THE CirclePoint METHOD

Practical and Integrated Mechanisms for
PREVENTING and **RESOLVING**
Bullying Issues in Schools

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About This Guide

The CirclePoint Method is a comprehensive set of integrated mechanisms that were tested in a K–8 school in the Boston Public School District in the state of Massachusetts, USA, in 2016 and found to be highly effective at preventing and resolving bullying issues. The mechanisms were relatively easy to implement and saved educators significant time compared to using traditional practices. More importantly, the sustained use of these mechanisms created a school environment where bullying behaviors became less accepted by students over time, allowing students to feel safe and accepted and to focus on learning.

This guide describes the mechanisms in detail and provides suggestions for implementation. The mechanisms are based on a modern understanding of bullying and were designed to supplant traditional bullying prevention policies and approaches while allowing educators to maintain compliance with typical district reporting and discipline requirements. Please note that this guide is not intended to help educators address all aggressive behavior in students, particularly behavior driven by mental health issues where intervention by counselors or mental health professionals is required.

The information in this guide is primarily intended for administrators, teachers, and support staff in elementary and middle schools and their equivalents outside of the United States. The Method can also be used by any organization where adults work with young people, such as after-school programs and youth camps.

In order to describe the mechanisms as simply as possible, the text does not burden readers with references or footnotes for all of the supporting research. However, a comprehensive bibliography is included at the end of the guide. In addition, appendices provide supporting information and deeper dives into select topics. Further, the CirclePoint website (circlepointbullying.com) provides updates and addenda to this guide.

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Introduction
Method Overview

The CirclePoint Method consists of the following mechanisms:

Key Terms and Language (Chapter 1)

The language used when discussing bullying can affect outcomes. Some traditional bullying-related terms are subjective and carry negative connotations, the use of which can make successful resolution of issues more difficult. Having everyone use a common language of objective terms avoids these negative connotations, leading to easier resolution.

Staff Education (Chapters 2 and 3)

Education on bullying for all stakeholders—educators, students, and parents—is critical to successfully preventing and resolving bullying issues. In order to be applied effectively, the integrated mechanisms of the Method require an accurate understanding of bullying, free from the myths and misconceptions that traditionally characterize the topic. Education for staff is described in two chapters due to the complexity of the topic. Education for students is described in chapter 10. Education for parents is described in chapter 11.

Constructive Consequences (Chapter 4)

Constructive Consequences is a way of resolving bullying problems by leveraging the same drivers of aggression to get it to stop. The mechanism involves having a discussion with an aggressor to make him aware that he is causing harm; giving him an opportunity to stop in order to avoid a consequence; letting him know that the adults who are with him and the target will be watching to ensure the behavior stops; and applying a consequence if the aggression continues. The consequence consists of a separation from peers during the times when the aggression against the target has occurred. The aggressor will perceive the separation as having a negative effect on social status, which will motivate the aggressor to change his behavior toward the target.

Chain of Custody Awareness (Chapter 5)

Chain of Custody Awareness is the communication of a bullying issue to all adults who are with a target during the school day and, optionally, at home, in order to monitor the behavior of the aggressor toward the target to ensure bullying has stopped. Any instances of aggression are documented and reported. The heightened monitoring ends when the bullying issue is confirmed to be resolved, usually after a few days. Both the aggressor and target are aware that adults are monitoring them so that the aggressor has an incentive to stop the behavior and the target feels safe. The mechanism is used in tandem with Constructive Consequences.

Target Support—The Five-Step Framework (Chapter 6)

Target Support consists of the Five-Step Framework, a discussion outline used to guide support conversations with targets. The framework is designed to help the target heal, educate the target on bullying, and empower the target to take effective action to get the bullying to stop. The framework is informal, meaning that discussions that do not cover all five steps can still be helpful to the target. The number of steps used in the discussion will depend on target need and the circumstances of the bullying issue.

Removal of Barriers to Reporting (Chapter 7)

Barriers to reporting prevent targets from coming forward to seek help with a bullying problem. The Removal of Barriers to Reporting mechanism is a collection of steps that schools can take to eliminate these barriers so bullied students will proactively self-identify and students aware of bullying issues involving peers will notify educators. This mechanism should help surface bullying issues early, before targets suffer significant harm and when issues can be most easily resolved, and ensures that educators are aware of most, if not all, of the bullying issues occurring at any one time.

Antibullying Announcement (Chapter 8)

The Antibullying Announcement is a periodic announcement about bullying that lets students know that adults do not condone bullying behaviors, makes students aware that adults need help in identifying bullying problems, and explains how adults will handle bullying problems when students come forward. This mechanism helps remove a barrier to reporting by providing students with assurances that asking adults for help will not make the problem worse. Periodic delivery is needed to reach those students who are newly involved in a bullying issue.

Classroom Strategies (Chapter 9)

Educators who are with the same group of students on a regular basis (e.g., classroom teachers) occupy a unique position as they know best their students' social structures and interpersonal dynamics. These educators can use a variety of proactive and reactive Classroom Strategies to influence individual students and groups of students to positively change the culture around aggression; identify those suffering harm and intervene; and provide support to targets.

Student Education and Empowerment (Chapter 10)

Student Education and Empowerment is critical to success. Students who understand what bullying is, why peers do it, and what they can do to get it to stop can avoid the harm caused by aggression and resolve issues on their own. This mechanism includes bystander activation and empowerment so that students learn low-risk and risk-free ways of helping bullied peers without the risk of becoming targets themselves.

Parent Education and Engagement (Chapter 11)

Parents need to work in partnership with their children and educators on resolving bullying problems. Parent Education and Engagement is important as it ensures that parents' understanding of bullying is accurate and aligned with educators. The CirclePoint website (www.circlepointbullying.com) provides the parent education component. Due to differences in the understanding of bullying that parents invariably have, educators need to take care in how they engage with parents and the language they use when trying to resolve a bullying issue.

Implementation (Chapter 12)

The Method can be implemented in a variety of ways, depending on time and resources. However, four phases are recommended. Schools need to: 1. prepare for implementation by developing a plan and gathering materials; 2. educate staff on bullying and the Method's mechanisms; 3. practice the mechanisms in order to reach a level of proficiency that ensures that student trust will be maintained; and 4. initiate student and parent engagement.