

Bullying: How to Stop the Epidemic!

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What is Bullying?

Bullying has been around for centuries. While it is not a new problem, the violence of the acts has grown to the level of criminal acts that cause life-long scarring and sometimes death. Bullying has no boundaries of race, ethnicity, social economics, religion, gender, or class. While research has indicated that the top years for bullying include 4th through 8th graders - 90 percent were reported as victims of some kind of bullying - younger and older children are still subjected to bullying.

Bullying is basically a form of intimidation or domination of someone who is perceived as weaker. It is a way of getting what one wants through some sort of coercion or force. It is also a way for someone to establish some sort of perceived superiority over another person. The definition can be further explained as:

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- **Imbalance of Power:** people who bully use their power to control or harm and the people being bullied may have a hard time defending themselves
- **Intent to Cause Harm:** actions done by accident are not bullying; the person bullying has a goal to cause harm
- **Repetition:** incidents of bullying happen to the same the person over and over by the same person or group

Bullying Statistics

The statistics of bullying today are astounding. According to The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, about half of all children are bullied at some point during their school years. Close to 10 percent of children are bullied repeatedly. According to bullying statistics 2010, there are about 2.7 million students being bullied each year and about 2.1 million students taking on the role of the bully.

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Other Bullying statistics:

There are about 160,000 children that miss school every day out of fear of being bullied.

- Over half - about 56 percent - of all students have witnessed a bullying crime take place while at school.
- A reported 15 percent of all students who don't show up for school report it to be out of fear of being bullied while at school.
- There are about 71 percent of students that report bullying as an on-going problem.
- One out of every 10 students drops out or changes schools because of repeated bullying.
- One out of every 20 students has seen a student with a gun at school.
- Some of the top years for bullying include 4th through 8th graders in which 90 percent were reported as victims of some kind of bullying.

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- Other recent bullying statistics reveal that 54 percent of students reported that witnessing physical abuse at home can lead to violence in school.
- Among students of all ages, homicide perpetrators were found to be twice as likely as homicide victims to have been bullied previously by their peers.
- There are about 282,000 students that are reportedly attacked in high schools throughout the nation each month.

Types of Bullying

Cyber bullying/ Text Bullying

This type of bullying takes place when a child or teenager is harassed, humiliated, embarrassed, threatened or tormented using digital technology. This is not limited to the Internet; cyber bullying also encompasses bullying done through such things as text messages using cell phones.

Cyber bullying is often a systemic attempt to get another child or teen to feel bad about him or herself through electronic communication. It usually happens more than once, and includes leaving demeaning messages on someone's Facebook page, uploading embarrassing photos, or spreading gossip or rumors through instant messaging and text messaging. There are a number of ways to humiliate and threaten children online. This type of bullying is very psychologically damaging.

Text Bullying

Text bullying has become a serious problem among adolescents. It can have devastating consequences, and parents may not even know it's occurring.

Parents can play an important role in preventing text bullying and helping teens who have been the victim of a text bully.

Text bullying is sending mean, embarrassing, untrue, or hurtful messages to or about someone using cell phone text messaging. This can also include sexting, or sending sexually suggestive text messages to someone or about someone.

Most children get their cell phones when they are in middle school, which is when bullying, including text bullying, is most common. Almost 9 out of 10 teens have a cell phone, and about 1 in 5 will be victims of a text bully. About 1 in 10 teens engage in text bullying. Text bullying has become more

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common than traditional bullying, especially among girls.

There are several factors that can make text bullying more damaging than traditional bullying for both the victim and the bully:

- It can happen 24 hours a day, even at home, which is usually a refuge from bullying, so it can feel inescapable.
- Text bullies are often much meaner because they don't have to see their victims.
- The victims may not know who is sending the messages, which can be frightening.
- Teens may think text bullying is anonymous and that they can't get caught. They also may use someone else's phone to send the messages. Text bullying can often be traced, however, and the bully, as well as his or her parents, can face criminal penalties as a result.

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- Victims often respond by sending mean messages back to the bully, becoming bullies themselves.
- Sexting is against the law and can result in child pornography charges for the sender or senders even if they are minors.
- Text bullying doesn't necessarily go away. Just as words are lasting, text messages can also last. It may get passed around and it can end up where somewhere public for all to see and read. It can also be that in a future time, that a potential employer could read the message. This can harm the victim further, and can be even more damaging for the bully, who may miss out on job opportunities because of the text messages they sent in their past.

Physical Bullying

While this is the most common type, there are many kinds of negative physical interactions that can occur, including fighting, practical jokes, stealing, and sexual harassment. It is only **considered physical bullying when:**

- The same victim is targeted repeatedly
- The bully or bullies intend to hurt, embarrass, or intimidate the victim
- The actions occur in a situation with a real or perceived imbalance of power, such as when the bully is stronger than the victim or has a higher social standing

In this context, physical bullying can take many forms:

- Hitting
- Pushing
- Tripping
- Slapping

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- Spitting
- Stealing or destroying possessions, including books, clothing, or lunch money

Social Bullying

- Social bullying is deliberate, repetitive and aggressive social behavior that is intended to hurt others. This type of behavior generally includes verbal abuse, gossip or other actions that cause mental and emotional harm and particular social isolation for the victim, intentionally leaving others out of activities on purpose, and breaking up friendships.

Schools, sports activities, colleges, domestic and work situations and neighborhoods are some of the places in which social bullying occurs.

The goal of social bullying is to belittle and harm another individual or group. This type of bullying takes on a completely different form

and meaning for those in middle schools, for example, where bullying might manifest itself in the teasing of unpopular children. Ridiculing another child's clothes, making fun of the way he speaks and mocking his academic achievements, his race or culture, or their sexual orientation are also forms of bullying.

Verbal Bullying

With verbal bullying, the goal is still to degrade and demean the victim, while making the aggressor look dominant and powerful. It includes, name calling, teasing, cursing, shouting, spreading rumors and lies, put-downs, demeaning jokes, racial slurs, sexual harassing language, and religious slander.

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Although there are different types of bullying, they all cause emotional and psychological damage and scarring, often over a lifetime and sometimes death. Some of the negative repercussions of bullying include:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Sickness
- Eating Disorders
- Low self esteem
- Social withdrawal
- Violence
- Suicide

What is Bullycide?

Bullying is so serious that it has taken on a life of its own, and has been cited as the reason that some kids choose to take their lives. Research indicates that suicide continues to be one of the leading causes of death among children under the age of 14. Bullycide is a term used to describe suicide as the result of bullying. In 2010, bullying statistics report that there is a strong connection between bullying, being bullied, and suicide, according to a new study from the Yale School of Medicine. Suicide rates are continuing to grow among adolescents, and have grown more than 50 percent in the past 30 years.

The correct answer to this question is that bullycide is suicide which happens as a result of bullying. Children and teens who are bullied live in a constant state of fear and confusion in their lives. Many feel the only way to escape the rumors, insults, verbal abuse and terror is to take their own

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lives. Bullycide is clearly a serious issue. There are several different things that ultimately can lead to bullycide:

- Being constantly physically and emotionally bullied
- Experiencing constant physical and emotional pain
- Having to continually relive an embarrassing moment that is regularly brought up peers as a method of torment
- Being the victim of bullying by an authority figure like a parent, teacher, coach or other adult
- When the victim of bullying has no other friends to rely on for support or encouragement while being bullied regularly

Signs your child is being bullied

As a parent, how do you know if your child is being bullied? There are some clear signs that may indicate that your child is being bullied. Your child may be a victim of a bully if they....

- are scared to walk to and from school
- change their usual route
- do not want you to ride the school bus – want a ride instead
- are unwilling to go to school (or become 'school phobic')
- feel ill in the mornings
- begin doing poorly in their school work
- come home regularly with clothes or books destroyed
- come home hungry (bully taking lunch money)
- become withdrawn, start stammering, lack confidence
- become distressed and anxious, stop eating

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- have their possessions go missing
- ask for money or start stealing (to pay the bully)
- refuse to talk about what's wrong
- have unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches

If you see any of these signs, there is a chance that your child is being bullied at school. If that is the case, there are things that you can do as a parent to protect your child and help them deal with this situation.

If you are concerned that your child is the victim of bullying, here are six steps you can take to try and help him/her deal with bullying:

Finding out if your child is being bullied

So you have seen the signs. The first time you see any of these signs, immediately sit down and talk with your child. Sometimes, as parents, it's easy to ignore some things or feel that you are being over protective. That is okay. It is far better than ignoring signs, being in denial, or chalking it up to kid-play or teenage transition.

It's normal to be hesitant or uncomfortable when talking to your child because of what you think their reaction may be. They may not be honest with you or they may feel uncomfortable or scared to share with you.

Here is a script that will help you get through the conversation:

Parent: *Hey honey, I would like to ask you something? I have noticed that you act different lately. Is there something you would like to tell me?*

Child: *No, Mother. I am fine.*

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Parent: *Well, I can see that you are not. Is something or someone bothering you?*

Child: *No.*

Parent: *Well, I can tell that something is. Is anyone bothering you at school, or on the internet? I know that some kids can be mean and cruel and I am here to help and protect you. Please share with me. (Hopefully, they will share at this time)—If not,*

Child: *No one is bothering me. I'm okay.*

Parent: *I can see that you are not. Let's work through this together. It will make it easier if you share with me so that I can help you. If not, I am going to find out anyway as my job is to protect you and I will do whatever is necessary to make sure that you are safe. I will visit with your teacher tomorrow to see if she/he can tell me*

anything that may be happening and to check on how you are doing at school.

Usually at this time, they will give in and say “No you can’t come to school, that will make it worse”. Now you have your answer and know that something is going on. They will usually share at that point. It is really critical that you continue to have to conversation with your child that will assure them of their safety and protection.

So now that you know something is going on, what are the steps you should take?

Share and follow the **ACTION** steps with your child.

Action Steps to Deal with Bullying ©

Assure your child of their safety and protection

Besides food, water, and shelter, on the hierarchy of needs, safety is next. In order for them to thrive, it is imperative that they feel their world is safe from harm. A bully

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can make the victim believe they control the world. The sooner your child understands that you (the parent) are more in control than the bully is, the sooner they will begin to feel that they are safe and can begin to flourish.

Communicate to the school authorities

Discuss the problem with your child's teacher, principal or counselor. Maybe you need to have a meeting with all three. In many cases, bullying takes place in unsupervised areas, such as school buses, bathrooms, playgrounds and other areas that can be hard to monitor. If you know where the bullying is taking place, you can let school authorities know so that they can step up "patrols" in those areas to discourage bullying.

Teach your child to avoid the bully and walk around with friends

Your child does not need to fight back. Encourage him or her to avoid the bully when possible. Suggest that he or she walk away, and go find a teacher or other trusted adult. A good support system can be an effective deterrent against bullies. Have your child go to school and other places with trusted and true friends.

Initiate contact with bully's parents

While this may not be the most popular suggestion, I would always encourage contacting the parents. In many cases, the parents, for whatever reason, may not be aware that their child is harming other children. Sure, they may have seen signs, but not have truly known that their son/daughter is victimizing other students.

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It is normal for the parent, when confronted, to defend their child. It is important to remain calm, non accusatory, and logical when having the discussion. The parent of the bully can become your best ally. If you get a negative response, it helps you to a) understand a bit more about the bully's environment, b create a more strategic plan of action for dealing with the situation.

Ongoing talks with child on assertiveness and role-play

It is not necessary to fight back to defeat a bully. You can teach your child to stand up straight and tell the bully, firmly, to leave him or her alone. In some cases, this type of assertiveness will work. Enroll them in a self-defense course. That will help to build discipline, self-esteem and confidence. It might be beneficial to have a little bit of role play with your child. This way he or she can

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practice what to say to a bully, or how to leave a situation that could turn into bullying.

Never disregard any behavioral signs or be in denial

Sometimes, it is easy to overlook behavioral signs that you see in your children and chalk it up to kid's stuff, or adjustment issues, or adolescent changes. Certainly there are some things that can be classified in the areas of identity, peer pressure, and self image. Signs of bullying are definite, and affect mind, body, and spirit. Don't ignore anything. It's better to be safe than sorry.

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Bully Prevention- Preventing your Child from Being Bullied

There are many reasons that a child or teen is bullied. Some include; appearance height, weight, race, dress, academic ability, disabilities, religion, sexual preference, hobbies or even their social status and parent's financial status in the community.

While the school has some responsibility in protecting your child, it is up to parents to instill a healthy self-image and teach the strategies that will help them learn how to protect themselves and be safe.

There are children that are targeted by bullies and there are some things that you can do to help to keep your child from becoming a target.

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1. Concentrate on building a healthy self image when they are young and continue that process throughout high school.
2. If your child is small in stature, enroll them in self- defense courses at an early age to help build strength and confidence.
3. Have a strong support group of family and friends that your child/ren interact(s) with. Make it a point to build relationships with other parents and their children to create that sense of community.
4. Teach your child appropriate treatment from friends and what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable.

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5. Get them involved in extra-curricular activities that build self-esteem, and self worth. This also discourages being a loner.
6. Teach your child/ren how to stand up for themselves and others and not be afraid.

Signs your child may be a bully

Since the statistics on bullying are so astounding, we have to understand that there are thousands of bullies out there. Is your son or daughter one? As a parent, be alert for signs that your child is a bully. Bullying behavior is something that can be curtailed and taught to control. If kid-bullying behavior is not stopped, children can grow up to be adult bullies which can lead to problems later in life, especially criminal activity. It can also affect future professional and personal relationships. It is important that children learn to express themselves in socially acceptable ways. Bullying is not something that most in society tolerate. Here are some signs that your child might be a bully:

- Views violence as the solution to most problems
- Is larger in stature coupled with aggressive tendencies
- Is disrespectful to parents and/or teachers

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- Shows aggression toward adults as well as other children
- Needs to dominate others and control situations
- Is easily frustrated
- Shows little sympathy to others who are being bullied, or who are having problems

Causes of bully behavior

There are many contributing causes to a child acting as a bully. Research states that it is combination of many factors; family, peers, school, individual personalities, and community.

- **Family** factors contributing to bullying:
 - Uninvolved parents.
 - Permissive parenting style
 - A lack of supervision by parents.
 - Harsh, physical discipline
 - Bullied by parents
 - Bullied by siblings
- **Peer** factors that contribute to bullying:
 - Hanging out with people who bully.
 - Friends who practice and enjoy violent behavior
 - Power and status among peers
 - Victim of bullying by older peers
 - A way to deflect taunting and teasing

School factors that may contribute to bullying:

- Schools that are not addressing or focusing on bullying and failing to adopt zero-tolerance policies
- Unsupervised areas that are common “hot spots” where bullying takes place.
- A blind eye or denial of what is happening in the classrooms or hallways.

What to do if your child is a bully?

What if you discover that your child is a bully? No one wants to think that their child is terrorizing other children. This is a sensitive space for parents, as that is not what you dreamed your child would become. Because of the nature of bullying, and our defense mechanisms as parents, you can be in denial and not accept that your child is hurting others. Don't despair, there is a way to

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handle this problem and get your child some help. It is very important to take immediate action. Avoid being angry with other parents of victims or the school and spring into action to get your child help.

1. I would recommend talking to the school counselor and seeking professional help as needed.
2. Create a plan to help modify their behavior and set up consequences for unacceptable behavior and actions.
3. Make sure that your child is not being bullied by someone as well and in turn, acting out by bullying others.
4. Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to bullying in your home.

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5. Support and love your child, as it is a cry for help. It is just as important for the parents of the bully to implement an action plan to stop the behavior as their behavior will have lasting effects on their life and so many others.

Community Involvement and Solutions

Suppose you don't have children, or your children are grown now. What can you do to get involved and help stop this problem that is infecting our society?

- 1. Become a Secure House** – If you live in a neighborhood that is prone to fights and/or bullying, place the sticker (No Bullying Allowed) in your window so kids will know that they can run to your house should they feel the need for safety.

- 2. Step Up**- If you see or hear bullying taking place in your neighborhood, step up and don't be afraid to say something. So often, we hesitate to get involved in the name of "minding our own business". There are some obvious precautions to consider. If there is a large group of teenagers and there is fighting and other violent acts taking place, call 911. If you see a smaller and/or younger group of kids, I would encourage you to say

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something that could stop the bullying. Just do what you would want or hope another adult would do if that were your child, nephew, niece, cousin, sister, or brother.

3. Speak Out – There are several celebrities, campaigns, schools, and political arenas that are standing up and speaking out against this problem that is plaguing our society and destroying our children, psychologically and physically. Add your voice to the number. Talk about the problem so that more people are aware that it is a growing problem. Get behind the parents, advocates, and organizations that are dedicated to stomping out bullying.

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