



What Is Bullying?

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intended to cause harm or distress, occurs repeatedly over time, and occurs in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take many forms, including physical violence, teasing and name-calling, intimidation, and social exclusion. It can be related to hostile acts perpetrated against racial and ethnic minorities, gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual youth, and persons with disabilities.

Ninety percent of 4th through 8th graders report being victims of some form of bullying. Boys are typically more physically aggressive (physical bullying), whereas girls rely more on social exclusion, teasing, and cliques (verbal or emotional bullying). Bullying can also take the form of cyber communication, for example via email (cyber bullying). It is estimated that one in four boys who bully will have a criminal record by age 30.

Who Are Bullies?

Children who regularly bully their peers tend to be impulsive, easily frustrated and dominant in personality, have difficulty conforming to rules, view violence positively, and are more likely to have friends who are also bullies. Boys who bully are usually physically stronger than their peers.

Moreover, several risk factors have been associated with bullying, including individual, family, peer, school, and community factors. With respect to family factors, children are more likely to bully if there is a lack of warmth and parent involvement, lack of parental supervision, and harsh corporal discipline. Some research suggests a link between bullying behavior and child maltreatment. Also, schools that lack adequate adult supervision tend to have more instances of bullying.

Who Is Being Bullied?

Children who are bullied are often cautious, sensitive, insecure, socially isolated, and have difficulty asserting themselves among their peers. Boys who are bullied tend to be physically weaker than their peers. Children who have been victims of child abuse (neglect, physical, or sexual abuse) or who have disabilities are also more likely to be bullied by their peers. Bully victims may also be hyperactive children, frequently displaying the social-emotional behaviors associated with victimization.

Psychological Effects of Bullying

Bullying exerts long-term and short-term psychological effects on both bullies and their victims. Bullying behavior has been linked to other forms of antisocial behavior, such as vandalism, shoplifting, skipping and dropping out of school, fighting, and the use of drugs and alcohol.

Victims of bullying experience loneliness and often suffer humiliation, insecurity, loss of self-esteem, and thoughts of suicide. Furthermore, bullying can interfere with student's engagement and learning in school. The impact of frequent bullying often accompanies these victims into adulthood.

Bullying

Intervention and Prevention Programs

The most effective prevention strategies are very comprehensive in nature, involving the entire school as a community to change the climate of the school and norms for behavior. It is crucial that parents, educators, administrators, health care professionals, and researchers work together to reduce bullying.

Prevention strategies should span from kindergarten through high school and involve educating the school community about bullies and their victims, as well as implementing school policies that set clear behavioral expectations. As of 2003, at least 15 states had passed laws addressing bullying in schools, which often include directives requiring or encouraging prevention program development, school employee training, and systematic reporting and disciplinary practices.

Strategies proven effective include having a consistent open dialogue about bullying and its consequences via classroom discussions, writing workshops, role plays, and parent-teacher meetings. Immediate intervention by school staff when bullying occurs has also shown to be successful, in which adequate adult supervision is provided in at-risk situations (hallways during class transitions and playgrounds) and negative consequences are strictly enforced in front of student bystanders to demonstrate that bullying behavior is not acceptable.

Parents must also be involved in their children's lives and intervene in a supportive and empathetic nature if they believe their child or another child is being bullied. To help prevent bullying, parents should enforce clear and concise behavioral guidelines and reward children for positive, inclusive behavior. Furthermore, parents should seek assistance from the school's principal, teachers, and counselors if concerns regarding their child's or another child's behavior arises.

The American Psychological Association's Recommendations

- Implementation and dissemination of comprehensive, research-based bullying interventions within schools and communities.
- Support for research that will lead to a better understanding of bullying and victimization, as well as evaluate and establish evidence-based prevention programs that work.
- Training for all school personnel (e.g., teachers, cafeteria workers, school-bus drivers, maintenance workers) on bullying and bullying prevention.
- Federal funding to support the implementation of effective bullying prevention programs.

