



What We Know About Bullying

What is Bullying?

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, it is repeated over time. A child who is being bullied has a hard time defending himself or herself.

Bullying can take many forms such as: hitting or punching (physical bullying); teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying); intimidation through gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by e-mail (cyber bullying).

Prevalence of Bullying:

- Studies show that between 15-25% of U.S. students are bullied with some frequency ("sometimes or more often") while 15-20% report that they bully others with some frequency (*Melton et al., 1998; Nansel et al., 2001*).
- Recent statistics show that while school violence has declined 4% during the past several years, the incidence of behaviors such as bullying, has increased 5% between 1999 and 2001 (*U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2002*).
- Bullying has been identified as a major concern by schools across the U.S. (*NEA³, 2003*).
- In surveys of 3rd-8th graders in 14 Massachusetts schools, nearly half who had been frequently bullied reported that the bullying had lasted six months or longer (*Mullin-Rindler, 2003*).
- Research indicates that children with disabilities or special needs may be at a higher risk of being bullied than other children (see Rigby, 2002, for review).

Bullying and Gender:

- By self-report, boys are more likely than girls to bully others (*Nansel et al., 2001; Banks 1997*).
- Girls frequently report being bullied by both boys and girls, but boys report that they are most often bullied only by other boys (*Melton et al., 1998; Olweus, 1993*).
- Verbal bullying is the most frequent form 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 more more likely to bully each other through social exclusion (*Olweus, 2002*).
- Use of derogatory speculation about sexual orientation is so common that many parents do not think of telling their children that it could be hurtful (*NEA², 2003*).

Consequences of Bullying:

- Stresses of being bullied can interfere with student's engagement and learning in school (*NEA Today, 1999*).
- Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely, anxious, have low self-esteem, feel unwell, and think about suicide (*Limber, 2002; Olweus, 1993*).
- Students who are bullied may fear going to school, using the bathroom, and riding on the school bus (*NEA¹, 2003*).

- In a survey of 3rd-8th graders in 14 Massachusetts schools, more than 14% reported that they were often afraid of being bullied (*Mullin-Rindler, 2003*).
- Research shows that bullying can be a sign of other serious antisocial and/or violent behavior. Children and youth who frequently bully their peers are more likely than others to get into frequent fights, be injured in a fight, vandalize or steal property, drink alcohol, smoke, be truant from school, drop out of school, and carry a weapon (*Nansel et al., 2003; Olweus, 1993*).
- Bullying also has an impact on other students at school who are bystanders to bullying (*Banks, 1997*). Bullying creates a climate of fear and disrespect in schools and has a negative impact on student learning (*NEA¹, 2003*).

Adult Response to Bullying:

- Adults are often unaware of bullying problems (*Limber, 2002*). In one study, 70% of teachers believed that teachers intervene “almost always” in bullying situations; only 25% of students agreed with this assessment (*Charach et al., 1995*).
- 25% of teachers see nothing wrong with bullying or putdowns and consequently intervene in only 4% of bullying incidents (*Cohn & Canter, 2002*).
- Students often feel that adult intervention is infrequent and unhelpful and they often fear that telling adults will only bring more harassment from bullies (*Banks, 1997*).
- In a survey of students in 14 elementary and middle schools in Massachusetts, more than 30% believed that adults did little or nothing to help in bullying incidents (*Mullin-Rindler, 2003*).

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