



# Bullying in Schools

## What is bullying?

Bullying is usually an intentional behavior, repeated over time, intended to harm. It was often once thought that bullies targeted 'weaker' children (Bacchini, Esposito & Affuso 2009). Whilst that can still be the case, it is now known that any child can be a target of bullying behavior.

## Where does bullying occur?

Bullying can occur in any social setting from birth through to aged-care facilities. Precursors to bullying can be seen in infant behavior by the time they start primary school.

Bullying can occur in:

- Families
- Schools
- Workplaces
- Sporting & recreational clubs
- Churches

Children are not born with the skills to read and understand social norms, rules, solve problems, and to see the consequences of their behavior. Rather, these need to be learned and taught. Bullying is best addressed when it is framed as a learning opportunity for the child by parents and teachers. If a child tells a parent or teacher that they are being bullied, the child should be affirmed and see that their report is acted upon. It is right to speak out.

## What behavior does bullying include?

Traditional forms of bullying include:

1. *Physical bullying*: hitting, pinching, kicking, hair pulling, spitting, aggression
2. *Verbal bullying*: insults, name-calling, put-downs, teasing, threats
3. *Social bullying*: isolating, ignoring, leaving out, or embarrassing in front of peers
4. *Reputation bullying*: rumors, gossip, spreading false information, disregarding privacy

Cyber-bullying includes:

1. *Texting*: malicious messages, bombarding inbox, unwanted messages
2. *Email*: sending offensive messages, forwarding a message without permission, 'hoax' messages that appear to be sent from the victim, target, or an unknown source
3. *Social networking*: comments that impact self-esteem, disrespect privacy, cause victim to feel publically humiliated
4. *Images*: shared without permission, used to humiliate, digitally manipulated

## How serious is bullying?

Bullying tends to have an accumulative impact. Therefore, even 'minor' incidents, repeated over time, can have a damaging impact. All bullying should be treated seriously and not brushed aside.

## How common is bullying?

Surveys suggest that in any given year, about 50% of students in high schools are targets of bullying, and about 1/3 of students engage in bullying. About 1/2 of those students who bully others, are also targets of bullying themselves. Only about 20% of students are not involved in bullying in any way. In terms of bullying throughout a student's school life, 80% - 90% of students report being bullied on at least one occasion/period whilst at school (Marsh, McGee, Nada-Raja & Williams, 2010; Dukes, Stein & Zane, 2009; Wang, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009).

## What are the impacts of bullying?

The impacts of bullying vary greatly. Not all students seem to suffer adversely, and some appear to be able to 'bounce back', 'take it in their stride', and dismiss the bullying with 'humor' which defuses the situation. However, bullying can have significant damaging impacts, even if the impacts seem to be well hidden. Common impacts include (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010):

- Low self-image
- Fearful for safety
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- School grades drop
- Eating disorders
- Suicidal thoughts

A parent or teacher who sees these impacts should raise the topic of bullying with the child.

### Sources:

Bacchini, Esposito & Affuso (2009) Social experience and school bullying, *Journal of Community & Applied Psychology*, 19, 17-32.

Bowes et.al (2010) Families promote emotional and behavioral resilience to bullying. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 51, 809-817.

Dukes, Stein & Zane (2009) Effect of relational bullying on attitudes, behavior and injury among adolescent bullies, victims, and bully-victims. *Social Science Journal*, 46, 671-688.

Hinduja & Patchin (2010) Bullying, cyber-bullying, and suicide. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 14, 206-221.

Marsh, McGee, Nada-Raja & Williams (2010) Text bullying and traditional bullying among New Zealand secondary school students. *Journal of Adolescence*, 33, 237-240.

Wang, Iannotti & Nansel (2009) School bullying among adolescents in the United States: Physical, verbal, relational and cyber. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 44, 368-375.

## What do we know about kids who are uninvolved in bullying, as either victims or bullies?

Children who are uninvolved in bullying have the following characteristics:

- High levels of parental support and involvement/interest in their activities
- Moderate number of good friends, unlike bullies (isolated); bully-victims (many friends) and victims (2-3 friends)
- High levels of self-esteem
- High capacity for empathy

## What helps to stop a child bullying?

Parents who have anti-bullying attitudes, are more likely to have students who cease bullying when schools/teachers bring cases of bullying to their attention. In cases where parents are defensive or dismissive of their child's conduct the bullying is more likely to continue and escalate (Bowes et.al 2010).

## What can schools do?

- Talk about the reality of bullying
- Appoint and promote an anti-bullying coordinator
- Encourage students to report bullying to their class teacher, playground teacher, or the anti-bullying coordinator
- Students allegedly involved in bullying, should be counseled on first report, and this logged with the anti-bullying coordinator
- Second and subsequent reports of bullying should result in parents being notified, for their help in reinforcing changes
- In persistent cases, students may need to be separated or have restrictions placed on their movement around the school property

### Helpful Services & Organizations

Bullying see [www.bullyingnoway.com.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au)

Kids Helpline see [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au) or 1800 55 1800

Cyber bullying see [www.thinkuknow.org.au](http://www.thinkuknow.org.au)

Lifeline see [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) or 13 11 14