

MORE INFORMATION ON BULLYING

- [Take Action Against Bullying](#)
 - [What Is Bullying?](#)
 - [Common Characteristics of Bullying](#)
 - [Kinds of Bullies](#)
 - [What makes a Bully?](#)
 - [What makes a victim?](#)
 - [What happens to Bullies?](#)
 - [What happens to Victims??](#)
 - [Reasons why we must take action against bullying](#)
 - [Benefits of an Anti- Bullying Policy](#)
 - [What Schools Can Do](#)
 - [Students are Key to A Successful Anti-Bullying Campaign](#)
 - [Bully Off UK](#)
 - [Bully Problem Solver](#)
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Take Action Against Bullying

The United Nations Charter of Rights for Children states, in part, that:

- every child has the right to an education and;
- every child has the right to be safe

As adults working in the public education system, it is our duty to provide a safe school environment for all students. The following qualities are essential for a healthy and safe school environment.

Safe schools:

1. Are free from violence
2. Are nurturing, caring and respectful of everyone
3. Are physically and psychologically healthy
4. Promote sensible risk taking
5. Enhance the self-esteem of all (DASH, 1995)

Bullying has no place in a safe school.

"Take Action Against Bullying" was written to educate students, parents, teachers and administrators. We believe that by taking action against bullying, we can make a significant difference to the lives of all students, and have a profoundly positive impact on the climate of your school.

[TOP](#)

What Is Bullying?

Bullying in its truest form is comprised of a series of repeated intentionally cruel incidents, involving the same children, in the same bully and victim roles. This, however, does not mean that in order for bullying to occur there must be repeat offenses. Bullying can consist of a single interaction. Bullying behavior may also be defined as a criminal act if the bully is twelve years of age or older.

[TOP](#)

Common Characteristics of Bullying

So, what makes a bullying incident? Certain conditions must exist for a bullying incident to occur. Lots of kids joke around with each other, call each other names, or engage in some fairly physical horse-play and yet these incidents are not deemed as bullying when they occur between certain children. The difference lies in the relationship of the bully and victim, and in the intent of the interaction.

Bullying usually, although not always, occurs between individuals who are not friends. In a bullying situation, there is a power difference between the bully and the victim. For instance, the bully may be bigger, tougher, physically stronger or be able to intimidate others or have the power to exclude others from their social group.

The intention of bullying is to put the victim in distress in some way. **Bullies seek power.**

Bullying knows no financial, cultural or social bounds. Bullying may not look exactly the same everywhere, but it has the same devastating effect on everyone, and during adolescence, bullying is not a problem that usually sorts itself out.

The effects of bullying last a lifetime. It causes misery for the bully's victims, and leaves a lasting impression on all those who witness repeated bullying incidents.

[TOP](#)

Kinds of Bullies

Physical Bullies

Physical bullies are action-oriented. This type of bullying includes hitting or kicking the victim, or, taking or damaging the victim's property. This is the least sophisticated type of bullying because it is so easy to identify. Physical bullies are soon known to the entire

population in the school. As they get older, their attacks usually become more aggressive. These aggressive characteristics manifest themselves as bullies become adults.

Verbal Bullies

Verbal bullies use words to hurt or humiliate another person. Verbal bullying includes name-calling, insulting, making racist comments and constant teasing. This type of bullying is the easiest to inflict on other children. It is quick and to the point. It can occur in the least amount of time available, and its effects can be more devastating in some ways than physical bullying because there are no visible scars.

Relational Bullies

Relational or relationship bullies try to convince their peers to exclude or reject a certain person or people and cut the victims off from their social connections. This type of bullying is linked to verbal bullying and usually occurs when children (most often girls) spread nasty rumors about others or exclude an ex-friend from the peer group. The most devastating effect with this type of bullying is the rejection by the peer group at a time when children most need their social connections.

Reactive victims

Reactive victims straddle a fence of being a bully and or victim. They are often the most difficult to identify because at first glance they seem to be targets for other bullies. However, reactive victims often taunt bullies, and bully other people themselves. Most of the incidents are physical in nature. These victims are impulsive and react quickly to intentional and unintentional physical encounters. In some cases, reactive victims begin as victims and become bullies as they try to retaliate. A reactive victim will approach a person who has been bullying him/her and say something like, "You better not bug me today, otherwise I'll tell the teacher and boy, will you be in trouble, so you just better watch out."

Statements such as this are akin to waving a red flag in front of a raging bull, and may provoke a bully into action. Reactive victims then fight back and claim self defense. Reactive victims need to learn how to avoid bullies.

[TOP](#)

What makes a Bully?

Bullying behavior can be identified as early as pre-school age, and some children who are bullies continue this behavior into adulthood. Most children learn to control their anger and fighting instincts as they grow older, but not the bully. These children have special characteristics. Children who systematically bully others usually have a group of children they bully regularly while other bullies randomly target a variety of students.

Bullies have particular behavior and personality traits. Dr. Sam Samenow describes these as:

- greater than average aggressive behavior patterns
- the desire to dominate peers
- the need to feel in control, to win
- no sense of remorse for hurting another child
- a refusal to accept responsibility for his/her behavior

Parent(s) of bullies usually support their child's aggressive behavior toward other children and often bully their child.

[TOP](#)

What makes a victim?

Why aren't all children victims? Research on bullying states that sixty percent of all students are never involved in any kind of bullying incidents, either as victims or as bullies (Psychology Today, Sept. 1996). However, every day in schools, many students witness bullying incidents as they happen, and this forces their involvement. Often, these students do not realize that what they are witnessing is, in fact, bullying. Good natured teasing and rough-housing are only fun if both parties involved agree that it is fun. The power difference between bullies and victims determines the nature of the interaction.

Most children are approached by a bully early in their school career, and/or when they change schools. It is often the child's reaction to that first encounter with being bullied which determines whether or not he/she will be approached again. Children who are victimized tend to display "vulnerable behaviors". People who are identified as being highly vulnerable are often singled out as victims.

[TOP](#)

What happens to Bullies?

The life-long outlook for bullies is not good. If bullies don't learn how to change their behavior, the pattern of bullying behavior often becomes a habit as the bully gets older.

Bullies have average social popularity up to approximately age 14 or 15. In fact, some children even look up to bullies in some ways because they are powerful and do what they want to, or have to, to get their way with their peers. However, by late adolescence, the bully's popularity begins to wane. By senior high school, if a bully is still attending school, his or her peers group includes other bullies, or more seriously, he or she has

developed or is developing gang alliances. By late high school, school-yard bullying is a rare occurrence, but what takes its place is more serious.

By age 24, up to sixty percent of people who are identified as childhood bullies have at least one criminal conviction. A study spanning 35 years by psychologist E. Eron at the University of Michigan found that children who were named by their school mates, **at age eight**, as the bullies of the school were often bullies throughout their lives. In this longitudinal study of bullies, many of these children, as adults, required more support from government agencies (Psychology Today, Sept. 1995). For example, these children later had more court convictions, more alcoholism, more antisocial personality disorders and used more of the mental health services than the other children.

Unless new behaviors are learned and adopted, bullies continue to bully throughout their lifetime. They bully their mates, their children, and possibly their underlings in their place of business. Bullying gets them what they want, and although some bullies learn to refine the art of bullying in their professional lives and use it in situations where there is a power imbalance, it creates less than harmonious relations in the workplace.

[TOP](#)

What happens to Victims?

Adults, like children, resent being bullied, except that adult victims have more options available to them than do child victims. Children cannot escape the school yard, the change room, or the cafeteria. Sometimes, victims do not survive the torture and humiliation of bullying.

In most situations, victims do survive, but carry their emotional scars for a lifetime.

By senior high school, regular bullying incidents are often a thing of the past, but all victims know who the bullies are, and avoid them. By age 16 or 17, bullies and victims are usually moving in different directions in terms of curricular interests in school, therefore their paths rarely cross. Social groupings are clearly defined by this time in a student's life and invisible boundaries have been drawn.

When a child has been repeatedly victimized, certain behaviors and attitudes tend to emerge which are inconsistent with his/her typical behaviors. Often children are too embarrassed and humiliated to report victimization.

[TOP](#)

Reasons why we must take action against bullying:

- by age 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
- schools are a prime location for bullying
- bullies lose their popularity as they get older and are eventually disliked by the majority of students
- primary age children who were labeled by their peers as bullies required more support as adults from government agencies, had more court convictions, more alcoholism, more antisocial personality disorders and used more mental health services
- many adults do not know how to intervene in bullying situations, therefore bullying is often overlooked
- bullying occurs once every seven minutes
- on average, bullying episodes are brief, approximately 37 seconds long
- the emotional scars from bullying can last a lifetime
- the majority of bullying occurs in or close to school buildings
- most victims are unlikely to report bullying
- only 25% of students report that teachers intervene in bullying situations, while 71% of teachers believe they always intervene

We believe that bullying can be significantly reduced in schools if teachers, support staff, parent groups, student councils and administrators join together to take action against bullying.

[TOP](#)

Benefits of an Anti- Bullying Policy

In talking to parents over the past years, it is clear that what they want most for their children is to know that they are safe at school. When a child does not feel safe at school, it affects everything else that goes on in that child's life. Many schools have an unofficial reputation for tolerating bullying. This reputation is usually common knowledge throughout the student community. In these schools more children tend to feel anxious about their personal safety and as a result many are reluctant to attend. By the time a school has a public reputation for being a "tough school", many victims have suffered in silence.

Once the issue of bullying is brought into the open by the school, and the community is made aware of the "No Bullying" policy, the school gains a reputation of being safe for all children and is seen as an active partner in taking care of children.

The benefits to students are significant as well. When children know that the school they attend actively works to make the learning environment a safe environment, and that bullying is not tolerated, they can afford to relax their guard and divert more of their attention to learning rather than staying safe. Even students who cannot be categorized as

victims or bullies, but who witness bullying, feel more comfortable when they know that the school community, students, staff and administration stand together against bullying.

Regardless of what kind of school environment students have previously encountered, when they enter a school with a Zero Tolerance for bullying, students who have bullying potential usually test the policy. For this reason, it is important that the school maintains the active teaching of non bullying behaviors, and publishes school-based bullying statistics (Appendix E). Students need to know that this is not just a 'shot in the dark', and that the policy will be reviewed and maintained each and every year.

Although it is best to have the entire school working toward a reduction in the number of bullying incidents, in situations where this cannot be achieved, classroom teachers can adopt individual programs. This is not as desirable for obvious reasons, but it is a start to tackling the bullying problem.

[TOP](#)

What Schools Can Do

A major cause of stress at school for children is the fear of being taunted or bullied. Kids who are bullied are two to three times more likely to have headaches or other illnesses. (ABC News, Sept. 22, 1996)

Schools need to establish a social climate where physical aggression and bullying are not used to gain popularity, maintain group leadership or influence others to do what they are told to do. No one deserves to be bullied. Once the 60% of children who are neither victims nor bullies adopt the attitude that bullying is an unacceptable behavior, schools are well on their way to having a successful bullying program.

Schools need to advertise the fact that they have adopted a Zero Tolerance policy for bullying, and that they have a working Anti-Bullying plan in force. School faculty must maintain a high profile in terms of the behavioral expectations of their students in order to gain support from the community and send a clear message to the families of present and future students that bullying will not be tolerated.

Once a school has established itself as a safe place for all students, school personnel will need to continually work at maintaining that reputation. It is a difficult task that requires the school faculty to put student safety at the top of their priority list. Remember, students who do not feel safe at school are unlikely to perform as well academically as they are capable, thus possibly impeding their future opportunities. A commitment by the staff to no-bullying in the school must be a long term undertaking. When a new school year begins, staff should be sure Anti-Bullying policies have been included and discussed in the yearly goal setting process.

Schools can create support groups where victims can concentrate on developing the skills needed to change their place within the social hierarchy of the student body. The goal is for the victim to become a part of the group of students who do not bully and are not bullied. Such changes requires a great deal of time and effort, but it is possible, given the necessary support.

[TOP](#)

Students are Key to A Successful Anti-Bullying Campaign

Students are key to a successful Anti-Bullying campaign primarily because they usually know who the bullies are long before the adults do.

When it comes to discipline or punishment issues, most students strongly believe in fairness and therefore welcome Anti-Bullying policies that encourage treating others with care and respect. However, students are more likely to support an Anti-Bullying campaign when they have been directly involved in determining the need for such a program, and deciding on its implementation. This includes developing Anti-Bullying policies and subsequent school-wide or classroom activities. It is necessary for students to promote the concept that caring for others is a valued quality, one that they accept and encourage.

Teachers need to be sensitive to the fact that the level of student participation in the Anti-Bullying campaign will vary. Once students are mobilized to take action against bullies, they must feel secure that teachers understand their need to stay safe. For some students this means ensuring that the information they share will not cause them to lose status in their peer group. Confidentiality must be maintained in order for the program to be viewed by the students as credible. As well, to help students actively participate and take on the challenge of reducing bullying, it is very important that they learn the difference between "ratting" and "reporting". "Ratting" occurs when a student tells about an inappropriate act with the idea getting another student into trouble with the administration. "Reporting" happens when a student tells to protect the safety of another student. Once students have an understanding of the difference between the two, reporting bullying incidents becomes much less of a social taboo.

Thanks for your interest in this important issue.

Bully B'ware Productions has a [book, video and posters](#) to help students, parents, teachers and administrators "Take Action Against Bullying".

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