Department of Basic Education (DBE) Strategies to Deal with Bullying in Schools
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Problems relating to bullying and school violence are found throughout the world and their increasing prevalence is a major disturbance in the South African schooling system, with more than 3.2 million learners experiencing bullying in schools annually. The fact that learners have cell phones at school has created a specific type of challenge in this regard.

Bullying involves one or more people singling out and deliberately and repeatedly hurting or harming another person. Bullying is often confused with teasing. Some of the causes of bullying in schools are low self-esteem (a desire for popularity and a lack of affirmation) and a power imbalance between the perpetrator and victim. Bullying behaviour is also learnt from others and occurs in the following ways:

- Physical bullying (hitting, pushing)
- Verbal bullying (threats, insults)
- Non-verbal bullying (insensitive messaging)
- Social bullying (homophobia, gossiping)
- Sexual bullying (inappropriate jokes, touching)
- Cyberbullying (insult and abuse through social media)
- Stealing (books, school lunch).

School violence and bullying harms the physical health and emotional wellbeing of children and adolescents, and the significant educational impact these have on victims compromises effective learning in the classroom. Victimisation by teachers or peers may make learners who are bullied as well as bystanders afraid to go to school and often interferes with the victims’ ability to concentrate in class or participate in school activities. The school climate as a whole becomes one of fear and insecurity, and an unsafe learning environment. Violence and bullying in and around schools also have significant social economic costs. The long-term impact on victims and perpetrators can include increased risk of social and relationship difficulties, anti-social behaviour, and criminal behaviour. Victims tend to have lower grades and even drop out of school, and there is the likelihood that they have inadequate social support. Warning signs to look out for in a learner who is being bullied include loss of self-confidence, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, stress, fearfulness, and suicidal tendencies.

The DBE has put the following interventions in place to equip schools in terms of preventing and managing bullying and to ensure that they deal with bullying behaviour:

- The National School Safety Framework (NSSF) is based on the following pillars: early identification and intervention, reporting, support, and care for victims of bullying, and a safe and responsive learning environment for all learners. One of its goals is to create a safe, violence and threat-free, supportive learning environment for learners, parents, educators, principals, school governing bodies (SGBs) and administration, and in so doing, make schooling an enjoyable experience and retain learners in the system. The other goal is to ensure schools identify, prevent, and manage bullying incidents and develop anti-bullying policies, and to train schools on bullying prevention.
- The Life Orientation curriculum which takes a human rights-based approach to teaching diversity and respect, addresses the different categories of bullying and how they manifest, and helps create an environment where learners feel safe to report incidents of bullying.
- The Inter-Departmental Campaign facilitates collaboration between the DBE and other government departments in rolling out a multi-departmental campaign on the prevention of violence, bullying, corporal punishment, learner pregnancy, gender-based violence (GBV), drugs and substance abuse. The campaign is championed by the Minister and Deputy Minister of Basic Education and will be implemented in all provinces by 2023.