



**Brenda Durosinni, M.P.A.**  
**Anger Management and Violence Prevention  
Specialist**

---

## **WHAT IS BULLYING?**

Bullying refers to deliberate hostility and aggression toward the victim. Bullying can be pushing, kicking, threats, name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumors, persistent teasing and humiliation. Bullying is a behavior characterized by inflicting physical, verbal or emotional abuse on another individual or individuals. Bullying is a way of using control through verbal or physical aggression to relieve the bully's own feelings of inadequacy.

## **WHY DO CHILDREN BULLY?**



Bullies are cultivated in homes where parents: (1) prefer physical means of discipline, (2) are sometimes hostile and rejecting, (3) utilize inconsistent parenting styles, (4) have poor problem solving skills and (5) teach their children to strike back at the least provocation. Bullies learn from playgrounds and other experiences that they can get what they want by picking on other kids. Many bullies come from environments where they have been successful in bullying for personal gain or establishing a positive reputation with their peers, or they bully to escape an undesirable situation. Research also indicates that those children with the highest levels of bullying behavior usually have parents who display significantly greater levels of forceful parental discipline, spend more time watching TV violence and less time with other adults.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES OF BULLIES**

Generally, boys tend to be bullies; and they are also bullied more than girls. Victims report that about 65 percent of the bullying is perpetrated by boys, 15 percent by girls and 19 percent by boys and girls. The type of bullying also varies according to gender. Boy bullies are three to four times more likely to inflict physical assaults than girl bullies. Girl bullies use more ridicule and teasing that can be considered indirect bullying. Boys are more likely to employ direct bullying.<sup>2</sup>

## AGE AND GRADE TRENDS

Twice as many students experience bullying while in grades two through six than in grades seven through nine. The percentage of students bullied decreases significantly with age and grade. Children 7 to 12 years of age are bullied more often than children who are 13 to 15 years of age. There is a general decline in direct physical bullying as age and grade increase while the level of verbal abuse (indirect bullying) remains the same.<sup>1,3</sup>

## SOME SIGNS THAT A CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

A child may indicate by his/her behavior that he/she is being bullied. The following signs may indicate that the child is the victim of bullying behavior:



- Comes home with clothes torn or books destroyed
- Becomes distressed and anxious
- Stops eating
- Becomes frightened of walking to and from school
- Changes his/her usual route
- Begins doing poorly in school
- Begins making excuses to stay home from school
- Threatens or attempts suicide
- Continually "loses" his/her money or is "missing" possessions
- Refuses to say what is wrong
- Has unexplained bruises, scars or cuts
- Becomes aggressive and unreasonable
- Begins to bully other children

## EFFECTS OF BULLYING IN SCHOOL

Bullying behaviors with youth occur mainly at school. For this reason, it is understandable that victims would be fearful and anxious in the school environment. Children might skip school, carry a weapon to school for protection or see school generally as an unhappy place to be. Effective schooling cannot occur under conditions of fear and intimidation. In extreme cases children have committed suicide or killed their bully. Almost one in five of all students have no friends at school, indicating that many victims have few peer level resources for problem solving or support. It is no wonder that 90 percent of students who were bullied experienced a drop in school grades.<sup>1,4,5</sup> These victims had somewhat lower grades than their peers.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP BULLIED VICTIMS

Similar to domestic violence, bullying can leave the victim believing that he/she deserved to be bullied. The victim becomes very vulnerable and has no sense of his/her own personal power. If a child has been bullied for an extended amount of time, his/her self-esteem may be very low and in need of repair. The following suggestions can help parents to build self-esteem in a child who is a victim of bullying.

- Learn and recognize the behavior of children victimized by bullies
- Support your child in ways that will build confidence and self-esteem
- Practice assertiveness techniques with the child
- Role play responses with your child so that he/she may be prepared to respond to the bully in an assertive manner

- Let the child know that the bullying is not his/her fault
- Work out solutions with the child to minimize opportunities for the bullying
- Make time to encourage the child to talk about his/her feelings
- Create opportunities for your child to do well
- Give your child responsibilities-this helps to makes her/him feel valued and important
- Help the child to develop positive social skills
- Encourage the child to join groups where there may be a better chance to make friends
- Help the child develop a hobby, become involved in a sport or do something in which he/she may experience success
- Enlist the help of school personnel in providing proper supervision

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN THAT BULLY

Children may turn to bullying as a way of coping with a difficult situation such as their parent's divorce or the death of a relative. Some bullies are victims of abuse themselves and take out their anger and humiliation on other children who cannot fight back. The bullies' goal is to make themselves feel better. Bullies use bullying behaviors to gain popularity and friends. Parents must teach children that the bullying behavior is not acceptable, that there are consequences for such behavior and that they will not be allowed to torment others. Parents can help their bullying children by doing the following:

- Become aware of the kinds of bullying behaviors children engage in
- Find out what may be troubling their children
- Show their children that they are loved
- Set up a reward process for acceptable non-bullying behaviors
- Discuss with children ways that they can make amends for the bullying
- Talk to teachers and other school personnel about the bullying behavior the children display
- Ask the child's pediatrician for suggestions
- Teach children the difference between assertive and aggressive behaviors
- Praise children when they do things well
- Learn and teach the child nonviolent anger management strategies

The presence of bullying indicates a lack of pro-social behavior and a lack of respect for one another. Children who are prepared to respond to bullies are children who feel good about themselves, have a peer and adult support system, demonstrate appropriate interpersonal skills and understand consequences for such behaviors.<sup>5</sup> Children that bully often are children trying to relieve their own personal pains.<sup>1,5</sup>

---

### References

<sup>1</sup>Espleage, D., K. Bosworth, K. Karageorge, G. Daytner. "Family, Environment and Bullying Behaviors: Interrelationships and Treatment Implications." Presentation: Metro Toronto Convention Center, Exhibit Hall Session 3093 (C-2).

<sup>2</sup>Batsche, G. M. and H. M. Knoff. 1994. "Bullies and Their Victims: Understanding a Pervasive Problem in the Schools." *School Psychology Review* 23: 165-174.

<sup>3</sup>Hayler, R. J., J. H. Hoover, R. Oliver. 1991. "Student Perceptions of Victimization by Bullies in School." *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development* 29 (June): 143-150.

<sup>4</sup>Hoover, J. and R. Hazler. 1991. "Bullies and Victims." *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling* 25 (February).

<sup>5</sup>Loiber, R. and T. J. Dishion. 1984. "Boys Who Fight at Home and School: Family Conditions Influencing Cross-Setting Consistency." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 52: 759-768.

<sup>6</sup>Olweus, D. 1987. "Bullying in School: How Educators Can Help." *School Safety* (Fall): 4-11.

<sup>7</sup>Olwir, R., N. I. Oaks, J. H. Hoover. 1994. "Family Issues and Interventions in Bully and Victim Relationships." *The School Counselor* 4 (January).