The main character in the movie, Daniel, moves to a new town and is repeatedly physically attacked by a group of teenagers from a karate dojo. At one point, Daniel is physically bullied to the point of becoming unconscious. Eventually, Daniel is able to remove the imbalance of power the other teenagers hold over him by learning karate.

Verbal Bullying

Verbal bullying includes both oral and written communication that causes harm to the target. Common examples of verbal bullying include calling someone names, written notes that are threatening, inappropriate sexual comments, and threatening someone verbally. A popular culture example of verbal bullying is found in the television show *Ugly Betty*. In the show, Betty Suarez works as an executive assistant at a fashion magazine. The majority of her coworkers have greater power over her due to the fact that they hold higher positions than she does and because they are ostensibly more attractive. Using this power, they continually humiliate and insult Betty because of her appearance.

Relational Bullying

This type of bullying is designed to harm a student's relationships and/or reputation. Relational bullying can be perpetrated either directly to the target or indirectly about the target. For example, direct relational bullying can include excluding a peer from activities. Indirect relational bullying often takes the form of spreading false or harmful rumors. In the movie *Mean Girls*, relational bullying is front and center with the main characters. One scene highlights how relational bullying can be used in an attempt to improve one's social standing. The main character, Cady Heron,

is a new student at a high school and attempts to connect with her peers by disparaging another student. A separate character, Regina George, takes the opportunity to spread rumors about the targeted student.

Damage to Property

Although less common than the other forms of bullying, damaging one's property is a type of bullying. As described by Gladden and colleagues (2014), examples include taking a targeted student's property and refusing to return it or destroying the targeted student's property in front of them. An example of this type of bullying comes from the television series *Family Matters*. In one scene, a main character, Laura, is working at her aunt's diner, Rachel's Place. A group of teenagers enter the diner, and the leader of the group sexually harasses Laura before asking her on a date. After being rebuffed, the leader of the group purposefully breaks a glass on the floor. Later in the episode, Laura and her aunt enter the diner to find it has been vandalized. This example also demonstrates the importance of including the community in bullying prevention efforts because many students are connected to community establishments.

Prevalence of Bullying

How bullying is measured can, and often does, vary by study and researcher. As mentioned earlier, the definition of bullying is still debated among scholars. It can easily be seen then how changing the way in which bullying is defined can change prevalence rates. Even the order with which questions are asked can affect prevalence rates (Huang & Cornell, 2015). Some research surveys students, whereas other research uses observation or staff input. Rates of bullying can change depending on the state from which a sample was derived. These fluctuations and variances between empirical studies further suggest the importance of using local data systems to guide decision making. Schools need to have an understanding of the prevalence of bullying within their unique site, because even data at a district level can paint a picture that differs from the reality at one specific school.

Given these caveats, understanding the general prevalence of bullying, including those who are more at risk of being targets, can provide schools with a broad understanding of how to support their students. There are several national studies on the prevalence of bullying that provide longitudinal data on bullying rates, including the School Crime Supplement (SCS) of the National Crime Victimization Survey, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), and the Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Survey, which is conducted every 4 years across the United States and Europe. The SCS in particular is useful because it is administered to students as young as 12 years old, whereas other surveys are only administered to students in high school across the United States. The most recent data from the SCS come from 2017 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019) and show that 20.2% of students report being the target of bullying. The most common way students reported being bullied was that they were the subject of rumors (13.3%), and females were more likely to report being the target of bullying (23.8%) compared to males (16.7%) in the study. In general, the prevalence of cyberbullying is significant, albeit less prevalent than face-to-face bullying (Eyuboglu et al., 2021; Gaffney, Farrington, Espelage, & Ttofi, 2019). Across several studies, the rates of cyberbullying have been found to be roughly half that of face-to-face bullying (Eyuboglu et al., 2021; Iannotti, 2013; see Rivara & Le Menestrel, 2016).

Results from the SCS also align with empirical research on how likely students are to be the target of bullying based on specific demographic information. Research on the prevalence of bullying by grade level has consistently found that students are more likely to be involved in bullying during middle school, that incidents of bullying decrease as students progress through high school, and that the prevalence of cyberbullying increases as students get older (see Rivara & Le Menestrel, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The same results are found in the SCS with students in sixth grade reporting the highest rates of bullying (29.5%) and students in twelfth grade reporting the lowest (12.2%). Household income has been identified in some studies as a potential risk factor for students experiencing bullying (Lemstra, Nielsen, Rogers, Thompson, & Moraros, 2012), though it has been suggested that other social-ecological factors may explain these connections (Barboza, Schiambrg, Oehmke, Korzeniewski, Post, & Heraux, 2009). At the school level, socioeconomic status is commonly assessed by examining the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. In the SCS, students with reported household incomes between $7,500 and $14,999 were the most likely to also report being bullied (26.6%) and those with household incomes below $7,500 (26.2%) a close second. Those students with household incomes above $35,000 are the only group that reported bullying rates below 20%.

An important question asked on the SCS concerns the location where bullying occurs. The top two locations students report being bullied have stayed fairly consistent over multiple SCS surveys: in a hallway or stairwell (43.4%) and in the classroom (42.1%). The location of hallways or stairwells seems reasonable to anyone who has been in a middle or high school during a passing period. There is less adult supervision given the number of students and, given the design of some schools, more secluded areas can provide cover for bullying to occur. But what about the classroom? It is not because teachers are being vigilant about addressing bullying in their classrooms. It is likely because this is where students spend the majority of their time while at school.

Bullying and Federally Protected Classes

While bullying can and does affect the lives of students from many backgrounds, there are several federally protected groups of students that are more likely to experience bullying in schools. Federally protected classes or groups are defined in anti-discrimination laws in the United States. This includes Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (prohibiting discrimination based on sex), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (prohibiting discrimination based on disability status). All of these protected classes are listed in a 2010 Dear Colleague letter from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights (Ali, 2010) as areas that may constitute discriminatory harassment depending on the circumstances surrounding bullying.

There have been few studies on how race or ethnicity influence the likelihood that students will experience bullying (see Rivara & Le Menestrel, 2016). What limited research has suggested is that it is not one's race in particular that leads to an increased chance of being the target of bullying, but if a student's race or ethnicity is in the numerical minority in their school they are more likely to experience bullying (Graham & Bellmore, 2007). However, more recent data have suggested that students identifying as Black and Latinx were significantly more likely to report being the target of bullying (Gage, Katsiyannis, Rose, & Adams, 2021). In related data from the most-recent SCS, student reports of the reasons why they were bullied found race (9.5%) to be the

second most-cited reason after appearance (29.7%; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Separate research has suggested that greater ethnic diversity is correlated with lower rates of bullying and harassment as self-reported by students (Felix & You, 2011; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2006). This finding seems reasonable when one considers the necessity of an imbalance of power for bullying to occur: the numerical majority ostensibly has power over a numerical minority. Again, research in this area is still limited, and more studies are needed to fully understand the role that race and ethnicity play in students' experiences of bullying.

An area of significant research in the field of bullying in recent years has been the experiences of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other (LGBTQ+). Research has consistently demonstrated that LGBTQ+ students are more likely to be the targets of bullying (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; Russell, Everett, Rosario, & Birkett, 2014). On the most recent YRBSS survey of high school students from 2019, students identifying as gay or lesbian were most likely to report being the target of bullying (37.3%), with gay male students in particular reporting targeting rates of 43.7%. In comparison, straight students reported being the targets of bullying at a rate of 17.1%, with only 14.0% of straight male students reporting being the target of bullying. In short, gay male students are three times more likely to experience bullying than straight male students.

Fortunately, empirical research has also examined what is effective at preventing bullying of LGBTQ+ students. Kull, Greytak, Kosciw, and Villenas (2016) examined the impact that district bullying prevention policies have on improving the school climate for LGBTQ+ students. Their findings revealed that students in districts with bullying prevention policies that enumerate LGBTQ+ students specifically as protected against bullying report greater school safety, less victimization based on their sexual orientation, and less social aggression than students in districts with unenumerated policies or no policies. These findings are in line with other research suggesting that enumerated policies may be most effective at reducing bullying for LGBTQ+ students (Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013; Saewyc, Konishi, Rose, & Homma, 2014). Moreover, when schools have Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSA) or similar student clubs, LGBTQ+ students are more likely to report that their school has a positive climate (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, & Zongrone, 2020).

Similarly to students who identify as LGBTQ+, students with disabilities have consistently been shown to be at greater risk for involvement in bullying regardless of role (Bell Carter & Spencer, 2006; Blake, Zhou, Kwok, & Benz, 2016; Farmer et al., 2012; Gage et al., 2021; Rose & Gage, 2017). Moreover, this disparity can be found in children as early as preschool (Son et al., 2014). Although some research has been conducted on how different types of disabilities (e.g., learning disability, autism spectrum disorder) are more or less likely to be involved in bullying, additional studies are needed to provide reliable data.

Impact

As discussed earlier, bullying is marked by an imbalance of power and repetition. These factors are integral not only to understanding the difference between bullying and other forms of aggression, but also in determining the degree to which students are impacted by the bullying they experience (Cougnard et al., 2007). Ybarra, Espelage, and Mitchell (2014) found that, from a nationally represented sample of adolescents, students who reported bullying without endorsing an imbalance of power or repetition had the lowest rates of negative consequences interfering in their daily lives.

In contrast, students reporting the highest rates of interference were those who reported a power imbalance and a repetition of bullying. Research on cyberbullying has found similar results, with increased severity of cyberbullying being correlated with increased severity of depression (Didden et al., 2009).

Targets

Involvement in bullying, regardless of role, has been shown to be correlated with negative academic, behavioral, and health consequences. For students who are the targets of bullying, the most immediate consequences can be that of injury if the bullying is physical. Health effects can also be long lasting. In a longitudinal study by Bogart and colleagues (2014), researchers found that students with the worst mental and physical health as indicated on a self-report were those who had bullying experiences in both the present and the past. In the same study, the least likely students to have poor physical health outcomes were those that had never been the target of bullying.

Similarly, students who have been the target of bullying are more likely than their non-bullied peers to report symptoms of depression, anxiety, and self-harming behavior (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Kidger et al., 2015; Klomek, Sourander, & Elonheimo, 2015). This disparity in internalizing symptoms is present in both face-to-face and cyberbullying contexts (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Unfortunately, the internalizing impacts of bullying can be long lasting. A study by Bowes, Joinson, Wolke, and Lewis (2015) examined the depressive symptoms of students at both age 13 and then later at age 18. Those students who had reported being bullied at age 13 had higher rates of depression 5 years later at age 18 compared to students who had not been bullied. The authors concluded that roughly one-third of the explanation for depressive symptoms at age 18 could be attributed to the bullying the participants experienced as students at age 13.

In addition to the negative internalizing symptoms students who have experienced bullying endure, externalizing symptomatology has also been demonstrated through multiple research studies. Specifically, targets of bullying are more likely than uninvolved adolescents to use alcohol, cigarettes, and inhalants within the next 12 months (Tharp-Taylor, Haviland, & D'Amico, 2009). Alcohol and drug abuse and dependence have also been shown to be connected to experiencing bullying (Radliff, Wheaton, Robinson, & Morris, 2012), but more research is needed in this area to fully understand the impact bullying has on later substance use (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). Other studies have shown connections between experiences as the target of bullying and increased violence and crime (Gibb, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2011).

Academically, students who are bullied have been shown to score lower on standardized tests and to receive lower course grades (Espelage, Hong, Rao, & Low, 2013). Targets of bullying have also been found to be at greater risk for overall lower academic achievement (Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010; Neary & Joseph, 1994). Perhaps related to these outcomes, the same students are at increased risk for absenteeism compared to their non-bullied peers (Vaillancourt, Brittain, McDougall, & Duku, 2013). These negative academic connections to being bullied can be seen as early as kindergarten (Ladd, Ettekal, & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2017).

Perpetrators

Studies examining the impact that being the perpetrator of bullying, and not simply aggression, has on students is extremely limited. Moreover, in the research that does exist, the consequences

of perpetrating bullying are not as clear as those for students who are the targets of bullying. This result may be due to the fact that some students who bully are actually perceived by their classmates as popular and as having strong social skills (Peeters, Cillessen, & Scholte, 2010; Thunfors & Cornell, 2008).

A meta-analysis by Gini and Pozzoli (2009) examined 11 studies on the role students play in bullying situations and their later reports of psychosomatic problems (e.g., headache, stomachache). Results from the meta-analysis showed that perpetrators of bullying had elevated reports of psychosomatic problems compared to students who were not involved in bullying. Interestingly, there were also significantly higher reports of psychosomatic problems with youth who reported being the target of bullying or a perpetrator-target. A longitudinal examination of how bullying experiences in childhood may later predict psychotic symptoms (e.g., hallucinations, delusions) was conducted in 2014 by Wolke, Lereya, Fisher, Lewis, and Zammit. The study assessed over 4,500 students between the ages of 8 and 11, then followed up with the same individuals when they were 18 years old. Results from the study found that being involved as a perpetrator or target of bullying as a child may increase the risk of developing psychotic symptoms as an adolescent.

Perpetrator-Targets

In general, the outcomes for students involved in bullying as perpetrator-targets are worse than any other role (see Rivara & Le Menestrel, 2016). Students who are perpetrator-targets of bullying have been shown to have worse physical health (Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2001) and greater sleep problems (Hunter, Durkin, Boyle, Booth, & Rasmussen, 2014) compared to those who are not involved in bullying. Students who are perpetrator-targets have also been found to be more likely than other students in other roles to have report suicidal ideation (Holt et al., 2015). To be clear, existing research does not confirm a causal link between bullying and suicide; however, it does show that students who experience bullying are at increased risk of suicidal ideation and attempts (see Rivara & Le Menestrel, 2016).

Social-Ecological Theory

When we have a better idea of all the influences impacting our students, it gives us a more complete understanding of how to tackle issues of bullying. This can be done more formally as a Tier 3 support or informally when trying to figure out what may be leading to the bullying in your school. One of the most prominent theories that can help frame the many factors involved in bullying is social-ecological theory. This theory was first introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979. The idea behind the theory is that there are unseen influences from our students' environments that affect their behaviors, beliefs, and emotional development. Through Bronfenbrenner and others who subsequently elaborated upon his theory, these influences are organized into five different systems, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem, which we define in the next section. Table 1.3 features a complete list of the systems, questions to ask yourself to better understand your students, and considerations for how to address concerns that arise.

Before diving into the five different systems it's important to note the characteristics of the individual student as well. This is another reason why building positive relationships with your students is so vital. Even just starting with basic demographics like your students' age, socioeconomic status, and gender can be helpful. Knowing that a student is female, for example, lets you

TABLE 1.3. Questions and Considerations across the Social-Ecological Theory

System	Questions	School supports
Individual	• How old is the student? • Does the student have a disability? • Does the student identify as LGBTQ+? • Is the student a numerical or historically marginalized minority?	• Active GSA is a student group in the school. • Students in special education receive push-in supports to reinforce that they are part of the general education classroom. • The school makes intentional efforts to celebrate all cultures and traditions.
Microsystem	• What is the primary language spoken in a student's family? • How safe is the student's neighborhood? • Does the student's family have a documented history of child maltreatment? • What do students value at the school (e.g., athletic performance, academic achievement)?	• Bullying prevention materials are available in multiple languages for families. • The school partners with local youth organizations in the community to reinforce prosocial behaviors. • All students are provided trauma-informed educational practices. • Staff intentionally highlight the achievements of all students, regardless of their popularity.
Mesosystem	• What are the relationships like between families and the school? • Are there common locations in the community where families visit? • What community organizations exist that partner with the school? • Does the student attend a before-or-after school care facility?	• The school embodies a culture where all families are welcome. • The school partners with neighborhood before-and-after-school care centers to align behavioral expectations. • The school utilizes a community resource map to structure organizations and businesses as potential partners.
Exosystem	• What is the school board policy on bullying? • What laws exist in the state related to bullying? • Does the student's family receive social services or other government services? • What media does the student consume regularly? • Does the student qualify for free or reduced-price lunch?	• The school handbook anti-bullying policy is aligned with the district school board anti-bullying policy. • Leaders at the school actively push for effective district school board policy on bullying prevention. • The school provides and/or connects families to low- or no-cost resources (e.g., food, clothing). • Educators are generally aware of the youth culture.
Macrosystem	• Is bullying considered a rite of passage in the culture of the school or district? • Do families believe it is the school's role to support social-emotional development in their children?	• The school clearly explains the connection between behavior and academic performance to families. • The school makes intentional efforts to include families in decision making on behavior expectations in the school.
Chronosystem	• How have beliefs about bullying changed over time? • How does current technology impact the school and students? • What recent events have begun to shift the macrosystem?	• The school clearly demonstrates the impact bullying can have on students. • The school culture leans into current health and societal changes that affect students socially, emotionally, and behaviorally.

know that statistically she is more likely to be involved in cyberbullying compared to her male peers. Do you know how a targeted student responds when facing more common adversities, such as having difficulty understanding an academic concept or not getting selected for the lead role in a school play? This information can give you insight into how resilient the targeted student may be when facing bullying. We know that students with disabilities are more likely to be involved in bullying (Gage et al., 2021), and knowing what disabilities the targeted student has can help you decide what interventions to consider. Finally, think about the strengths that you know the targeted student possesses. How can those strengths be used to support the student in overcoming the impact of bullying?

Microsystem

The microsystem includes factors directly connected to students themselves. It includes the students' home, school, and neighborhood. The activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships that influence students' development are represented in the microsystem. Some of the most common factors within the microsystem are students' socioeconomic status, relationships with teachers, relationships with family members, relationships with peers, recent loss, family views on the value of education, and extracurricular activities. Any of these factors can provide a buffer against or be a risk factor for bullying.

Research has shown that the microsystem of the family can have a profound impact on the likelihood that students are bullied. In 2008, Holt and colleagues conducted a study looking at how family characteristics impacted the rate at which children were bullied. One interesting finding from the study was that parents reported that their children were involved in bullying at a lower rate than the children themselves reported being involved in bullying. As shown later in the chapter, this observation holds true for teachers as well as parents. The researchers also found that home environments marked by greater rates of criticism, fewer rules, and more child maltreatment were risk factors for being the target of bullying. Risk factors associated with being the perpetrator of bullying included homes environments with a lack of supervision, child maltreatment, and exposure to domestic violence. These results were also reinforced by a later meta-analysis of familial risk factors conducted by a separate set of researchers (Lereya, Samara, & Wolke, 2013). Although as educators we are limited in our ability to shield students from many of these factors, having knowledge of them allows us to consider which students may need Tier 2 supports related to bullying prevention.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem represents the interactions between two or more different settings in which the student resides. If you have watched the movie *The Karate Kid*, then you have seen an example of a mesosystem. In one scene, the main character, Daniel, gets chased by several students from his school and tries to get home before they catch him. The students eventually catch up with Daniel and physically attack him. Just before he is knocked unconscious, Daniel sees the handyman from his apartment complex, Mr. Miyagi, fending off the student attackers. Daniel's microsystems of school and home interact, and the interaction creates a mesosystem.

A real-world example of a mesosystem involving bullying would be the interaction between a student's familial value of education and the way peers value education. If a student's family places a high value on doing well in school, but the student's peers think being smart means being a

"nerd," then they may be at an increased risk of being the target of bullying. Conversely, if there is congruence between family and peers about the value of education, the student may be less likely to be targeted for bullying. Thinking of what is valued at your school, where might these interactions lead to an increased likelihood of bullying? Maybe there is a high value placed on athletic achievement. Perhaps your school is geared toward performing arts, and those students who excel in this area are more protected from bullying they would otherwise experience. Understanding how these different microsystems interact can give you a head start on preventing bullying.

Exosystem

The final three systems indirectly impact students but can still have profound consequences. Outside of the mesosystem is the exosystem. Students are not directly interacting with the exosystem, but the events that occur within this system affect students. For example, decisions made by students' school board will change their experience at school, but students are not typically directly interacting with the school board to make decisions. In the past several decades, many school boards have developed or updated their bullying prevention policies. When they are able to use the most up-to-date research, such as disavowing zero-tolerance policies, the impact on bullying can be great even if it is a decision made at the policy level. Laws in students' cities, states, and country are another example of how the exosystem can influence their experiences of bullying. Each year, states propose new laws around bullying. In Wisconsin in 2019, a law was proposed that would fine the parents of students who bully other students $313. Moreover, several states have made cyberbullying a misdemeanor offense with the potential for a fine.

Macrosystem

Outside of the exosystem lies the macrosystem. This system reflects the culture and belief systems that may indirectly influence a student. Although bullying occurs in countries throughout the world, it can look very different depending on the culture. For example, bullying in Japan, known as *ijime*, is largely characterized by groups of students bullying weaker peers in a psychological way (Naito & Gielen, 2006). This type of bullying is compared to the traditional view of bullying in American culture that focuses on physical aggression. Changes in the macrosystem occur less frequently but can have a sweeping impact. In America, cultural changes can often be seen through the lens of television and movies. If you have ever gone back and watched shows from even just a few decades ago, the shift in culture can be readily apparent. The first season of the show *Friends* aired in 1994 and is rife with jokes that show the culture's fear of being perceived as a homosexual or not masculine. In one episode, a father is mortified that his young son prefers to play with a Barbie doll and tries to convince him to play with soldiers instead. In another episode, a character, Joey Tribbiani, starts wearing a unisex bag that looks like a large purse in an effort to land an acting job. The first time one of his friends sees him wearing the bag, he states, "Wow. You look just like your son, Mrs. Tribbiani." Just 4 years later in 1998, the first television show staring an openly gay character, *Will and Grace,* premiered. American culture continued to shift, and in 2015 the United States legalized marriage between same sex couples. To be sure, students who identify as LGBTQ+ are still at an increased risk for experiencing bullying; however, the culture has evolved to be more accepting.

Chronosystem

The final system that affects the development of students is the chronosystem. This system refers to the time in which students live. As recently as the 1980s, cyberbullying was not a concept that bullying prevention researchers would have been able to predict. In current times, it is such a concern that legislatures around the country pass laws that criminalize it. More recently, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how bullying occurs. Before in-person learning was discontinued for schools across the country in the spring of 2020, Asian American students began reporting bullying related to the virus and their ethnicity. In one example posted online by a parent in Georgia, her Asian American daughter was touched by other students, who pretended that she was the most contagious child, in a game they called coronavirus.

Placing bullying experiences in the context of the social-ecological model, as described earlier, can help you when problem solving for individual students' bullying concerns or at the schoolwide level. Moreover, by understanding the different effects of each system, you can begin to predict how bullying may change in your school. Are school boundaries being redrawn this year? How might the change in feeder neighborhoods influence the types of bullying that occur? Is your school adding new clubs? How might this decision affect the culture, and thus bullying, in your school? When we are able to consider our students' individual characteristics within the context of their environments, we are better able to prevent bullying.

COMPREHENSIVE BULLYING PREVENTION

Having outlined how bullying is defined, its prevalence, and the context that reinforces it, we now offer a way to address it. Comprehensive Bullying Prevention (CBP) is a schoolwide approach that reinforces a positive school climate, engages the community, and outlines structures to actively preventing bullying and to address specific instances of bullying (National School Climate Center [NSCC], n.d.; cf. McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Sugai & Horner, 2006). CBP is composed of five components: (1) school climate, (2) policy, (3) evidence-based curricula, (4) family and community partnership, and (5) data-based decision making. We describe each component briefly here before discussing how best to organize the components in a systemic manner.

School Climate

School climate refers to the overall quality and character of the school (NSCC, n.d.; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Specifically, it includes the perceptions of safety and security of the students and staff, the quality of relationships among students and staff in the school, the extent to which the staff emphasizes teaching and learning, and the actual physical environment (NSCC, n.d.). To create a positive school climate, schools develop a safe and predictable environment that has an intentional focus on positive student–staff relationships. Additionally, the staff and students are given methods and tools to respond to bullying, whether they experience it directly or witness it as a bystander (see Ross, Horner, & Stiller, 2012). By creating a positive climate, schools establish a culture that reinforces prosocial skills, discourages unwanted interactions and bullying, and establishes the positive treatment of everyone in the school community.

Policy

The next component is policy, which provides guidance and organization on the expectations for the treatment of students and how staff can respond to and investigate incidents of bullying. Within the policy, schools outline the exact steps and procedures that families, students, and staff members should take when bullying occurs. It includes how staff members should immediately intervene when they see bullying, investigate incidents, and document incidents for record keeping. Overall, schools use the policy to establish the positive treatment of all students and reinforce that bullying is not tolerated at the school.

Evidence-Based Curricula

A critical piece of CBP is the use of curricula to intentionally teach students prosocial skills to navigate the school setting. In particular, the chosen curriculum is used to teach students about bullying dynamics, social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies, and how to manage instances of bullying they may experience. Schools use a universal curriculum with all students, and then use additional lessons or other curricula for students who need additional support.

Family and Community Partnerships

In creating a context that reduces bullying, schools must include families and the community. Schools use intentional strategies to build relationships between families, students, the community, and the school, which help to reinforce expected behaviors across multiple settings. When families are included as true partners in bullying prevention efforts, schools are better equipped to use practices that are both evidence based and parent approved. Moreover, when bullying incidents do occur, schools that have already developed relationships with families are in position to be supportive instead of defensive.

Data-Based Decision Making

Data-based decision making is the use of data to make decisions regarding fidelity of implementation and the effectiveness of the practices used within CBP. Schools gather a variety of data to make decisions about implementation and the impact their efforts have for students, the staff, and families. To organize decision making and use data well, schools can use the four-step problem-solving model as an organizing heuristic (Deno, 2016; Good, Gruba, & Kaminski, 2002; Shinn, 2008). With the problem-solving model, schools can identify and resolve problems that arise, and they can engage in continuous improvement cycles to ensure that their efforts are beneficial.

CBP AND MTSS

Having described the five components of CBP, the idea of implementing all the components cohesively may feel overwhelming. We are well aware of initiative fatigue in schools, as schools often are asked to take on too much and end up with scattered approaches (Elmore, 2000; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Schmoker, 2006). The last thing we want is for schools to imple-

ment bullying prevention in a disconnected manner. To create a context that supports implementation and a coherent system, schools can adopt a comprehensive systems approach to bullying prevention, which is reflective of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) (cf. Bradshaw, 2013 and Sugai & Horner, 2006).

At its core, MTSS is a service delivery model. It's a way to organize a school's systems so that supports and services can be provided to students in an effective and efficient manner (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2016; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). In practice, this means that schools provide instruction or support to students based on data, not labels, and they put processes in place to ensure that these supports are effective in meeting the needs of students, staff members, and families (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Because MTSS is a schoolwide framework for coordinating, providing, and monitoring supports provided to students (Jimerson et al., 2016; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016), implementing bullying prevention within MTSS is a sensible and natural fit. Schools can capitalize on the organizing systems of MTSS to ensure that bullying prevention is systemic and sustainable.

MTSS provides the shell within which bullying prevention is organized (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Specifically, schools can orient the practices and efforts related to bullying prevention within instructional tiers (Stoiber & Gettinger, 2016). At Tier 1, schools provide students a safe and positive school climate in which they all are taught schoolwide expectations that encourage safety, empathy, and responsibility (George, Kincaid, & Pollard-Sage, 2009). The adults work to build relationships with one another, with students, and with families. The staff make intentional efforts to connect with families and communities, educate them on bullying prevention, and enlist them as partners in building a safe and supportive school (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013). The staff also use evidence-based curricula to teach all students about bullying prevention, SEL, and ways to respond to conflict. At Tiers 2 and 3, the staff can use additional interventions and curricula to further support students involved in bullying, connect with families and the community, and provide additional guidance and education around bullying prevention (cf. McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). All of these practices represent the CBP components of *school climate*, *evidence-based curricula*, and *family and community partnerships*.

The *policy* component is a core feature of MTSS, as the staff and administrators outline the efforts of the school to prevent bullying across all three tiers of support. Within this component, the school outlines an effective bullying prevention policy that provides structure and guidance for how to respond to incidents of bullying, the use of data, and how problems around bullying are solved.

Finally, the school will use the *data-based decision-making* component of CBP throughout all of MTSS. Schools engage in data-based decision making as they evaluate the benefit of their bullying prevention practices (Deno, 2016; Hosp, 2008). In particular, the staff will regularly screen all students multiple times a year to identify the rate of bullying within the school, thus allowing the school to gauge the overall prevalence of bullying and to identify those students who need support (cf. Clemens, Keller-Margulis, Scholten, & Yoon, 2016; PBIS Apps, 2020). Staff members will also evaluate how well the various components are being implemented and benefiting students. For example, they will evaluate the extent to which the school climate is positive and the extent to which they are engaging families in a positive and beneficial manner.

Schools can use the MTSS framework as a foundation and structure within which their efforts to prevent bullying can be organized, so we hope our readers understand that MTSS is a framework that can bring the components of CBP to light. Certainly a school could use the components

outside of an MTSS framework, but it would likely result in a disconnected and unsustainable system (Sugai & Horner, 2006). As such, we have framed bullying prevention within an MTSS framework so that schools and staff can create the necessary systems for sustainable change (cf. Jimerson et al., 2016).

Implementation Science

In addition to framing bullying prevention within MTSS, schools will also want to consider implementation science as a means to ensure sustainability. Despite the fact that empirical studies on bullying have been providing educators with research-based prevention approaches for decades, difficulties still persist in translating research into real-world practice. This has been an issue that bullying researchers have worked on addressing for years (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009). One of the most effective ways to bridge this gap is through implementation science. As defined by Rogers (1995), implementation science is the study of methods and strategies that facilitate the use of evidence-based practice and research into real-world application by practitioners and policy-makers. In other words, implementation science tells you how to take research and put it into practice. At the end of each CBP core component chapter, you will find a Practice Profile that aligns with the principles of implementation science. These Practice Profiles define each component and provide readers with an understanding of what the component looks like when implemented as expected. The second half of this book covers implementation science in depth to support your understanding of its concepts and how they are applied to bullying prevention efforts in schools.