



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 using gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by e-mail (cyberbullying).

Prevalence of bullying:

- Studies show that between 15–25 percent of U.S. students are bullied with some frequency (“sometimes or more often”) while 15–20 percent report that they bully others with some frequency (Melton et al., 1998; Nansel et al., 2001).
- Recent statistics show that although school violence has declined 4 percent during the past several years, the incidence of behaviors such as bullying has increased by 5 percent 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 third through eighth 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 using 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 third through eighth graders in 14 Massachusetts schools, more than 14 percent reported that they were often afraid of being bullied (Mullin-Rindler, 2003).
 - Research shows that bullying can be a sign of other serious antisocial 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 percent of teachers believed that teachers intervene “almost always” in bullying situations; only 25 percent of students agreed with this assessment (Charach et al., 1995).
 - 25 percent of teachers see nothing wrong with bullying or putdowns and consequently intervene in only 4 percent 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 percent believed that adults did little or nothing to help in bullying incidents (Mullin-Rindler, 2003).

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