

## Bullying

This section has been taken from the publication **Not In Our School - Preventing and Addressing Bullying and Intolerance, A guide for law enforcement (2015)**. It is being reproduced in part here, as it does a great job covering many of the issues surrounding the issue of bullying. While the guide is designed to help deal with bullying in K-12 school settings, the behaviors and ages encountered in youth programs is the same. The complete guide can be downloaded at: <https://www.niot.org/sites/default/files/cops-p334-pub.pdf>

### The accepted bullying definitions: Something old and something new

A common but outdated perception of a bully is a bigger kid physically overpowering another child to get his lunch money. Today however, especially with the anonymity of the Internet, bullying is far more complex than that. The U.S. Department of Education defines bullying in the following way:

“Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include

- *an imbalance of power*: Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people;
- *repetition*: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.”<sup>6</sup>

An imbalance of power may include physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or threats to popularity that are used in attempts to control or harm others.

There are three main kinds of bullying:

1. **Physical.** Hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking personal property or making mean or rude hand gestures. [NOTE: Physical bullying that involves actual or threatened violence, theft, or damage to property is a crime and needs to be reported to law enforcement. If it is based on a protected status, such as gender or national origin, it also must be reported to the Title IX coordinator.]
2. **Verbal.** Teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, or threats of physical harm. [NOTE: As with physical bullying, if verbal bullying is based on a protected status, it must be reported to the Title IX coordinator.]

3. **Relational.** Leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors, or embarrassing someone in public.

Bullying often happens under the radar of teachers and other adults. When a young person is accused of being mean to another, they might respond with, “I was just kidding.” This is one way bullying can start and gradually accelerate. The target feels bad, but out of shame, she does not report it. In other cases, a youth is threatened that worse things will happen if he reports.

Cyberbullying, defined as “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices,”<sup>7</sup> has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Cyberbullying is willful because it consists of intentional actions that, like other forms of bullying, are repeated with the intent to hurt another person. New forms of cyberbullying continue to emerge as different electronic applications (“apps”) become available, making it possible to anonymously share words, photos, or videos with large numbers of people. The imbalance of power in cyberbullying manifests differently: Power in cyberspace may be gained from access to information, photos, or videos along with the capacity to spread the information quickly, rendering the target powerless to stop or respond to it.<sup>8,9</sup>

### **Bullying has been linked to criminal behavior**

Some researchers have suggested that those who bully others are at higher risk of becoming involved in antisocial and criminal behavior later in their lives,<sup>17</sup> including dating and intimate partner violence.<sup>18</sup> In one study, 60 percent of those characterized as bullies in grades 6 to 9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24.<sup>19</sup> These statistics underscore the importance of helping students who bully transform their behavior.

### **Intolerance and bias**

Intolerance is often at the heart of bullying, revealed through unkind remarks and negative stereotypes regarding a person’s race, ethnicity, language, social class, appearance, sexual orientation, religion, or physical ability.

Peers, family members, teachers, coaches, or other adults in a child’s life sometimes encourage these intolerant attitudes. They may use anti-gay epithets or make remarks about people of different religions or racial groups or disparaging comments about a person’s weight, appearance, or intelligence, all the while unaware that their children are listening. Intolerant behaviors are also learned through exposure to television, music, and the Internet. For example, students may hear news items about people of Middle Eastern descent being called terrorists and then target their own peers who wear turbans or hijabs. They may mimic anti-gay remarks about effeminate peers or repeat the overwhelming number of insulting comments about overweight people they hear in movies. Students may express intolerance out loud in a classroom or public place or online or in other secret places.

Adults are often unaware that bullying is taking place. In a diverse community, people may assume that since their child has been exposed to different races, sexual orientations, etc., he or she will automatically be tolerant. Children need adult guidance to help them understand that all people deserve respect and equal opportunities. While many organizations are dedicated to addressing bullying, often the link between bullying and intolerance is ignored. As part of

bullying prevention efforts, it is crucial to examine intolerance and help children develop accepting attitudes about people from different backgrounds.

### **Where do people learn to be intolerant? How does intolerance foster bullying incidents?**

Statistics show the link between bullying and intolerance. For example, consider the following:

- 65 percent of parents whose children have Asperger's Syndrome report their children have been victimized by peers.<sup>20</sup>
- 86 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) students report being bullied at school.<sup>21</sup>
- 67 percent of Sikh youth reported that they are bullied in school, especially those wearing turbans.<sup>22</sup>
- 80 percent of Muslim youth reported being bullied, and 50 percent said they had been taunted in front of teachers or administrators.<sup>23</sup>

These numbers signal the need to help students learn to be empathetic and get to know people who are different from themselves. School resource officers and law enforcement officials can help children and adults change their attitudes, and in turn, change their behavior.

### **It's never too early to teach and to learn**

Starting in preschool, children need to learn about differences and about being kind to others. Skills for social-emotional learning (SEL) can be taught at home and in school. Children can learn how to communicate and express feelings, how to be empathetic, and how to control their impulses and think before they act.

Playful teasing and calling other children embarrassing nicknames, which can begin innocently, should be stopped as well. The target may laugh on the outside to cover up hurting on the inside. Starting at a young age, children also need to be given clear messages that hurtful remarks and exhibiting cruel behavior are harmful acts and will not be tolerated.

### **When a child is being bullied: Changes to look out for**

How can adults discern that a child is being bullied, especially amidst the typical angst associated with growing up? The biggest warning sign is a dramatic change in behavior. Parents may notice that suddenly their child comes home from school and locks himself in his bedroom. His answers are mostly just one word and are delivered in an angry tone. He says he has a stomach ache and doesn't want to go to school. Absences mount. A dramatic change in his demeanor is observed. Teachers notice his grades are starting to drop.

When asked if anything is wrong, he says no. He may not want to speak to teachers, administrators, or others in authority. Students of any age are often embarrassed that they have been bullied, or they may feel like they deserve it. Teens might worry that the bullying will get worse with adult intervention.

Unfortunately, if these incidents are not handled appropriately, the bullying often does get worse. If adults bring the target together with the child who is bullying her, the conflict might be exacerbated by intimidation or threats, or the bullying can go underground and become even more secretive. Therefore, handling bullying incidents must be done carefully.

School resource personnel and law enforcement officials can be an important extra set of eyes and ears and provide a different perspective before, during, and after the school day.

These are potential signs that a child is being bullied:<sup>24</sup>

- Unexplained injuries
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches, feeling sick, or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating; kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem

Depression, anxiety, and isolation, among the most damaging effects of bullying, can have a lasting impact on a child's social identity and self esteem. Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, and—in rare instances—suicide or school shootings can also result from bullying. An eight-year longitudinal research study by The Lancet Psychiatry in 2015 reported that children who were bullied by peers only were more likely than children who were maltreated by adults to have mental health problems.<sup>25</sup> The impact of bullying can be life threatening and life changing for students of all ages and often persists into adulthood.

### **Responding to a child who has been bullied: Listening with empathy**

Building positive relationships and trust is important.

- Listen and take it seriously. When adults diminish the power of the child's experience or make an excuse for the behavior, a child may feel unsupported. Saying "Oh, he must have been joking around" or "Oh, he didn't really mean it" or "You're just too sensitive" or "Just walk away when he does it" is not helpful to the child.
- Stay unemotional and avoid being inflammatory or accusatory. Express your concern and empathy about what he is going through, but do not show anger or sadness. This may make him afraid to tell the truth again in the future.
- Discuss with the child why bullying happens. Make sure he understands that it is not his fault that he is a target. Explain that the person who bullies often has problems of his own, and bullying another child is his inappropriate way of dealing with those problems.
- Reassure the child that everyone will work together to make it better without retaliation from the bully. Often a child will feel like she is the only target. Explain that bullying is common, but not everyone talks about it.
- Explain that you will investigate the situation. Calm the students and parents down and reassure them. Explain that an overreaction or vengeful attitude by the parents may have the reverse effect and may cause the child to feel more shame and not supported.
- Inform the child's parents to not speak directly to the parents of the person who bullies, even if they know them well. This is rarely helpful. They are most likely going to be defensive if a parent says, "Your child has been bullying mine."

### **Successful strategies: Create identity safe and empathetic school climates**

A bullying prevention program cannot be successful without people simultaneously working to create a positive and welcoming school climate. School climate is defined as the quality and character of whole school environment. This includes how each member of the school community has a sense of belonging and feels valued and safe from physical or psychological harm.

A positive climate is achieved through shared goals and norms of behavior together with positive relationships between teachers and students and among students in an affirming organizational structure. Research has shown that a positive school climate fosters not only academic achievement but also improved student behavior and a reduction in bullying.<sup>33</sup>

Identity safe school climates are those in which educators work to ensure students that their social identities are an asset rather than a barrier to success in school. Acknowledging students' identities, rather than trying to ignore differences or being colorblind, can build the foundation for students to feel a sense of belonging.<sup>34</sup>

In spite of real and powerful social inequalities in the world at large, identity safety is an antidote to negative stereotyping in our society and to stereotype threat (the fear of confirming a negative stereotype). Research on stereotype threat shows that student behavior is impacted even by the worry that he or she may inadvertently confirm a negative stereotype. Improving school climate is critical when it comes to addressing bullying.<sup>35</sup>

### **Evidence-based strategies and procedures to prevent and respond to bullying**

Following are promising practices for school bullying prevention and response:<sup>37</sup>

- **Reporting systems.** Students should have several methods of reporting. Find out how students are informed of the reporting system. Effective methods include — official reporting forms available in the office; — identified staff who receive reports: administrators, teachers, counselors, and paraprofessional staff; — anonymous systems for students to report if they have observed a peer being bullied.
- **Supervised and safe campus.** Find out how the school collects data on bullying and learn how the campus is supervised during the school day and as students come to school in the morning and depart in the afternoon. Schools have specific bullying hot spots, like the hallways, cafeterias, locker rooms, school buses, and places in the school yard where there is less supervision. Develop plans to assure these areas have sufficient supervision.<sup>38</sup>
- **Staff training.** All staff members need training on definitions of bullying and intolerance; school policies; and how to recognize, respond to, and prevent bullying. New staff members need the full training, and information needs to be updated regularly.
- **Bullying curriculum and refusal skills.** Students need to be taught about bullying and intolerance as part of the curriculum during elementary, middle, and high school. They need to do role-plays to practice refusal skills and need to be taught how to be an upstander instead of a bystander.<sup>39</sup>
- **Additional supports for students who are bullied and those who bully.** Individual and small group counseling and skill-building groups need to be offered for those who have been bullied or who have bullied others repeatedly.

- **Parent education and involvement.** Parents need education so they can support their children in being safe at school, not engaging in bullying behaviors, and insuring siblings at home do not bully one another. Parents can also join and support [program]-wide events and efforts to prevent bullying.
- **Identity safe school climate building activities.** Empathy, positive relationships, and valuing each person’s background need to permeate the school environment and be reiterated in classrooms and school-wide activities.<sup>40</sup>
- **Assessment and evaluation.** [Program]-wide surveys are a useful way to assess the problem of bullying and to evaluate progress on bullying prevention programs. Parents should be notified when surveys are conducted and parental consent obtained as required. Responses should be kept confidential to protect privacy. Reports of bullying-related discipline are also useful to review. After findings are analyzed, they should be distributed and discussed.<sup>41</sup>

For all strategies used, it is important to monitor effectiveness and identify what works to reduce bullying in a particular school.

Stopbullying.gov is the federal hub on bullying prevention by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They offer a PowerPoint “Bullying Prevention Training Module” for staff and a set of PowerPoints in English and Spanish for parents and communities. <http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/training-center/index.html>

### **Appendix A. Sample Survey Questions**

Select from these questions to develop an electronic or paper survey for students. These questions can also be used for small or large focus group discussions by asking the questions and having the participants explain and elaborate on their answers.

1. If you could change one thing about the climate and culture of the program, what would it be?
2. Have you or other students from different racial backgrounds been teased and bullied by others in this classroom/school?
3. Do you think that immigrant students feel welcomed? Do they actively participate in all school activities?
4. Do you hear racist slurs, or have you seen racist graffiti around the campus?
5. Have you or other students been teased or called anti-gay names?
6. Have you heard the phrase “that’s so gay”?
7. Have you or other students been teased or bullied about being overweight?
8. Have you or others been teased or bullied about being dumb (not as smart)?
9. Have you or others been teased for how much money you or your family has?
10. Where do you see bullying and cruelty taking place?
11. “I feel safe here.” Is this statement true for you? Why or why not?

#### **Footnotes:**

6. “Bullying Definition,” Stopbullying.gov, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/index.html>.
7. Justin W. Patchin, “What is Cyberbullying?” Cyberbullying Research Center, last modified December 23, 2014, <http://cyberbullying.us/whatis-cyberbullying>.

8. Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin, *Cyberbullying: Identification, Prevention, and Response* (Eau Claire, WI: Cyberbullying Research Center, 2014), <http://www.cyberbullying.us/Cyberbullying-Identification-Prevention-Response.pdf>.
9. Understanding the Roles of Law Enforcement Officers in Community-Wide Bullying Prevention Efforts (Washington, DC: StopBullying.gov, 2011), [http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/training-center/hrsa\\_guide\\_law-enforcement-officers\\_508v2.pdf](http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/training-center/hrsa_guide_law-enforcement-officers_508v2.pdf).
17. Ann Shields and Dante Cicchetti, "Parental Maltreatment and Emotion Dysregulation as Risk Factors for Bullying and Victimization in Middle Childhood," *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 30, no. 3 (2001), 349–363.
18. Kathryn L. Falb et al., "School Bullying Perpetration and Other Childhood Risk Factors as Predictors of Adult Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration," *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine* 165, no. 10 (October 2001), 890–894, <http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1107602>.
19. Dan Olweus, *Bullying At School: What We Know and What We Can Do* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1993).
20. Shields and Cicchetti, "Parental Maltreatment" (see note 17).
21. Robert Kim, *A Report on the Status of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People in Education: Stepping Out of the Closet, Into the Light* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 2009), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505970.pdf>.
22. Go Home, Terrorist: A Report of Bullying against Sikh American School Children (Washington, DC: The Sikh Coalition, 2014), <http://www.sikhcoalition.org/documents/pdf/go-home-terrorist.pdf>.
23. "ING Efforts Against Student Bullying is Cited in Congressional Hearing," Islamic Networks Group, last modified April 6, 2011, <http://www.ing.org/2011/08/21/ing-efforts-against-student-bullying-is-cited-in-congressional-hearing/>.
24. Understanding the Roles of Law Enforcement Officers (see note 9).
25. Suzet Tanya Lereya et al., "Adult Mental Health Consequences of Peer Bullying and Maltreatment in Childhood: Two Cohorts in Two Countries" *Lancet Psychiatry* 2, no. 6 (June 2015), 524–531, [http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpsy/PIIS2215-0366\(15\)00165-0.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpsy/PIIS2215-0366(15)00165-0.pdf).
33. Dan Bellizio, December 2012 Policy Update: School Climate and Bully Prevention Trends State-by-State Assessment (New York: National School Climate Center, 2012), <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/policy/sc-brief-v6.pdf>.
34. Dorothy M. Steele and Becki Cohn-Vargas, *Identity Safe Classrooms: Places to Belong & Learn* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2013).
35. Bellizio, 2012 Policy Update (see note 33).
36. Susan M. Swearer, Susan P. Limber, and Rebecca Alley, "Developing and Implementing an Effective Anti-Bullying Policy," ch. 4 in *Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Realistic Strategies for Schools* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009).
37. Maria M. Ttofi and David P. Farrington, "What Works in Preventing Bullying: Effective Elements of Anti-Bullying Programs," *Journal of Aggression, Conflict, and Peace Research* 1, no. 1 (2009), 13–24.
38. *Measuring Bullying, Victimization, Perpetration, and Bystander Experiences* (Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).
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40. Ibid.
41. "Assess Your School" (Stopbullying.gov), <http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/assessbullying/index.html#Develop%20and%20Implement%20an%20Assessment>.