

Bullying

What is bullying?

Bullying includes a wide variety of behaviors, but all involve a person or a group repeatedly trying to harm someone who is weaker or more vulnerable. It can involve direct attacks (such as hitting, threatening or intimidating, maliciously teasing and taunting, name-calling, making sexual remarks, and stealing or damaging belongings) or more subtle, indirect attacks (such as spreading rumors or encouraging others to reject or exclude someone).

How common is bullying?

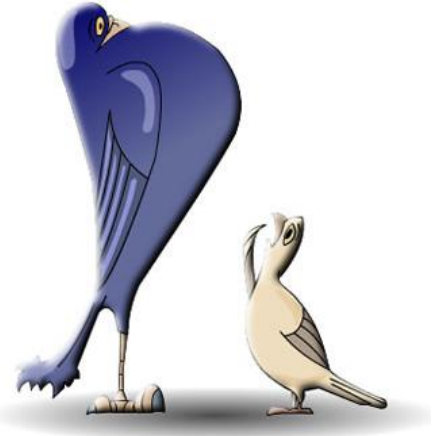
Almost 30% of teens in the United States (or over 5.7 million) are estimated to be involved in bullying as either a bully, a target of bullying, or both. In a recent national survey of students in grades six through ten, 13% reported bullying others, 11% reported being the target of bullies, and another 6% said they bullied others and were bullied themselves.¹

Limited available data suggests that bullying is much more common among younger teens than older teens. As teens grow older, they are less likely to bully others and to be the targets of bullies (see Footnote 1).

Bullying occurs more frequently amongst boys than girls. Teenage boys are much more likely to bully others and to be the targets of bullies. While both boys and girls say others bully them by making fun of the way they look or talk, boys are more likely to report being hit, slapped, or pushed. Teenage girls are more often the targets of rumors and sexual comments (see Footnote 1).

How does bullying affect teens who are the targets of bullies?

Bullying can lead teenagers to feel tense, anxious, and afraid. It can affect their concentration in school and can lead them to avoid school in some cases. If bullying continues for some time, it can begin to affect teens' self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. It also can increase their social isolation, leading them to become withdrawn, depressed, anxious, and insecure. In extreme cases, bullying can be devastating for teens, with long-term consequences. Some teens feel compelled to take drastic measures, such as carrying weapons for protection or seeking violent revenge. Others, in desperation, even consider suicide.^{3,4,5}



Researchers have found that years later, long after the bullying has stopped, adults who were bullied as teens have higher levels of depression and poorer self-esteem than other adults.⁶

Bullying can also affect those teens who witness the bullying.

In one study of junior high and high school students, over 88% said they had witnessed bullying in their schools.⁷ Teens who witness bullying can feel guilty or helpless for not standing up to a bully on behalf of a classmate or friend or for not reporting the incident to an authority who can help. They may experience even greater guilt if they are drawn into bullying by pressure from their peers. Some teens deal with these feelings of guilt by blaming the victim and deciding that he or she deserved the abuse. Teens sometimes also feel compelled to end a friendship or avoid being seen with the bullied teen to avoid losing status or being targeted themselves.^{8,9}



Which teens are most likely to become bullies?

While many people believe bullies act tough in order to hide feelings of insecurity and self-loathing, in fact, bullies tend to be confident with high self-esteem.^{1,10} They are generally physically aggressive with proviolence attitudes, and are typically hot tempered, easily angered, and impulsive, with a low tolerance for frustration. Bullies have a strong need to dominate others and usually have little empathy for their targets. Male bullies are often physically bigger and stronger than their peers (see Footnote 10). Bullies tend to get in trouble more often and to dislike and do worse in school than teens who do not bully others. They are also more likely to fight, drink, and smoke than their peers (see Footnote 1).

Teens who come from homes where parents provide little emotional support for their children, fail to monitor their activities or have little involvement in their lives are at greater risk for engaging in bullying behavior. Parents' discipline styles are also related to bullying behavior: An extremely permissive or excessively harsh approach to discipline can increase the risk of teenage bullying (see Footnote 10).

Surprisingly, bullies appear to have little difficulty in making friends. Their friends typically share their proviolence attitudes and problem behaviors (such as drinking and smoking) and may be involved in bullying as well (see Footnote 1). These friends are often followers who do not initiate bullying, but participate in it.¹¹

As mentioned previously, some teenagers not only bully others but are also the targets of bullies themselves. Like other bullies, they tend to do poorly in school and engage in a number of problem behaviors. However, they also tend to be socially isolated, with few friends and poor relationships with their classmates (see Footnote 1).

What are the long-term consequences of bullying behavior?

Bullying is often a warning sign that children and teens are heading for trouble and are at risk for serious violence. Teens (particularly boys) who bully are more likely to engage in other antisocial and delinquent behavior (e.g., vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and drug use) into adulthood. They are four times more likely than non-bullies to be convicted of crimes by age 24, with 60% of bullies having at least one criminal conviction.¹²

What can schools do to stop bullying?

Effective programs have been developed to reduce bullying in schools. Research has found that bullying is most likely to occur in schools where there is a lack of adult supervision during breaks, where teachers and students are indifferent to or accept bullying behavior, and where rules against bullying are not consistently enforced.¹³

While approaches that simply crack down on individual bullies are seldom effective, when there is a school-wide commitment to end bullying, it can be reduced by up to 50%. One effective approach focuses on changing school and classroom climates by raising awareness about bullying, increasing teacher and parent involvement and supervision, forming clear rules and strong social norms against bullying, and providing support and protection for all students. This approach involves teachers, principals, students, and everyone associated with the school including janitors, cafeteria workers, and crossing guards. Adults become aware of the extent of bullying at the school and they involve themselves in changing the situation rather than merely looking the other way. Students pledge not to bully other students, to help students who are bullied, and to make a point to include students who are left out (see Footnote 13).

References:

- Nansel, T.R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R.S., Ruan, W.J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). *Bullying behaviors among U.S. youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment*. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285(16), 2094-2100.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do* (p. 19). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Egan, S.K. & Perry, D.G. (1998). *Does low self-regard invite victimization?* *Developmental Psychology*, 34, 299-309.
- Hodges, E.V.E. and Perry, D.G. (1999). *Personal and interpersonal antecedents and consequences of victimization by peers*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 677-685.
- Rigby, K. (2001). *Health consequences of bullying and its prevention in schools*. In J. Juvonen and S. Graham, (Eds.). *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Olweus D. (1994). *Bullying at school: Long-term outcomes for the victims and an effective school-based intervention program*. In L.R. Huesmann, (Ed.). *Aggressive behavior: Current perspectives* (pp. 97-130). New York: Plenum Press.
- Hoover, J.H., Oliver, R., & Hazler, R.J. (1992). *Bullying: Perceptions of adolescent victims in Midwestern USA*. *School Psychology International*, 13, 5-16.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do* (pp. 43-44). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Salmivalli, C. (2001). *Group view on victimization: Empirical findings and their implications*. In J. Juvonen and S. Graham, (Eds.). *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do* (pp. 34-43). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Olweus, D. (1978). *Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys*. Washington, DC: Hemisphere (Wiley).
- Olweus D. (1992). *Bullying among schoolchildren: Intervention and prevention*. In R.D. Peters, R.J. McMahon, V.L. Quinsey, (Eds.). *Aggression and violence throughout the life span* (pp. 100-125). London: Sage Publications.
- Olweus, D., Limber, S., & Mihalic, S. (1999). *Blueprints for violence prevention, book nine: Bullying prevention program*. Boulder, Colorado: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Youth Violence Prevention Center. (n.d.). *Bullying*. Retrieved August 3, 2007, from <http://www.safeyouth.org>

About MINES & Associates

For over 25 years MINES & Associates has been a nationally recognized business psychology firm that provides a variety of services to corporate employers including employee assistance programs (EAP), managed mental healthcare, organizational development and psychology services, wellness programs, behavioral risk management, disease management, PPO services, and a number of other technology based services. MINES & Associates is divided into two main divisions, Organizational Psychology and Health Psychology, and currently serves a diverse portfolio of clients in all 50 states, Canada, Mexico, and the UK. Please log on to <http://www.minesandassociates.com> for the latest news and information on MINES & Associates.