

Bullying: What We Know – and Can Do

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NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and Prevention
www.njbullying.org

Traditional view

'boys will be boys', 'girls are mean' 'it's a dog-eat-dog world' 'life is cruel' 'rite of passage' 'people are like that' 'you have to get tough' 'competition builds character' 'you can handle it' 'life isn't always fair'

= inevitable, the nature of children/people, growth experience, strengthening

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Modern view – *bullying is created by adults:*

- modeling of bullying behavior
- acceptance of bullying as normal
- inaction when bullying occurs
- exposing persons to social systems in which bullying is rewarded or implicitly accepted.

DEFINITION OF BULLYING

A person is being bullied when:

- he or she is exposed repeatedly to negative acts by a peer or peers
- there is intent to harm
- there is an imbalance of power so that the person who is being bullied has a difficult time defending himself or herself.

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Bullying may involve either:

- **direct actions (e.g., hitting, name-calling, texting)**
- **indirect actions (e.g., avoiding, social exclusion, spreading rumors, texting others, altering a website)**

Teasing/Normal Conflict	Bullying
Variability in roles (negative acts in both directions)	Always the same target
Primary goal is not to harm.	Intent to harm
Playful or limited in extent, because participants equal in power	Harmful, directed at vulnerabilities, negative acts increase with target's distress
Relationship valued for mutual benefit, concern for other	Seeking power, control or material gain as primary motive for relationship
Remorseful, takes responsibility, makes effort to address problem	No remorse, blames victim, discounts target's point of view
<i>Modified from schwablearning.org</i>	<i>orig. Bullying at School, D. Olweus</i>

Prevalence

- **most common serious problem of the school-age child**
- **wide world occurrence**
- **middle school years peak period**

All persons affected (the Bullying Circle)

- as bullying or bullied
- as bystanders (active, passive, 'activated')
- feel afraid, powerless, guilty, diminished empathy
- tension, numbing, fears of openness and self-expression
- wide range of lasting negative effects

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There is evidence that bullying is harmful in the following ways:

Added injury: In children already suffering or at risk from a wide range of illnesses, conditions and characteristics, bullying increases vulnerability and suffering.

A source of problems: children may not have developed certain problems or developed the problems as severely if bullying had not occurred.

A sign of problems: indicates that other serious problems are present, in the child and in the school/setting

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Selected negative outcomes for those bullied

(lower) academic performance, (recurrent) abdominal pain, alcohol/tobacco /other drug use, anxiety, Asperger's (and other developmental conditions), binge eating disorder, body dysmorphic disorder, (chronic) abdominal pain, (increased) doctor visits, depression, (poor) diabetes self-management, dysfunctional voiding, low body satisfaction, (after controlling for actual body weight), low self-esteem, (inhibited) physical activity (including in youth who are obese), psychosis, suicide, weapon-carrying and school shootings

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Gender differences

- males more likely to bully (males, females)
- males more likely to be bullied by males than females.
- in females, 'relational aggression' more common (manipulating relationships for negative effects on a peer) (males also engage in this)

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Those who bully:

- difficult relationships with peers and at home
- more authoritarian parenting *

but ...

- have good self-esteem
- adequate academic performance
- good social skills
- and are often popular

Bully/Victims

A small number of children both bully and are bullied
And tend to have more problems

*Characteristics targeted for bullying:

1. looks (e.g., obesity/shortness/)
2. race
3. gender identify and expression
4. poverty (family income)
5. religion
6. disability (e.g., learning differences, special health needs)
7. other characteristics (shyness, emotional expressiveness, less strength/athleticism, family conflict)

(ref: *Youth Voices Project*, Stan Davis, Charisse Nixon)

***Any perceived difference.
Any child may be bullied.***

WHAT TO DO

**Whole School or Systemic Model e.g. Olweus,
or School Climate Model, e.g. Cohen)**

- **school the most common site**
- **change the culture of schools**
- ***adult*-initiated and led (children involved)**

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Strengthen School Climate

- **emphasize warmth, engagement, inclusion, community**
- **positive relations and shared understanding between staff**
- **positive staff-student interactions**
- **support/inclusion for all (diverse clubs/activities, proactive education, increase support for vulnerable groups)**
- **character education /social-emotional learning/ 'universal' social skills training**
- **clear/consensus expectations ('how we do things here')**

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School-Wide

- **Administrative support**
- **Coordinating group/staff discussions/training**
- **Assessment (surveys, reporting system)**
- **Positive staff-staff and staff-student relations**
- **Proactive effort to identify all incidents/relationships**
- **Supervise high-risk areas (schoolyard, lunchroom, school bus, team activities, locker room, cyberspace)**
- **Consistent rules and sanctions (staff consensus) (well-known to students, staff, parents, community)**
- **Involve parents**
- **Activate peer bystanders**

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Classroom

- **Clear, consistent rules**
- **Regular meetings**
- **Collaborative learning**
- **Curriculum integration**
- **Proactive work on relationships**
- **Parent involvement**

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Individual

- **Proactive information-gathering on vulnerability and relations**
- **Meeting with each child who was bullied and call/see parent (apologize, take responsibility, absolve)**
- **Meeting with each child who bullied and call parent**
- **Consequences for the bullying child (reasonable, invariable, escalating), then (post-incident) reflection/empathy**
- **Assure and arrange increased support for the bullied child.**
- **Active monitoring after incidents.**

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Seven Measures Which Positively Impact Bullying

- 1. collaborative learning models**
- 2. friendship circles**
- 3. mentoring to strengthen school engagement**
- 4. diverse clubs/activities**
- 5. proactive diversity education**
- 6. staff-student positive relations**
- 7. staff-staff positive relations**

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What can parents do about bullying? (1)

- Good relations/communication with children.
- Inform yourself.
- Expect/ ask/ demand adequate school action.
- Expect/ ask/ demand that owners of social organizations, including networking sites and internet providers, address bullying.
- Ask your child how children treat other children at school (and how your child is treated); listening is more important than advice.

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What can parents do about bullying? (2)

- When you hear children speak badly of another child, *gently* express discomfort, and empathy for the scorned child.
- Be present at your child's school; don't wait to be invited, ask to volunteer.
- Take action with other concerned parents. Meet (as a group) with school leaders; ask specifically about the school's approach.

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What can parents do about bullying? (3)

- *Never* ignore bullying, don't walk by; if you can't intervene directly, report it.
- Support bullied kids in every possible way.
- Seek legal advice and government support.
- Don't accept leaders who bully, including teachers; speak out, insist on change.
- Consider changing schools, if possible, as a last resort.

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (1)

- **Proactively identify all incidents/relationships**
- **Actively scan for bullying involvement, consider bullying as a factor or even cause of problems/behavioral changes**
- **Actively identify/track at-risk children**
- **Anticipatory education/support when students likely to be targeted**
- **Intensify/focus on (creative) support for at-risk children through activities, relationship-building, collaboration with counseling resources**

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (2)

- Have a bullying-aware classroom (materials, meetings)**
- Address/engage negative peer 'leaders'**
- Be clear about what works and doesn't work**
- Model positive relations with other teachers/staff**
- Increase positive staff (teachers, aides, any adults in classroom) and student interactions**

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (3)

- **Self-aware of biases and compensate**
- **Pay as much positive attention to improvement as to achievement**
- **Emphasize/support/value diversity (even more so if low staff-student matching)**
- **Use character education /social-emotional learning /'universal' social skills approaches**
- **Clear (ideally consensus) expectations ('how we do things here')**

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (4)

- **Consistent rules/sanctions (well-known to students, staff, parents, community)**
- **Be part of coordinating group/staff discussions/training**
- **Help monitor/survey/data-collect on bullying**
- **Let students provide anonymous data (to you, and to pass along to admin)**
- **Actively supervise high-risk areas/activities**

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WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO (5)

- **Collaborative learning ('jigsaw' – Aronson)**
- **Curriculum integration (all subjects)**
- **Parent involvement**
- **Clearly convey to children that bullying is wrong**
- **An atmosphere of warmth, acceptance and support**

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What Can Professionals Do?

- Screen for bullying involvement, consider bullying as a factor or even a cause of presenting problems
- Proactive identification of at-risk children, creative support through school action and/or preventive counseling
- Have a bullying-aware office
- Challenge negative leaders
- As a community leader, expect schools to address bullying, raise parental expectations
- Be clear about what works and doesn't work
- Advocate for stronger law

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Systemic approach works

- shown to reduce bullying substantially in well-done intervention studies in many different countries, including the U.S., with improvements in subsequent years ...
- *if administrative commitment and support*
- *if staff 'buy-in'*
- *if ongoing*

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Be clear about what doesn't work

Zero tolerance or '3 strikes'

**Social skills training/psychotherapy
as *primary* modalities and only directed at those
bullying or those bullied when incidents have
occurred**

Peer mediation and conflict resolution

**One-shot (e.g., assemblies)
or short-term interventions.**

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OLWEUS

Our moral obligation
to help bullied
children.

RESOURCES

NJ Coalition for Bullying Awareness and
Prevention

www.njbullying.org, (908) 522-2581

Stan Davis' *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*

www.stopbullyingnow.com)

National School Climate Center
www.schoolclimate.org

www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov

www.cyberbullying.us

www.bullyinginfo.gov

www.csriu.org