

Winter 2014, Volume 22, Number 1**Bullying: Dispelling Myths, Enhancing Prevention**

Article URL: (http://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume_22_Number_1/bullying-myths-prevention.aspx)

Phoebe Prince was 15 years old when she died by suicide at her home in South Hadley, Massachusetts, 5 months after moving to the U.S. from her native Ireland. The tragedy received a great deal of media coverage, especially regarding six students from South Hadley High School who faced criminal charges for bullying Phoebe Prince. Although the case is still ongoing, it is clear that many different factors contributed to Prince's death, including her school environment, her family situation, and her own emotional history.

Prince's story highlights the complex interplay of circumstances in situations involving bullying and suicide, which can complicate accurate reports to the public. SAMHSA is committed to encouraging accurate reportage as one way to reduce the occurrence of bullying.

Demystifying Bullying

Although definitions of bullying vary, experts generally agree that the core elements of bullying consist of unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children involving a real or perceived power imbalance. There is also an element of repetition, meaning the behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time. Types of bullying include:

- Physical abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Social exclusion
- Spreading rumors
- Cyberbullying (via e-mails, texts, websites)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that every year between 20 and 56 percent of students in the United States are involved in bullying. Verbal bullying appears to be the most common form, followed by cyberbullying which has risen with the use of technology.

Although bullying may be associated with suicide-related behaviors, assuming a causal relationship is an oversimplification. A history of depression and delinquency increases the

concurrency of bullying and suicide, say experts in the field. But bullying, alone, does not cause suicide and there are many factors that contribute to death by suicide.

The effects of bullying are evident in both psychological and physiological ways. For example, headaches, stomach aches, dizziness, bedwetting, and sleep disturbance all may be warning signs that bullying is occurring.

SAMHSA's Collaborative and Multidisciplinary Approach

Given the serious consequences and complex factors surrounding bullying, multidisciplinary prevention strategies are needed to address this issue with individuals, families, schools, communities, and with the general population.



SAMHSA is an active member of the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention effort, which includes other U.S. Department of Health and Human Services agencies such as the Health Resources and Services Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as the Departments of Education and Justice. Under this collaborative, SAMHSA co-sponsored the website [StopBullying.gov \(http://www.stopbullying.gov/\)](http://www.stopbullying.gov/), a central repository for news, information, and resources on bullying prevention for a wide range of [audiences \(http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-you-can-do/index.html\)](http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-you-can-do/index.html).

Since the site's 2010 launch, more than 6 million people have visited the site, with over 650,000 in October alone. Stopbullying.gov has more than 65,000 people who follow the site on [Facebook \(https://www.facebook.com/StopBullying.Gov\)](https://www.facebook.com/StopBullying.Gov)  and nearly 40,000 on [Twitter \(https://twitter.com/stopbullyinggov\)](https://twitter.com/stopbullyinggov)  and has recently expanded its social media reach into Tumblr and Pinterest.

In addition, SAMHSA provides grants to states, local communities, and schools to implement innovative strategies to address issues related to bullying. An example is the [Safe Schools/Healthy Students \(http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/\)](http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/), funded by a federal agency collaborative that has provided funds to 365 local education agencies to address issues related to school safety and youth violence, including bullying prevention. SAMHSA has recently invested in expanding the reach of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students by awarding state-level grants.

SAMHSA's Media Guidelines

SAMHSA's most recent efforts to promote accuracy of information include the [Media Guidelines for Bullying Prevention \(http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/\)](http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/). SAMHSA created a Media Coverage of Bullying Task Force to review the available literature and conduct an analysis of the media coverage of bullying. Task Force members agreed unanimously on the potential for harm in some current media coverage and the benefits of creating recommendations and resources to help journalists and other writers produce accurate coverage of bullying.

Ingrid Donato, Mental Health Promotion Branch Chief at SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services remarked, "The media can have a profound impact on how bullying is perceived. Our hope with developing these guidelines is that by providing journalists with accurate data and information, they will be better able to avoid perpetuating misinformation, as well as to provide useful resources."

The resulting [Media Guidelines for Bullying Prevention](http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/) (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/>) offer key messages and best practices to follow when developing articles about bullying. The Media Guidelines also contain information on how to select experts to consult for accurate information and offer a [Bullying Prevention Expert Checklist](http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/help/index.html) (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/help/index.html>). Some key messages and best practices include:

Key Messages

- Bullying is not okay. It is not a "rite of passage."
- Parents play a key role in preventing and responding to bullying.
- Be more than a bystander if you witness bullying.
- Ask for help if you need it.

Best Practices

- Question which stories about bullying to run.
- Get the entire, balanced story and present it accurately.
- Use knowledgeable sources and reputable resources.
- Use nuanced, accurate journalism to make the world safer for youth.
- Include information that many stories miss.
- Consider the standards that will shape your coverage of bullying issues before news breaks.

Many media outlets reported on the Phoebe Prince story and many of them placed blame for her death on her fellow students and implied that the bullying Prince endured caused her death. SAMHSA's Media Guidelines highlight an [article](http://slate.me/1ajpHhS) (<http://slate.me/1ajpHhS>) written by Emily Bazelon for Slate.com that reflects the balanced and accurate coverage of bullying that SAMHSA promotes and employs the best practices included in the Media Guidelines.

By collaborating with federal partners and equipping media members with tools to report accurately, SAMHSA aims to strengthen the national response to bullying.

Related Article

- [Administrator's Column: "Taking a Stand against Bullying"](http://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume_22_Number_1/administrator.aspx) (http://www.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsLetter/Volume_22_Number_1/administrator.aspx)

Resources

- [Media Guidelines for Bullying Prevention](http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/index.html) (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/news/media/index.html>)
- [Take Action Against Bullying](http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Take-Action-Against-Bullying/SMA08-4322) (<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Take-Action-Against-Bullying/SMA08-4322>)
- [15+ Make Time To Listen, Take Time To Talk...About Bullying: Conversation Starter Cards](http://store.samhsa.gov/product/15-Make-Time-To-Listen-Take-Time-To-Talk-About-Bullying-Conversation-Starter-Cards/SMA08-4321) (<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/15-Make-Time-To-Listen-Take-Time-To-Talk-About-Bullying-Conversation-Starter-Cards/SMA08-4321>)

Related SAMHSA Blogs

- [Addressing Cyberbullying \(http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/15/addressing-cyberbullying/\)](http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/15/addressing-cyberbullying/)
- [Early Bullying Prevention \(http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/23/early-bullying-prevention/\)](http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/23/early-bullying-prevention/)
- [October is Bullying Prevention Awareness Month \(http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/01/october-is-bullying-prevention-awareness-month/\)](http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/01/october-is-bullying-prevention-awareness-month/)
- [Stop Bullying: Be More than a Bystander \(http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/01/stop-bullying-be-more-than-a-bystander/\)](http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/01/stop-bullying-be-more-than-a-bystander/)
- [What Do Bullying and Youth Substance Use Have in Common? More Than You Might Think \(http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/03/what-do-bullying-and-youth-substance-use-have-in-common-more-than-you-might-think/\)](http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/10/03/what-do-bullying-and-youth-substance-use-have-in-common-more-than-you-might-think/)

On SAMHSA's YouTube Channel

- [Safe Schools/Healthy Students | Show Me How \(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KXEoVmJyGo\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KXEoVmJyGo) 
- [Everyone Plays a Role in Suicide Prevention: Turning Strategy into Action \(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXMFexq43OM\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXMFexq43OM) 