

RESEARCH BASE

The Safe School Ambassadors (SSA) Program is built on a solid foundation of research, including the work of three pioneers in the field of bullying prevention: Dr. Wendy Craig, Dr. Ron Slaby and Dr. Dan Olweus. A review of published literature on bullying conducted in 2004 by Denver CO-based Omni Research & Training found that the core principles of the SSA Program are supported by precedents and research.

What the experts found -

Dr. Olweus found through his groundbreaking research with youth and bullying that:

- A school-wide approach is needed, especially to address the mistreatment that occurs outside the classroom (e.g. in hallways, on the bus, lunchroom and schoolyards)
- If bullying behavior is ignored, it becomes the norm. When it is recognized and addressed, positive behavioral norms can be created and reinforced

Dr. Wendy Craig established through her extensive field research:

- Adults rarely see or hear the mistreatment students experience, and often don't intervene
- The corresponding lack of intervention implies that mistreatment is acceptable

Dr. Ron Slaby in addition proved that:

- Bystanders play a key role in resolving conflicts and preventing cruelty and violence; and
- Adolescents can learn skills to solve problems in nonviolent ways.

Key research findings and how SSA incorporates them -

- **Fact:** Other students **are present in 85% of bullying incidents**, and they determine the social norms that allow mistreatment to occur. Thus, effective bullying prevention efforts utilize students' social power.

The SSA Program is a student-driven program that engages a diverse group of socially influential students to intervene with their peers to prevent and stop mistreatment they notice.

- **Fact:** Involvement of bystanders **is the key variable in reducing mistreatment**, because their responses to it strongly influence aggressors' behavior.

The SSA Program empowers socially-influential bystanders by giving them tools and support to intervene to prevent or stop the mistreatment they notice.

- **Fact:** Students with sufficiently high "social capital" **are the most likely to intervene** in bullying situations.

The SSA Program works with school site staff and students to identify the socially-influential students on a campus, and provides staff with resources to recruit these leaders to become Ambassadors.

- **Fact:** Programs that **incorporate a "peer support" approach** - encouraging support for targets, teaching conflict resolution skills, reinforcing positive norms, and using informal counseling-based approaches - increase pro-social attitudes and behaviors.

The SSA Program equips Ambassadors with a range of these skills they can use with their peers, from supporting targeted students to reasoning with aggressors.

Students in general do not intervene, because they:

- Do not notice or recognize mistreatment as harmful
- Fear retaliation, or worry about losing social status
- Don't know what to say or do, or fear making it worse
- Don't feel comfortable informing adults about mistreatment, or think they won't listen

Through the SSA Program, Ambassadors:

- Learn common definitions of 5 types of mistreatment
- Take action mainly within their peer groups, reducing the chance of retaliation or loss of social status
- Learn youth-friendly things to say and do when they notice mistreatment
- Learn that informing adults of potentially or actually dangerous situations helps everyone