



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 namecalling (verbal bullying); intimidation using gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages through e-mail, text or other cyber technology (cyberbullying).

Prevalence of bullying:

- Research on the prevalence of bullying varies depending on the definitions of bullying, the characteristics of the participants, and the time frame of interest. Generally, studies show that between 10 and 25 percent of U.S. students are bullied with some frequency (e.g., two or more times in the previous couple of months), while 10–20 percent report that they bully others with some frequency.
- The first nationally representative study of bullying among American children (in grades 6–10) reported that within a single school term, 17% of children and youth had been bullied “sometimes” or more often, 19% had bullied others with this frequency, and 6% had been bullied and also had bullied others “sometimes” or more often (Nansel et al., 2001).
- The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (2009) reported that 20% of public high school students had been bullied on school property in the previous 12 months.

- The Health Behavior in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey found that in 2005/2006, 12% of boys and 11% of girls in the US had been chronically bullied (2 or more times in the past couple of months) and 13% of boys and 8% of girls had chronically bullied others (Molcho et al., 2009).

Bullying and gender:

- Anonymous, self-report surveys typically show that boys are more likely than girls to bully others (Molcho et al., 2009; Nansel et al., 2001).
- Girls frequently report being bullied by both boys and girls, but boys report that they are most often bullied only by other boys (Finkelhor et al., 2005; Olweus, 1993).
- 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).
- Recent studies have found only trivial differences between girls and boys in overall rates of indirect or relational aggression (Card et al., 2008).

Consequences of bullying:

- Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than non-bullied children to be depressed, lonely, anxious, have low self-esteem, feel unwell, and think about suicide (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1996).
- In a study of high school students, researchers found that bullied children were more likely than their non-bullied peers to experience a variety of psychosomatic ailments. They were nearly

- three times as likely as their non-bullied peers to get headaches, twice as likely to have problems sleeping or to have stomach pain, nearly five times as likely to feel unhappy, and eight times as likely to be seriously depressed (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-VanHorick, 2004).
- The stress of being bullied can interfere with learning. Students who are chronically excluded tend to participate less and underachieve in school; those frequently victimized are likely to avoid school and are at high risk of excessive absenteeism (Buhs et al., 2006, 2010).
 - Research shows that bullying can be a sign of other 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 may be an early sign that boys are at risk for later criminal behavior (Olweus, 1993; Pellegrini, 2001; Sourander et al., 2007). In a long-term study in Norway (Olweus, 1993), boys who were identified as “bullies” in middle school were four times as likely as other boys to have three or more criminal convictions by their early 20s.
 - Bullying also can negatively affect others at school who are bystanders to bullying. Bullying can create a climate of fear and disrespect in schools and has a negative impact on student learning (NEA, 2003).

References and Resources

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