

Preventing Bullying and School Violence

by Stuart W. Twemlow, MD, and Frank C. Sacco, PhD. *American Psychiatric Publishing, Arlington, VA, 2012, 336 pages, \$55.00 (paper).*

Recent high-profile instances of aggression in schools emphasize the need for new resources in the effort to improve school safety. These resources must embrace a paradigmatic shift to enable mental health and other professionals to confidently work with youth and their environments. Bullying results in long-lasting consequences for victims and bullies, including an increased risk for anxiety disorders, adult depression, and suicidality.¹ *Preventing Bullying and School Violence*, by Stuart W. Twemlow, MD, and Frank C. Sacco, PhD, is a crucial resource for those working to ensure the protection of children in our educational system. Rather than solely focusing on the bully and the victim, this book approaches the phenomenon systemically, analyzing the roles played by schools, social workers, child protective services, communities, and the legal system in the effort to curb violence and harassment in American schools.

The book conveys an abundance of information essential for the successful recognition and mitigation of school violence. The authors discuss practical recommendations tailored to various age groups, socioeconomic statuses, cultures, and settings. This specificity empowers mental health professionals to provide customized treatment across a range of unique situations. The prescriptive solutions that Twemlow and Sacco offer are evidence-based and substantiated by analyses of scientific studies and successful interventions. The reader is given guidance on how to communicate with schools and agencies, assess school climate, perform useful threat and risk assessments, and recognize common patterns of violence. The work explores the social dynamics of bullying in detail, with an emphasis on the importance of relationships between the bully, the victim, and bystanders. The authors also discuss interventions that are counterproductive and to be avoided. Additionally, the book introduces novel interventions, such as therapeutic mentoring, that afford professionals new tools to promote wellness among youths. The wealth of information prepares the reader to adeptly assess, manage, and prevent school aggression.

This essential guide conveys information in a readable and structured fashion. Each chapter focuses on an important topic that it explores in depth. At the end of each chapter is a distillation of central ideas, a feature that helps the reader review the chapter efficiently. Readers are able to easily reference the citations. The use of tables to organize information succinctly allows busy mental health professionals to quickly reference relevant information related to bullying and violence in their practice. The various case

examples are enjoyable to read and present salient material in an understandable and thought-provoking way. The realism of the case examples and interventions helps the reader fully understand his or her role in the abatement of bullying and school violence. Due to the sheer volume of guidance offered in the book, many professionals may not be able to implement the entirety of the material. However, the book is organized in a clear and concise way that allows the reader to reference necessary topics easily and quickly.

Twemlow and Sacco emphasize the importance of employing a preventative approach within the school environment when targeting school aggression. Children and adolescents spend a large proportion of their lives in school, which allows the implementation of more convenient, comprehensive, and consistent preventative efforts. For example, utilizing “resilient and hardy” natural leaders who model tolerance and compassion can serve to prevent school violence by creating a positive academic setting (p 298). Programs such as wellness initiatives can reach youth who, due to the stigma attached to mental illness, may not have otherwise accessed help. Moreover, the authors illustrate how interventions in the academic setting can improve access to care, prevent school aggression, and create long-lasting benefits for children and adolescents.

Preventing Bullying and School Violence delivers concise, well-organized, and hands-on guidance for professionals dealing with school violence and bullying. School aggression can have dire and far-reaching consequences. As such, professionals working with youths are obligated to develop the skills and knowledge required to help prevent and stop bullying. A safe academic environment is vital to the health and wellness of children and adolescents. *Preventing Bullying and School Violence* offers ample real-world and evidence-based examples that detail how we may maintain this level of comfort in children’s daily lives. Drs Twemlow and Sacco expertly convey knowledge of this prevalent public safety concern while skillfully enabling mental health practitioners and others to navigate the world of school violence.

REFERENCE

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