

Similarities and Differences between Rough-and-Tumble Play, Real Fighting, and Bullying

The table below shows how these three behaviors differ or are similar in characteristics such as the relationship between the participants, the balance of power between them, and the intent of the action.

Characteristics	Rough-and-Tumble Play	Real Fighting	Bullying
Relationship between Parties	Usually friends*	Usually not friends	Usually not friends
Number of Participants	May be two, but often more	Usually two	May be two, but often a group of two to three against one ⁺
Balance of Strength or Power	Usually equal (can be deliberately adjusted)	Can vary, but often is relatively equal	Unequal ⁺
Expression and Atmosphere	Smiling or neutral face, laughter, friendly*	Staring, serious face with furrowed eyebrows, tense, hostile	<i>The inferior party:</i> often sad, depressed, crying, angry, despairing <i>The superior party:</i> may vary, but often laughter and scornful smiles; serious, not friendly ⁺
Underlying Intention	Friendly, positive*	Negative, aggressive, desire to inflict injury or discomfort	Negative, aggressive, desire to inflict injury or discomfort, to humiliate and insult
Activity Repeated with Same Partner(s)	Often yes	Usually not	Yes ⁺

* Indicates characteristics that primarily distinguish rough-and-tumble play from real fighting and bullying.

+ Indicates characteristics that primarily distinguish bullying and real fighting.