



## STUDENT HOMELESSNESS: LESSONS FROM THE YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY

### PART VII: BULLYING

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was first developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to assess the health risk behaviors of youth and adults in the United States. For the first time since the survey has been widely administered, the 2017 YRBS optional question list included two questions pertaining to homelessness. SchoolHouse Connection analyzed demographic and risk factor data from the YRBS in 17 states<sup>i</sup>, comparing high school students experiencing homelessness and those not experiencing homelessness. This series shares the striking and heartbreaking results of that analysis, with tangible action steps schools can take to promote safety and health for students experiencing homelessness.

Bullying has many negative effects for students and schools. Students who are bullied are more likely to experience:

- Depression and anxiety, loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy. These issues may persist into adulthood.
- Decreased academic achievement—GPA and standardized test scores—and school participation. They are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.<sup>ii</sup>

High school students experiencing homelessness are 2.59 times more likely to be bullied on school property or electronically compared to their stably housed peers. **More than one in three students experiencing homelessness reported being a victim of bullying at school.**



## LIKELIHOOD TO BE BULLIED ON SCHOOL PROPERTY

High school students not experiencing homelessness



**2.59 TIMES**

High school students experiencing homelessness



**34.0%**  
of homeless high school students reported being bullied.

Data: Risk and Resilience: Differences in Risk Factors and Health Outcomes Between Homeless and Non-Homeless Students in 2017 YRBS Data  
Read the full paper: <http://bit.ly/SHC-YRBS2018>

## SCHOOLS ARE A PRIMARY LOCATION FOR BULLYING AND MUST BE LEADERS IN PREVENTING BULLYING.

### Action Steps for Schools

1. Never stigmatize or segregate students experiencing homelessness.<sup>iii</sup> Keep information about a student's homelessness private unless there is a particular reason for a school staff member to know.<sup>iv</sup> Always speak to parents and students prior to disclosing their homelessness to other school staff.
2. Know about your obligations under your [state's anti-bullying law](#). Also learn about [federal laws](#) that require schools to address harassment and discrimination. Work to establish [rules and policies](#) to let the entire school community know the expectations around bullying and procedures to report and investigate when something happens.
3. Train staff and students on the importance of ally behavior and speaking up when they observe bullying.
4. Provide students experiencing homelessness with access to showers, hygiene supplies, clothing, athletic equipment, school supplies, and other materials to help them participate fully in school without standing out from their peers.
5. Take a public health approach to bullying prevention. An approved training program is available at [stopbullying.gov](#).
6. Avoid [common "misdirections" in bullying prevention](#). Zero tolerance policies often fail, because as many as one in five students admits to bullying their peers occasionally. Bullying also can be an early indicator of other problem behaviors. Even conflict resolution and peer mediation programs may send the wrong message about bullying to the victim. Instead, adopt [restorative justice practices school wide](#), which seek to build a sense of community and restore relationships by placing emphasis on healing the wounds of victims, bullies, and communities.

#### Resources

American Psychological Association, [How Parents, Teachers, and Kids Can Take Action to Prevent Bullying](#)  
Bullyingnoway.gov.au, [Resources for Talking and Teaching about Bullying](#)  
Child Mind Institute, [What To Do If Your Child is Bullying](#)  
ChildTrends, [Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies](#)  
Crisis Prevention Institute, [10 Ways to Help Reduce Bullying in Schools](#)  
PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, [Questions Answered](#)  
National Education Association, [How to Intervene in a Bullying Incident](#)  
StopBullying.org, [What is Bullying](#)  
The New York Times, [Lesson Plan: Discussing Bullying and Antigay Attitudes](#)

<sup>i</sup> AK, AR, CA, CO, DE, HI, ID, IL, KS, KY, ME, MT, NH, NC, PA, VA, WI.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/effects/index.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Federal law requires state and local educational agencies to "adopt policies and practices to ensure that homeless children and youths are not stigmatized or segregated on the basis of their status as homeless." 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(1)(J)(i).

<sup>iv</sup> Information about a child's or youth's homeless living situation is protected as a student education record under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. 42 U.S.C. §11432(g)(3)(G).