



## The Scope and Impact of Bullying

### What is bullying?

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting, kicking, threatening another, teasing, name-calling, excluding from a group, or sending mean notes or e-mails. Often, children are bullied not just once or twice but over and over (Olweus, 1993; Roland, 1989; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Verbal bullying is the most common type of bullying experienced by both boys and girls. Boys are more likely to be physically bullied by their peers (Olweus, 1993; Nansel et al., 2001); girls are more likely to report being targets of rumor-spreading and sexual comments (Nansel et al., 2001). Girls are also more likely than boys to bully each other through social exclusion (Olweus, 2002).

### How common is bullying?

Approximately 30 percent of all children and youth in grades 6 through 10 have been bullied or have bullied other children "sometimes" or more often within a semester, according to research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (Nansel et al., 2001).

### Effects of bullying

Bullying can have serious effects on children who are bullied. These children are more likely than their peers to be depressed, lonely, and anxious; have low self-esteem; feel unwell; have more migraine headaches; and think about suicide (see Limber, 2002, for summary).

### Children who bully

Children who bully tend to have average or above average self-esteem. Other characteristics may include:

- Impulsive, hot-headed personalities
- Lack of empathy
- Difficulty conforming to rules
- Positive attitudes toward violence (Olweus, 1993)

### Children who bully are more likely than their peers to:

- Get into frequent fights
- Be injured in a fight
- Vandalize property
- Steal property
- Drink alcohol
- Smoke
- Be truant from school
- Drop out of school
- Carry a weapon (Nansel et al., 2001, 2003; Olweus, 1993)

### Research has also shown that:

- Children who bully are more likely to report that they own guns for risky reasons, such as to gain respect or frighten others (Cunningham et al., 2000); and
- Boys who were identified as bullies in middle school were four times as likely as their non-bullying peers to have more than one criminal conviction by age 24 (Olweus, 1993).

## What works in bullying prevention?

There are a number of school-based bullying prevention programs. Although they vary in size and scope, the most promising programs incorporate the following characteristics:

- A focus on creating a school-wide environment, or climate, that discourages bullying;
- Surveys students to assess the nature and extent of bullying behavior and attitudes toward bullying;
- Training to prepare staff to recognize and respond to bullying;
- Development of consistent rules against bullying;
- Review and enhancement of the school's disciplinary code related to bullying behavior;
- Classroom activities to discuss issues related to bullying;
- Integration of bullying prevention themes across the curriculum;
- Individual and/or group work with children who have been bullied;
- Individual work with children who have bullied their peers;
- Involvement of parents in bullying prevention and/or intervention activities; and
- Use of teacher or staff groups to increase staff knowledge and motivation related to bullying.

## References

- Cunningham, P. B., Henggeler, S. W., Limber, S. P., Melton, G. B., and Nation, M. A.** (2000). Patterns and correlates of gun ownership among nonmetropolitan and rural middle school students. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 29, 432-442.
- Limber, S. P.** (2002). *Bullying among children and youth*. Proceedings of the Educational Forum on Adolescent Health: Youth Bullying. Chicago: American Medical Association. Available online: <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama1/pub/upload/mm/39/youthbullying.pdf>
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M. D., Haynie, D. L., Ruan, W. J., & Scheidt, P. C.** (2003). Relationships between bullying and violence among US youth. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 157, 348-353.
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P.** (2001). Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth: Prevalence and Association With Psychosocial Adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, 2094-2100.
- Olweus, D.** (1993). *Bullying at school: what we know and what we can do*. NY: Blackwell.
- Olweus, D.** (August, 2002). *Bullying among children and youth*. Keynote address presented at the National Technical Assistance Meeting, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U. S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.
- Roland, E.** (1989). A system oriented strategy against bullying. In E. Roland & E. Munthe (Eds.), *Bullying: An international perspective*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Smith, P.K., & Sharp, S.** (1994). *School bullying: Insights and perspectives*. London: Routledge.