

The Brothers as Allies Study

Partner and Community Site FAQ

The New York State Department of Health and Cornell University are collaborating on a research grant to evaluate Brothers as Allies, a program for boys age 12-14. The study is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What is the program?

The Brothers as Allies program is a strengths-based, group approach to promote boys' and young men's safe and healthy passage through pre-teen and adolescent years. Designed especially for middle school boys, the program will help boys learn how to talk with people in a respectful and positive way, how to understand other people's perspectives, and what it means to be a healthy, balanced man. Brothers as Allies is part of One Circle Foundation's Council for Boys and Young Men (also called "Boys Council") series of curricula, all of which feature a strengths-based group approach to promote healthy masculinity development.

Why is this program being evaluated?

Preliminary evaluations of Boys Council programs have shown positive outcomes, but more research is needed to learn whether these outcomes are significant compared to boys who do not participate. Moreover, since most of the available research on Boys Council has focused on outcomes other than sexual violence, the results of this study will contribute to the evidence base for sexual violence prevention programs for national dissemination.

How will the study work?

The study will use surveys to compare changes in feelings, attitudes, and behaviors among boys in two groups: Brothers as Allies participants (intervention group), and similar boys who are participating in other kinds of youth programming (control group). We cannot know if this program works unless we do this kind of study.

We are partnering with youth service providers in Western New York to find pairs of similar sites (e.g. afterschool programs or summer camps, recreational programs, and/or school classes) that can be matched as an intervention site and a control site. Ideally, the sites comprising each pair will be similar in setting and in the demographics of the participating boys. Having pairs of similar sites can help us be sure that it is the Brothers as Allies program and not other factors that make the difference in outcomes for boys.

Surveys

Surveys will be used to measure change. Boys in both the intervention and control groups will be asked to take a total of four surveys over the course of nine months: one survey at the beginning of the program, one at the end, and follow-up surveys three and six months later.

Conducted by trained facilitators, the surveys will take about 30-40 minutes each. Participants will take the survey on tablets, and no one will see their individual answers. Survey questions will assess communication skills, connectedness to adults and peers, respect and empathy toward self and others, and balanced masculinity, as well as endorsement of aggression and sexual violence experiences. Trained staff from Cornell will handle data collection in collaboration with Brothers as Allies facilitators.

The surveys will be kept entirely private and confidential.

What is in this for the boys?

In addition to the new skills, friends, and positive experiences they are likely to have as part of the program, all participants, whether they are in the intervention group or not, will receive the incentive. Each participant will receive \$10 for the first survey, \$20 for the second survey, \$30 for the third survey, and \$40 for the last survey.

Who participates in Brothers as Allies?

Any boy age 12-14 (middle school) who is interested and linked to one of the study sites can participate. Brothers as Allies groups include about 10 boys each. Sites that act as control groups are welcome to implement Brothers as Allies after all data are collected for the study, if desired.

How is a Brothers as Allies group formed and conducted?

Brothers as Allies participants are recruited at the local level by experienced youth work professionals. Boys and their parents will be informed about the program using methods in place for each site.

In the Brothers as Allies program, boys form a "council" that is led by trained male facilitators, following the guidelines of the curriculum. Sessions are 90 minutes long and include seven steps, including reflection, discussion, and group activities. One complete program consists of 10 sessions, each of which focuses on a theme such as identity, masculinity, respecting differences, emotions, communication, bullying, dating, and gender expectations.

How many boys need to be part of the study?

Ideally, we will collect data from 600-700 boys. This means that we will have about 350 boys in the intervention group and 350 boys in the control group.

What do the control sites do?

The control sites do not need to change their programming in any way. They do, however, need to identify a cohort of 10 boys who are willing to participate in the study by answering the survey questions at four time points.

What is the timeline?

The timeline of the study will span about eight months for each Brothers as Allies group: two months for conducting the curriculum and six months after the completion of the program for follow up surveys. Control groups will follow a similar pattern.

The study will be conducted from now until 2019. We hope to be in close touch with our implementation partners during that time for ongoing dialogue and process evaluation. Final study results will be shared with partners and community members at the conclusion of the study in 2019.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

If you have general questions about the study, contact Janis Whitlock at Cornell University, (jlw43@cornell.edu or 607-254-2894), or Leah Wentworth at the New York State Department of Health (leah.wentworth@health.ny.gov).

Parents who have been contacted about this study can also call or text Amanda Purington (607-216-8794) or email Sara Komoroske (sara.komoroske@ppcwny.org) with questions or to opt out of the study.

Additional information is posted on the web page: www.actforyouth.net/brothers.