



## Sample Newsletter Article: *Bullying Among Children and Youth*

### 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 others, teasing, name-calling, excluding from a group, or sending mean notes or e-mails. A child who is being bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself. Often, children are bullied not just once or twice but over and over (Olweus, 1993; Roland, 1989; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

### How much of a problem is bullying?

Unfortunately, bullying is very common during the elementary and middle school years. In one study of fourth through sixth graders, 25 percent of students admitted to bullying another student several times or more often during the school term (Melton et al., 1998). Another study found that 80 percent of middle school students reported engaging in some form of bullying during the past 30 days, with 15 percent doing so frequently (Bosworth et al., 1999). In a national study of more than 15,000 students in grades 6 through 10, 17 percent reported having been bullied "sometimes" or more often during the school term, and 19 percent reported bullying others "sometimes" or more often (Nansel et al., 2001).

### Isn't bullying just part of growing up?

Perhaps this attitude is why bullying is still common in American schools. There is a lot of research that shows that being a victim of a bully can affect students' self-esteem and how they approach school (Juvonen & Graham, 2001). Students who are often bullied by other students may have serious levels of depression and anxiety, and they are more likely

than other students to think about suicide (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Grills & Ollendick, 2002).

Victims of bullying also are more likely than other students to report that they do not want to go to school because of fear of being bullied (Slee, 1995). Some children who are bullied decide, in turn, to bully others. For all of these reasons, it is important that schools address the bullying problem in their school.

### Where does bullying happen?

Most bullying happens at school and on the school bus to and from school (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992). Bullying also can take place when kids walk to and from school, but this is not quite as common. Bullying is more likely to happen when large groups of students are supervised by a small number of adults, including during lunchtime, recess, physical education, and when kids change classes (Espelage & Asidao, 2001; Olweus, 1993). Students also report being bullied in the classroom when their teacher's attention is diverted (e.g., when the teacher turns around to write on the board or is distracted helping other students).

### Do boys and girls bully in the same ways?

Both boys and girls bully, but there are some interesting differences in how they bully. Boys tend to be bullied by other boys, whereas girls are bullied both by boys and girls (Melton et al., 1998; Olweus, 1993). The most common form of bullying for both boys and girls is verbal bullying (teasing or name-calling). Boys are more likely to say that they are physically bullied. Girls are more likely to report being targets of rumor-spreading and sexual comments (Nansel et al., 2001). Both boys and girls

engage in what is called *relational aggression* (Knight et al., 2000). Individuals who use relational aggression tend to exclude students from a group activity (e.g., a game on the playground or a party) or they might threaten to not be someone's friend unless he or she does what they say. Girls are somewhat more likely than boys to bully each other through social isolation (Olweus, 2002).

### **Who takes part in bullying?**

Bullying often involves groups of students picking on another student (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Espelage & Asidao, 2001). Within these groups, there often is a "ring leader" and a number of followers. In addition, many students observe bullying but do not necessarily take any action—they neither engage in the bullying nor help stop the bullying. Children and youth are often reluctant to try to stop bullying because they are afraid of being bullied themselves, because they want to be part of a popular group, or because they simply are not sure how to help.

### **Who is bullied?**

Any child can be bullied. It is important not to blame or look for faults in children who are bullied, because *nobody* deserves to be abused by their peers. However, understanding some common characteristics of children who are bullied may help adults identify children who are likely targets of bullying and help protect them from abuse. Research indicates that children who are bullied tend to be more socially isolated than other children (Espelage & Asidao, 2001, Nansel et al., 2001). These children may seem to be easy targets for bullying because they have few friends to help protect them. They also may be shy, sensitive, or insecure children (Olweus, 1993). Boys who are bullied are often (though not always) physically

weaker than their peers. Educators, parents, and others should be especially watchful for bullying of children with disabilities, as these children are often bullied by their peers.

### **What causes a student to start bullying?**

There is no one single cause of bullying among children and youth. Rather, there are many factors in a child's environment (his or her family, peer group, classroom, school, neighborhood, and society) that can contribute to bullying behavior. Students who bully are more likely to witness violence in their home, have little parental supervision, and lack warmth and involvement from their parents (Olweus, 1993). Children who bully also are likely to "hang out" with others who bully and feel that they gain their popularity or "coolness" by teasing other students (Pellegrini et al., 1999). Bullying thrives in schools where faculty and staff do not address bullying, where there is no policy against bullying, and where there is little supervision of students—especially during lunch, bathroom breaks, and recess. Negative models of bullying behavior are also prevalent throughout society—especially in television, movies, and video games.

### **What can be done to reduce bullying in school?**

The good news is that much can be done to stop bullying in our schools. A single school assembly, PTA meeting, or social studies lesson on bullying won't solve the problem, however. What is needed is a team effort by students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other staff to change the culture or climate of schools. Many schools are meeting this challenge. To learn more about bullying and what your school or community can do to address bullying, visit [www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov).

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