

# Bullying

*Glen Newby - CEO New Path*

## **What is Bullying?**

Bullying is conscious, willful, and deliberate aggressive behaviour that is intended to intimidate or persecute other people through threats of continuous aggression and superior force. Unabated, it creates terror. It is not uncommon among children and can be a major problem. A major study in Toronto, Canada, found that a bullying act took place on school grounds, and in other supervised areas of the school, every seven minutes. Bullying can take many forms. It may include calling children nasty names, teasing or spreading unkind stories about them. It can also be physical - pushing, hitting, or kicking. Many children, of course, get into fights and disagreements from time to time and teasing and name-calling can all be done in a spirit of fun and playfulness. However, when this kind of behaviour becomes persistent, nasty and threatening, and singling out children who are unable to stand up for themselves, then bullying can become a major problem for all concerned.

## **Is Bullying Normal?**

Many children get involved in bullying at some time during their schooldays - they may be bullies themselves, they may bully someone else, or they may see a friend being bullied. Bullying can happen especially in elementary school. In fact, most children do behave aggressively sometimes, but it is only a minority of children who become regular bullies. Like all children, they need to learn that it is unfair and wrong to bully others.

## **Why Do Children Bully?**

Children can bully for all sorts of reasons. Some can bully because they enjoy the sense of power and feel that they can get away with it. Bullies are not always unpopular and may often have the support of their friends. They may or may not understand or care how much it hurts to be bullied, and they may think that the bullied child deserves or "is asking for it". Some bullies, however, may be bullied themselves - by other people or in their own families. They may be poor problem solvers, having to resort to violence to solve problems. They may not be sure of themselves at all - troubled, pressured by school or family life - and deal with their own fears and poor self-esteem by frightening others.

Bullying behaviour can be identified as early as pre-school, and some children who are bullies continue this behaviour into adulthood. Bullies tend to have particular behaviour and personality traits, including greater than average aggressive behaviour patterns, the desire to dominate peers, the need to feel in control and to "win", a lack of remorse for hurting another child, and a refusal to accept responsibility for his/her behaviour. Parents of bullies often tend to support their child's aggressive behaviour towards other children, and may in fact bully their child.

## **Boys and Girls Bully Differently**

Name calling and teasing are the most common types of bullying, but a lot of boys also use their physical strength to bully others. There has been a noted tendency for bigger girls to exhibit more outwardly aggressive behaviour. More frequently, girls will rely on excluding someone from a group or spreading hurtful stories about them. These forms of bullying are more difficult to see and hard to detect, but are equally destructive. Exclusion, together with spreading of rumors, can have devastating results for the victim.

## **Does Bullying Matter?**

It can sometimes be difficult for some adults to understand the distress and misery bullying causes, especially if the bullying is “only” teasing or name-calling. But being persistently teased or called names, like the other kinds of bullying, can make children very unhappy. It can seriously interfere with their school work, and they may even not want to go to school. Being picked on can mean children develop a low opinion of themselves. Over a period of time, those who are bullied come to believe they deserve it. Being bullied regularly can be associated with problems later on in life as well. Some adults who were bullied as a child find that they often get depressed, lack self-confidence, and feel resentful.

Bullying also matters to the bully. Some may feel isolated and come to believe that they are bad and worthy only of punishment. They may feel frightened that no-one is stopping them, that no-one cares. There is also clear evidence that aggressive behaviour that is not effectively challenged in childhood can sometimes carry on into adulthood, leading to violence and crime.

As Barbara Coloroso, a well respected expert on parenting, so aptly describes, “bullying is not about anger, or even conflict; it is about contempt - a powerful feeling of dislike towards somebody considered to be worthless, inferior, or undeserving of respect. The biases that are at the foundation of this contempt are often deeply rooted attitudes found in our homes, our schools, and our society. Any bias or prejudice related to race, gender, religion, physical attributes, or mental abilities can and will be used to validate and justify contempt on the part of a bully”.<sup>1</sup>

## **Bullying matters to all of us.**

- by the age of 24, 60% of identified bullies have a criminal conviction
- children who are repeatedly victimized sometimes see suicide as their only escape
- bullying is one of the most underrated and enduring problems in schools today
- bullies lose their popularity and are eventually disliked by the majority of students
- children labeled as bullies by their peers, required more support as adults from government agencies, had more court convictions, more alcoholism, more antisocial personality disorders, and used more mental health services
- bullying is often overlooked yet occurs every seven minutes
- the emotional scars from bullying can last a lifetime
- most victims are unlikely to report bullying.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander. Coloroso, Barbara, Harper Collins Canada Ltd. 2002

## What Can be Done?

There is a significant body of international knowledge concerning what can be done for both victims and bullies. Much of the information is related to specific interventions that have shown success in reducing the incidence of bullying in schools. The research shows that successful reduction in bullying is possible:

- ▶ when everyone involved with the school - administration, teachers, pupils, parents, and non-teaching staff - takes a strong and open stand against bullying
- ▶ It is clear that everyone should be respected
- ▶ students have the right not to be bullied.
- ▶ schools encourage students to accept that it is not wrong to “tell”
- ▶ children are sure that something will be done to stop the bullying
- ▶ schools help young people learn skills of mediation, conflict resolution, problem solving, and support
- ▶ befriending and “buddying” strategies are available

Children who have been badly bullied may have problems that warrant professional help through counselling or therapy. A focus may be to regain self-confidence and to better assert themselves. Children who bully others may be just as needy of professional help, although it may be more difficult if they believe that they do not have a problem. Some may be frightened of what they do and can benefit from counselling.

As a parent or care giver, it is crucial to become involved in your child’s school life. Ask questions, follow up on any unusual behaviour, and encourage your child to identify and express feelings. Ask your child’s school about a whole school policy on bullying. Most importantly, model respect and dignity in the family home. Compliment your child for being a fine, decent human being, every single day if they deserve it. Make a point of knowing their friends. Offer to be the driver, often. Then listen. Encourage your child to talk about his/her friends at school. If you are concerned about possible bullying, notify school personnel. As an older sibling, other family member, or friend, listen to what the child may be trying to say and if you suspect any form of bullying make sure the parent or care giver is told. Reassure the child that help is available and then follow up with the parent to ensure that school officials have been notified and that appropriate action has been taken. Make sure the child understands that you are telling the parent or care giver because you care.

Recent incidents of school violence have focused new attention on childhood bullying and harassment. As we watch children being crushed by bullying, we often feel powerless. However, based on decades of research we can now report there are ways to stop bullying and harassment. Although we sometimes see bullying as an inevitable part of childhood, research is showing that up to 50% reductions in rates of bullying are possible. Please feel free to visit some of the links on this site which will lead you through an indepth exploration of bullying, its causes, and its solutions.

[www.bullybeware.com](http://www.bullybeware.com)

[www.bullying.co.uk](http://www.bullying.co.uk)

[www.uncg.edu](http://www.uncg.edu)

[www.bullying.org](http://www.bullying.org) (Canada)  
[www.stopbullyingme.ab.ca](http://www.stopbullyingme.ab.ca) (Canada)  
[www.kidshelp.sympatico.ca](http://www.kidshelp.sympatico.ca) (Canada)  
[www.antibullying.net](http://www.antibullying.net)  
[www.stopbullying.com](http://www.stopbullying.com)  
[www.epab.co.uk](http://www.epab.co.uk)  
[www.stopthebully.org](http://www.stopthebully.org)

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