

# Nobody Likes a Bully

# What is Bullying?

- Bullying is 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. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.
- In order to be considered bullying, the behavior 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.

# Types of Bullying

- **Verbal bullying** is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes: teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, and threatening to cause harm.
- **Social bullying**, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes: leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, embarrassing someone in public.
- **Physical bullying** involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes: hitting/kicking/pinching, spitting, tripping/pushing, taking or breaking someone's things, making mean or rude hand gestures.

# Bullying Stats

- The 2022 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (National Center For Education Statistics And Bureau of Justice) indicates that, nationwide, about 19.2% of students ages 12-18 in grades 6-12 reported being bullied, with approximately 15.4% of students reporting being bullied with a power imbalance, 14.5% being bullied repeatedly, and 12.7% being bullied with both a power imbalance and repetition.
- The 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that, nationwide, 19% of students in grades 9–12 report being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- Bullying can occur during or after school hours. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like on the playground or the bus. It can also happen travelling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or on the internet.

# Adults Response

- When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior they send the message that it is not acceptable. Research shows this can stop bullying behavior over time.
- Parents, school staff, and other adults in the community can help kids prevent bullying by talking about it, building a safe school environment, and creating a community-wide bullying prevention strategy.
- There are many roles that kids can play. Kids can bully others, they can be bullied, or they may witness bullying. When kids are involved in bullying, they often play more than one role. Sometimes kids may both be bullied and bully others or they may witness other kids being bullied. It is important to understand the multiple roles kids play in order to effectively prevent and respond to bullying.

# Importance of Not Labeling Kids

- When referring to a bullying situation, it is easy to call the kids who bully others "bullies" and those who are targeted "victims," but this may have unintended consequences. When children are labeled as "bullies" or "victims" it may:
- Send the message that the child's behavior cannot change
- Fail to recognize the multiple roles children might play in different bullying situations
- Disregard other factors contributing to the behavior such as peer influence or school climate
- Instead of labeling the children involved, focus on the behavior. For instance:
- Instead of calling a child a "bully," refer to them as "the child who bullied"
- Instead of calling a child a "victim," refer to them as "the child who was bullied"
- Instead of calling a child a "bully/victim," refer to them as "the child who was both bullied and bullied others."



# Kids involved in Bullying

- The roles kids play in bullying are not limited to those who bully others and those who are bullied. Some researchers talk about the "circle of bullying" to define both those directly involved in bullying and those who actively or passively assist the behavior or defend against it. Direct roles include:
- **Kids who Bully:** These children engage in bullying behavior towards their peers. There are many risk factors that may contribute to the child's involvement in the behavior. Often, these students require support to change their behavior and address any other challenges that may be influencing their behavior.
- **Kids who are Bullied:** These children are the targets of bullying behavior. Some factors put children at more risk of being bullied, but not all children with these characteristics will be bullied. Sometimes, these children may need help learning how to respond to bullying.

## ➤ Kids who are not directly involved in bullying

- Even if a child is not directly involved in bullying, they may be contributing to the behavior. Witnessing the behavior may also affect the child, so it is important for them to learn what they should do when they see bullying happen. Roles kids play when they witness bullying include:

**Kids who Assist:** These children may not start the bullying or lead in the bullying behavior, but serve as an "assistant" to children who are bullying. These children may encourage the bullying behavior and occasionally join in.

**Kids who Reinforce:** These children are not directly involved in the bullying behavior but they give the bullying an audience. They will often laugh or provide support for the children who are engaging in bullying. This may encourage the bullying to continue.

**Outsiders:** These children remain separate from the bullying situation. They neither reinforce the bullying behavior nor defend the child being bullied. Some may watch what is going on but do not provide feedback about the situation to show they are on anyone's side. Even so, providing an audience may encourage the bullying behavior. These kids often want to help, but don't know how. Learn how to be "more than a bystander."

**Kids who Defend:** These children actively comfort the child being bullied and may come to the child's defense when bullying occurs.



# Most kids role

- Most kids play more than one role in bullying over time. In some cases, they may be directly involved in bullying as the one bullying others or being bullied and in others they may witness bullying and play an assisting or defending role. Every situation is different. Some kids are both bullied and bully others. It is important to note the multiple roles kids play, because:
- Those who are both bullied and bully others may be at more risk for negative outcomes, such as depression or suicidal ideation.
- It highlights the need to engage all kids in prevention efforts, not just those who are known to be directly involved.

# Why Some Youth Bully

- Children and teenagers who feel secure and supported by their family, school, and peers are less likely to bully. However, some youth do not have these types of support. Every individual is unique and there are many factors that can contribute to bullying behavior. A youth who bullies may experience one, several, or none of these contributing factors.

## **Peer factors**

Some youth bully:

- to attain or maintain social power or to elevate their status in their peer group.
- to show their allegiance to and fit in with their peer group.
- to exclude others from their peer group, to show who is and is not part of the group.
- to control the behavior of their peers.

# Family factors

Some youth who bully:

- come from families where there is bullying, aggression, or violence at home.
- may have parents and caregivers that do not provide emotional support or communication.
- may have parents or caregivers who respond in an authoritarian or reactive way.
- may come from families where the adults are overly lenient or where there is low parental involvement in their lives.

# Emotional factors

Some youth who bully:

- May have been bullied in the past or currently.
- Have feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem, so they bully to make themselves feel more powerful.
- Do not understand other's emotions.
- Don't know how to control their emotions, so they take out their feelings on other people.
- May not have skills for handling social situations in healthy, positive ways.

# School factors

Some youth who bully:

- may be in schools where conduct problems and bullying are not properly addressed.
- may experience being excluded, not accepted, or stigmatized at school.
- Every youth involved in bullying -- as a target, a bystander, or as one who does the bullying -- can benefit from adult, school, and community support. Youth who bully may also need support to help them address their behavior. Parents, school counselors, teachers, and mental health professionals can work with youth who bully to help them develop healthy school and peer connections and to learn new social and emotional skills. If you have bullied your peers, reach out to a trusted adult for help. Bullying is a behavior that can be changed.

# Who Is at Risk?

- No single factor puts a child at risk of being bullied or bullying others. Bullying can happen anywhere -- cities, suburbs, or rural towns. Depending on the environment, some groups -- youth with disabilities and socially isolated youth -- may be at an increased risk of being bullied. Stigma can also spread false and harmful information that can lead to increasing rates of bullying, harassment, and hate crimes against certain groups of people.



# Children at Risk of Being Bullied

Generally, children who are bullied have one or more of the following risk factors:

- Are perceived as different from their peers, such as being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing, being new to a school, or being unable to afford what kids consider “cool”
- Are perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves
- Are depressed, anxious, or have low self esteem
- Are less popular than others and have few friends
- Do not get along well with others, seen as annoying or provoking, or antagonize others for attention
- However, even if a child has these risk factors, it doesn't mean that they will be bullied.

# Children More Likely to Bully Others

There are two types of kids who are more likely to bully others:

- Some are well-connected to their peers, have social power, are overly concerned about their popularity, and like to dominate or be in charge of others.
- Others are more isolated from their peers and may be depressed or anxious, have low self esteem, be less involved in school, be easily pressured by peers, or not identify with the emotions or feelings of others.

# Children likely factors

Children who have these factors are also more likely to bully others;

- Are aggressive or easily frustrated
- Have less parental involvement or having issues at home
- Think badly of others
- Have difficulty following rules
- View violence in a positive way
- Have friends who bully others
- Remember, those who bully others do not need to be stronger or bigger than those they bully. The power imbalance can come from a number of source -- popularity, strength, cognitive ability -- and children who bully may have more than one of these characteristics.

# Warning Signs for Bullying

- There are many warning signs that may indicate that someone is affected by bullying -- either being bullied or bullying others. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying. Not all children who are bullied or are bullying others ask for help.
- It is important to talk with the children who show signs of being bullied or bullying others. These warning signs can also point to other issues or problems, such as depression or substance abuse. Talking to the child can help identify the root of the problem.

# Signs a Child Is Being Bullied

Look for changes in the child. However, be aware that not all children who are bullied exhibit warning signs.

Some signs that may point to a bullying problem are:

- \*Unexplainable injuries
- \*Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- \*Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- \*Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- \*Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- \*Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- \*Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- \*Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- \*Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

# Signs a Child Is Bullying Others

**Kids may be bullying others if they:**

- Get into physical or verbal fights
- Have friends who bully others
- Are increasingly aggressive
- Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blame others for their problems
- Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity



# Why Don't Kids Ask For Help?

- Statistics from the 2018 Indicators of School Crime and Safety PDF show that only 20% of school bullying incidents were reported. Kids don't tell adults for many reasons:
- Bullying can make a child feel helpless. Kids may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or a tattletale.
- Kids may fear backlash from the kid who bullied them.
- Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Kids may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak.
- Kids who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or could understand.
- Kids may fear being rejected by their peers. Friends can help protect kids from bullying, and kids can fear losing this support.

# Effects of Bullying

- Bullying can affect everyone -- those who are bullied, those who bully, and those who witness bullying. Bullying is linked to many negative outcomes including impacts on mental health, substance use, and suicide. It is important to talk to kids to determine whether bullying -- or something else -- is a concern.

**Kids who are bullied can experience negative physical, social, emotional, academic, and mental health issues. Kids who are bullied are more likely to experience:**

- Depression and anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy. These issues may persist into adulthood.
- Health complaints
- Decreased academic achievement -- GPA and standardized test scores—and school participation. They are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.
- A very small number of bullied children might retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied.

# Kids who bully others

**Kids who bully others can also engage in violent and other risky behaviors into adulthood. Kids who bully are more likely to:**

- Abuse alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults
- Get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school
- Engage in early sexual activity
- Have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults
- Be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children as adults

**Kids who witness bullying are more likely to:**

- Have increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs
- Have increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety
- Miss or skip school

# 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. This risk can be increased further when these kids are not supported by parents, peers, and schools. Bullying can make an unsupportive situation worse.

# Bullying and Trauma

- Bullying can have lasting impacts on everyone involved: the person being bullied; bystanders who witness the bullying; and the person who bullies others. In fact, bullying is considered an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). ACEs are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on a person's development, the way they interact with others, and how they perform in school. Research has shown that children reporting more ACEs may be more likely to exhibit bullying behavior.

# Understanding Trauma

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines trauma as a result of an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that an individual experiences as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. These experiences can have lasting adverse effects on a person's mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing.

**Childhood traumatic stress occurs when traumatic events overwhelm a child's or teenager's ability to cope, such as:**

- Neglect and psychological, physical, or sexual abuse
- Domestic violence or intimate partner violence
- Community and school violence (including bullying)
- Natural disasters
- Terrorism, war, and refugee experiences
- Serious accidents, life-threatening illness, or sudden or violent loss of a loved one

- Military family-related stressors, such as parental deployment, loss, or injury



# Signs of Traumatic Stress

- While each child may react differently to trauma, parents, caretakers, and teachers may be able to recognize some [signs of traumatic stress](#). For example, preschool children may have nightmares or fear of separation. Elementary school children may feel shame or anxiety, or have trouble concentrating. Kids in middle and high school may show signs of depression or engage in self-harm behaviors. Child trauma survivors are more likely to have academic problems and increased involvement with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

# The Connection Between Bullying and Traumatic Stress

- Every individual is different and incidents that traumatize one person may not affect another. As stated by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), children or teens who have been exposed to trauma and violence may be more likely to bully others and be bullied.
- Some children who experience trauma and bullying may have strong feelings of distress, while other children may appear desensitized. As an example, a study on bullying and post-traumatic stress found that some children may repress their thoughts or feelings about what took place. This can lead to numbness or loss of interest in activities. This study also found that children may experience intrusive thoughts, such as sudden flashbacks of their bullying experience. It is important that caregivers understand how to respond to bullying and are sensitive to possible traumatic stress.

# What Helps After Trauma from Bullying

Parents, teachers, and other trusted adults can help children or teens who experience traumatic stress from bullying. According to NCTSN's Effective Treatments for Youth Trauma, some approaches that help children and teenagers who have experienced trauma, including bullying, are:

- Ensuring the child or teen is safe and seek ways to prevent future bullying experiences
- Talking through what happened and why, to help clear up misconceptions about their role in the traumatic event
- Teaching stress management and relaxation techniques, to help them cope

Some children and teenagers may also need professional help to treat stress related from bullying and/or other traumatic experiences. Healthcare providers can make referrals for treatment.

# How Schools and Teachers Can Help

Schools can adopt a trauma-informed approach, by training teachers and staff skills to handle and recognize traumatic stress or other signs of trauma. These skills allow teachers to help or find other supports and services for students in need.

Resources like the Trauma-Sensitive Schools Training Package from The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) may help schools adopt trauma-informed approaches to create safe and supportive learning environments. These include:

- Educating school staff about trauma and its effects
- Promoting physical and emotional safety in relationships and the environment
- Reducing trauma-related triggers in the school environment
- Considering trauma in all assessment and protocol behavior plans
- Ensuring students and families have voice, choice, and empowerment

# Trauma-informed approaches

- By adopting trauma-informed approaches, schools can help prevent bullying and trauma at school, and provide a positive school culture for both students and staff.
- Parents, caregivers, teachers, and schools all play an important role in preventing and addressing bullying and its harmful effects.

# . Do your part to prevent bullying!

Bullying isn't limited to children and our youth. Bullying happens amongst adults as well and occurs in places such as:

- College/any type of school or learning institution
- Workplace
- Bars/ Entertainment Venues
- At home
- Online

**Not everybody is kind. Bullying is a sad and unfortunate reality in life. Do your part to prevent bullying!**

<https://www.stopbullying.gov>