

Bullying- A serious problem

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Bullying Behavior causes serious problems that school, families and neighbors ignore. Teasing at bus stops, taking another child's lunch money, insults and threats, kicking and shoving- it's all fair game to a bully.

Young people say that bullying is one of the biggest problems they face. In fact, 52 percent of students report seeing bullying at least once a week. This negatively affects the victims and the bullies as well as the kids who witness bullying and the school environment as a whole.

The National Crime Prevention Council currently has two campaigns to help children and parents stop bullying.

Bullying has become a tidal wave of epic proportions. Although bullying was once considered a rite of passage, parents, educators and community leaders now see bullying as a devastating form of abuse that can have long-term effects on youthful victims, robbing them of self-esteem, isolating them from their peers, causing them to drop out of school and even prompting health problems and suicide.

A recent study by the Family and Work Institute reported that one third of youth are bullied at least once a month, while others say six out of ten American teens witness bullying at least once a day. Witnessing bullying can be harmful, too, as it may make the witness feel helpless- or that he or she is the next target.

Children who are bullied are often singled out because of a perceived difference between them and others, whether because of appearance (size, weight or clothes) intellect or increasingly ethnic or religious affiliation and sexual orientation.

And bullying can be a gateway behavior, teaching the perpetrator that threats and aggression are acceptable even in adulthood. In one study by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, nearly 60 percent of boys whom researchers classified as bullies in grades six to nine were convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24, while 40 percent had three or more convictions.

What is Bullying

Although most definitions of bullying vary, most agree that bullying involves:

-Imbalance of power: people who bully use their power to control or harm and the people being bullied may have a hard time defending themselves.

-Intent to cause harm: Actions done by accident are not bullying; the person bullying has a goal to cause harm

-Repetition: Incidents of bullying happen to the same person over and over by the same person or group

Types of Bullying-

Verbal: name calling, teasing

Social: spreading rumors, leaving people out on purpose, breaking up friendships

Physical: hitting, punching, shoving

Cyberbullying: using the internet, mobile phones or other digital technologies to deliberately upset someone else.

People who are bullied:

- Have a higher risk of depression and anxiety, including symptoms that may persist into adulthood.
- Have increased feelings of sadness and loneliness.
- Have changes in sleep and eating patterns
- Lose interest in activities
- Have increased thought about suicide that may persist into adulthood. In one study, adult who recalled being bullied was associated with physical health status 3 years later.
- Have decreased academic achievement (GPA and standardized test scores) and school participation.
- Are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.
- Are more likely to retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990's, the shooters had a history of being bullied.

People who bully others:

- Have a higher risk of abusing alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults
- Are more likely to get into fights, vandalize property and drop out of school.
- Are more likely to engage in early sexual activity.
- Are more likely to have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults. In one study, 60% of boys who bullied others in middle school had criminal conviction by age 24.
- As adults are more likely to be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses or children.

People who witness bullying:

- Have increased use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.
- Have increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.
- Are more likely to miss or skip school.

Girls and Bullying

When most people picture a “typical” bully, they imagine a boy who is bigger or older than his classmates, who doesn’t do well in school, who fights and who likes it when others are scared of him. Girls usually face a different type of bully- one who may not look as scary from the outside, but who can cause just as much harm.

What’s she like:

The typical girl who bullies is popular, well-liked by adults, does well in school and can even be friend with the girls she bullies. She doesn’t get into fist fights, although some girls who bully do. Instead, she spreads rumors, gossips, excludes others, shares secrets and teases girls about their hair, weight, intelligence and athletic ability. She usually bullies in a group and others join in or pressure her to bully.

What you can do:

One of the best ways to stop this form of bullying is for the girls who see it or who are stuck in the middle to speak up and say that it is not okay. But only 15% of girls speak up, usually because they’re afraid the bully will turn on them next. Parents and other adults can help girls beat bullying by teaching them how to stand up for themselves and their friends and by taking action themselves.

The Effects:

This kind of bullying can have just as serious consequences as physical bullying. It can cause a drop in grades, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, drug use, and poor eating habits in girls who are bullied. This kind of bullying is harder to see. Most of the time adults don’t realize when girls are being bullied in this way.

Cyberbullying: How Parents can help

Since most Cyberbullying takes place at home, it's important that parents know about cyberbullying and that they get involved in preventing it. Just like parents help their kids avoid inappropriate websites, they can protect them from cyberbullying.

What kids need to know:

- Never give out personal information online, whether in instant message profiles, chat rooms, blogs, or personal websites.
- Never tell anyone but your parents your password, even friends.
- If someone sends a mean or threatening message, don't respond. Save it or print it out and show it to an adult.
- Never open emails from someone you don't know or from someone you know is a bully.
- Don't put anything online that you wouldn't want your classmates to see, even in email
- Don't send messages when you're angry. Before clicking "send" ask yourself how you would feel if you received the message
- Help kids who are bullied online by not joining in and by showing bullying messages to an adult.- Always be as polite online as you are in person.

What can parents do:

- Keep your home computer In a busy area of your house.
- Set up email and chat accounts with your children. Make sure that you know their screen names and passwords and that they don't include any personal information in their online profiles.
- Regularly go over their instant messenger "buddy list" with them. As who each person is and how your children know him or her.
- Discuss cyberbullying with your children and ask if they have ever experienced it or seen it happen to someone.
- Tell your children that you won't blame them if they are cyberbullied. Emphasize that you won't take away their computer privileges- this is the main reason kid don't tell adults when they are cyberbullied.

Online Safety and Civility

Using the internet and technology should be a positive experience for young people, and for most of them it is. Unfortunately, young people can use technology in negative ways. When a young person is bullied or harassed via the Internet or mobile phones by their peers, the Internet becomes a source of anxiety and fear. In various research studies conducted around the world, as many as one third of young people have experienced **cyberbullying**.

What to do

-Don't respond and don't retaliate: Getting back at the bully turns you into one and reinforces the bully's behavior

-Talk to a trusted adult: You deserve back up. It's always good to involve a parent, but if you can't, a school counselor usually knows how to help. Sometimes both are needed. If you're really nervous about saying something, see if there's a way to report the incident anonymously at school.

-Block the bully: If the harassment is coming in the form of instant messages, texts or profile comments, do yourself a favor: Use preferences or privacy tools to block the person. If it's in chat, leave the "room"

-Be Civil: Even if you don't like someone, it's a good idea to be decent and not sink to the other person's level. Also research shows that gossiping about and trash talking others increases your risk of being bullied. Treat people the way you want to be treated.

-Don't be a bully: How would you feel if someone harassed you? Even a few moments of thinking how your aggressive behavior might make another person feel can put a big damper on that aggression.

-Be a friend, not a bystander: Watching or forwarding mean messages empowers bullies and hurts victims even more. If you can, tell bullies to stop or let them know harassment makes people look stupid and mean. It's time to let them know that their behavior is unacceptable, and that it is abuse of fellow human beings. If you can't stop the bullying at least try to help the victim and report the behavior.

For more information, visit [SafeKids.com](http://www.SafeKids.com) and Cyberbullying tips from ConnectSafely.org and also: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/activities/toolkits/school-event-guide.asp>

