# Bullying

## What Is Bullying?

Bullying is defined as unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Youth who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. In order for a behavior to be considered bullying, it must be aggressive and include:

- An Imbalance of Power: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
- Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose. Bullying behaviors can occur in-person or online.

Data on bullying and cyberbullying from scientific studies is substantial. A review by Joshi and colleagues (2019) highlights some of the data available as of 2018: US teens who admit to being bullied online are increasingly telling adults (e.g., 60% in 2014 compared to 40% in 2013). Cyberbullying can be defined as the willful and repeated harm (i.e., harassing, humiliating, or threatening text or images) inflicted through the Internet, interactive technologies, or mobile phones. As of 2018, over 40% of American teens (13–17 years of age) reported experiencing some form of cyberbullying in the past year. Conversely, 11.5% of teens admitted to having engaged in cyberbullying. Girls are much more likely to be victims of cyberbullying (> 40%) than boys (29%). Girls also dominate social media, while boys more frequently play video games. In extreme cases, peer victimization experienced through cyberbullying can be directly linked to an increase in suicide risk. Victimization through cyberbullying is more strongly related to suicidal ideation, compared to traditional bullying (Van Geel, et al, 2014). This phenomenon is not just limited to teens. A recent meta-analysis found that this phenomenon is true for older as well as younger children, boys as well as girls, and children who were both bullied and who bullied others (previously known as bully/victims). Just owning a cell phone significantly increases cyberbullying risk (both as a victim and perpetrator), among children in grades 3–5 (Van Geel, et al, 2014).

## Prevention of Bullying & Hate-Motivated Behavior: The California Department of Education (CDE)

Schools are responsible for creating safe environments for all students. They must work to prevent bullying, and they must respond to it when it happens. The California Department of Education offers information and resources for parents, administrators, and students about bullying.

## A Community Responsibility

Bullying is such a long-established behavior in our society and schools that it has often been ignored as "a normal part of growing up." However, research has shown that there are severe long-term consequences for both the targets and the bullies. Further, severe reactions to bullying have been cited as one of the causes of the extremely violent incidents on school campuses that have received so much media attention in recent years. Fortunately, well-documented research has been done which provides techniques for preventing bullying, responding to incidents of bullying, and dealing with its long-term consequences. The key elements of a bullying prevention program are:

- Raising awareness of bullying through actions such as surveys of prevalence and role-playing events at assemblies.
- Formation of a bullying prevention committee which represents the entire school community, and which is responsible for choosing and implementing a prevention program.
- Defining bullying and making it clear to all staff and students that it is unacceptable.
- Adapt and implement bullying prevention policies.
- Training all members of the school community in the appropriate responses to observed incidents of bullying.
- Providing counseling for persistent bullies, targets, and their parents/guardians.
- Regular review of effectiveness of anti-bullying programs.

There are a number of resources available which contain detailed information about comprehensive bullying prevention programs. These research-based programs describe the elements above, and also contain:

- Broadly conceived definitions of bullying, including behaviors such as social ostracism in addition to the traditionally-considered physical dominance behaviors.
- Bullying prevalence questionnaires.
- Appropriate interventions for bullying situations, and for chronic bullies and targets.

## Understanding the Roles of Parents and Caregivers in Community-Wide Bully Prevention Efforts

Because of the influence that parents and caregivers have on the attitudes and behaviors of their children, and their concern and responsibility for their well-being, parents play critical roles in preventing and addressing bullying. Although parents have a good understanding of what bullying is and the negative effects it can have on children (Sawyer, Mishna, Pepler, & Wiener, 2011), they typically believe that their children are less involved in bullying (as victims and as perpetrators of bullying) than their children report (Holt, Kaufman Kantor, & Finkelhor, 2009; Stockdale, Hangaduambo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela,

2002). One reason that parents may be unaware of their children's involvement in bullying is that kids often do not tell their parents about their experiences. In a study of U.S. students in grades 3-12, fewer than half (49% of bullied girls and 38% of bullied boys) said they had told a parent about their experience (Limber, Olweus, & Wang, 2012). The likelihood of reporting bullying experiences to parents decreases with age (Limber et al., 2012).

## The Roles of Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers can help prevent bullying and respond to it effectively by using these research-based best practices:

• Begin early. Aggressive behavior in young children is very common (Hanish, Kochenderfer-Ladd, Fabes, Martin, & Denning, 2004), but if these behaviors are not addressed, they can lead to bullying and other problems with peers. Parents can work to stop these behaviors before they become habitual by encouraging cooperative behaviors such as helping, sharing, and problem-solving.

• Show warmth and be engaged. Having parents who are disengaged (e.g., parents who spend little time with their children or do not regularly supervise their activities) increases the likelihood that a child will bully others; while having warm, involved parents reduces this likelihood (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Olweus, 1993).

• Learn about bullying and dispel myths about its nature, prevalence, effects, and best practices in prevention. The StopBullying.gov infographic might be a helpful tool in grasping key information and sharing it with others. [found here, https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/2017-10/stop-bullying-infographic.pdf]

• Talk about bullying. Talking with kids about bullying helps them understand what it is, why it is harmful, and how to respond. Discuss and practice what they can do when they encounter bullying. Give tips for dealing with bullying that they may experience, such as saying "stop" directly and confidently, walking away, and getting help from adults. Talk about how they can help others who are being bullied, by speaking up, showing kindness, and telling an adult.

• Model how to treat others with kindness and respect. Children learn by example and will reflect the attitudes and behaviors of their parents/caregivers. Problems in the family environment may increase the likelihood of bullying. For example, exposure to family conflict, parental use of drugs and alcohol, domestic violence, and child abuse is related to a greater likelihood of bullying others and also being bullied by peers (Baldry, 2003; Holt, Finkelhor, & Kaufman Kantor, 2007; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001).

• Develop clear rules and expectations about how children should treat others. Enforce these rules with natural and appropriate consequences that emphasize teaching appropriate behavior, not punishment. Children whose parents use parenting styles that are authoritative (that permit independence but also set limits and are responsive to their child's needs) are less likely to be involved in bullying (Bowes, Arseneault, Maughan, Taylor, Casi, & Moffitt, 2009; Olweus, 1993).

On the other hand, parents who are overly permissive and those who use overly harsh discipline are more likely to have children who bully.

• Encourage children to speak up if they are bullied or witness others being bullied. Identify one or two trusted adults at school to whom your child can report bullying that they experience, see, or suspect. Encourage them to report bullying to you; take these reports seriously.

• Encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities, interests, and hobbies can boost confidence, help kids make friends with peers outside of school, and protect them from bullying behavior.

• Learn about bullying prevention policies and practices at your child's school and in leagues, clubs, and activities in the community. Offer to support their efforts. Become familiar with steps to address bullying within your school or community organizations.

• Know the difference between bullying and harassment and what steps to take if you suspect or know that your child has been harassed. Although bullying and harassment sometimes overlap, not all bullying is harassment and not all harassment is bullying. Under federal civil rights laws, harassment is unwelcome conduct based on a protected class (race, national origin, color, sex, age, disability, religion) that is severe, pervasive, or persistent and creates a hostile environment.

## A Framework for School-Wide Bullying Prevention and Safety

Estimates of the prevalence of bullying in the United States vary significantly depending on methodology, setting, or age groups studied, revealing the absence of consensus. Nevertheless, research on bullying and victimization generally suggests that approximately 70% to 80% of school-age students have been involved in bullying at some point during their school years, whether as bully, victim, or bystander (e.g., Graham, 2011; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001).

## Effects of Bullying on Students

Involvement in bullying creates barriers to learning and is associated with a host of negative outcomes for both victims and bullies, including increased risk of substance abuse, delinquency, suicide, truancy, mental health problems, physical injury, and decreased academic performance. Students involved as both bullies and victims (i.e., bully-victims) are often the most troubled or negatively impacted. Importantly, even those witnessing bullying in school are at an increased risk to experience adverse mental health problems as a result, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse (Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009), and an increased sense of vulnerability (Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000)

## The Relationship between Bullying and Suicide

Media reports often link bullying with suicide. However, most youth who are bullied do not have thoughts of suicide or engage in suicidal behaviors.

- Although kids who are bullied are at risk of suicide, bullying alone is not the cause. Many issues contribute to suicide risk, including depression, problems at home, and trauma history.
- Additionally, specific groups have an increased risk of suicide, including American Indian and Alaskan Native, Asian American, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. This risk can be increased further when these kids are not supported by parents, peers, and schools.

- Bullying can make an non-supportive situation worse.

California Anti-Bullying Laws & Policies

1. California laws and regulations covering bullying and cyberbullying
https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/california/index.html (6)
2. Sample Policy for Bullying Prevention,
https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/samplepolicy.asp (7)
Sample policy on the prevention of bullying and on conflict resolution that were developedF by the California Department of Education as resources to help California schools address for these vital school safety concerns.

## Resources

1. Stop Bullying official website of the United States government, https://www.stopbullying.gov

2. Understanding the Roles of Parents and Caregivers in Community-Wide BullyingF Prevention Efforts https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/2017-09/hrsa_guide_parents-and-caregivers_508v2.pdf

3. National Association of School Nurses, https://www.nasn.org/advocacy/professional-practice-documents/position-statements/ps-bullying

4. National Association of School Psychologist, https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/bullying-prevention, see "A Framework for School Wide Bullying Prevention and Safety".

5.F National Association of School Psychologists, https://apps.nasponline.org/search-results.aspx?q=Cyberbullying

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9.  California Department of Education. (2018) Sample Policy for Bullying Prevention.F https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/samplepolicy.asp