



Let's Talk About Bullying

BY SHERRY ROCHA

Bullying has been around for ages. That doesn't mean it's ok, or we should get used to it. It is a persistent problem for all ages, and now it's reaching into our early childhood programs. What can program administrators do? Some definitions and tips are below.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying has been described as a student's repeated exposure to negative actions on the part of one or more students in which there is an imbalance of power between bullies and the victim. Some children learn that by bullying others, they can get ahead. It can affect the goals of education if not handled well.

While the behaviors of young children can sometimes be aggressive, they lack the more strategic and deliberate actions that typically define bullying. Still, early behaviors can be precursors to later behavior, so awareness and [positive interventions are needed](#). Bullying prevention can be embedded into SEL practices, diversity awareness, and behavior guidance practices of early childhood programs.

HOW COMMON IS BULLYING?

Most studies look at bullying as something that involves older children. Research on early childhood bullying is still developing. The [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program \(OBPP\)](#) is considered one of the most effective school-based anti-bullying programs that schools and centers study. Its founder, Dan Olweus, Ph.D, found that 35-40% of boys characterized as bullies in grades 6-9 had been convicted of at least three officially registered crimes by the age of 24. Bullies sometimes teach their children to be bullies.

PREVENTION AND GUIDANCE CONCERNING BULLYING

There are things parents, teachers, and friends can do to prevent or [stop bullying](#). During the early childhood years, programs to help prevent bullying are helpful. Teachers and parents should be role models of caring behavior. Children raised in safe and nurturing environments will learn to be caring individuals. As children's abilities develop, they can learn anger management, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills.

TEACHERS AND PARENTS CAN ALSO:

- Dispel myths that bullying is part of childhood.
- Encourage a positive environment by stating desirable behavior instead of negative behavior.
- Emphasize respect, fairness, caring, and responsibility in classrooms.
- Incorporate lessons about appropriate social skills in classrooms and everywhere; provide words for children to use.

- Understand the seriousness of bullying.
- Encourage children to consider the needs of others.
- Parents can arrange play groups for their children.

A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM SHOULD:

- Promote a caring, respectful environment
- Help victims help themselves
- Challenge the bullies' thinking
- Consider the effects of peer pressure
- Elicit students' input

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA). (2025, February 5). *Get help now*. StopBullying.gov. <https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/get-help-now>

The Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life. (n.d.). *Olweus bullying prevention program*, Clemson University. Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Clemson University. <https://clemsonolweus.org/>

Temkin, D., & Snow, K. (2015, August 18). *To prevent bullying, focus on early childhood*. NAEYC. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/prevent-bullying-focus-early-childhood>

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