

# **BULLYING: WHAT ADMINISTRATORS NEED TO KNOW**

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## **Abstract**

*Bullying was once thought as a rite of passage, an initiation of sorts. Numerous studies have shown that bullying isn't so simple and its effects don't disappear after the school year is done. Victims of bullies can have life long emotional damage which can prevent them from reaching an emotionally well-balanced adulthood. Bullying is no longer limited to physical domination, but it takes on many forms that can't always be seen. These bullying behaviors can be minimized within school buildings through proactive supervision and progressive programs.*

## **Introduction**

Bullying is an issue that is having a powerfully negative effect on our nation's youth. Students are loosing, or in some cases have lost their sense of safety and belonging within a school building. When these senses of are lost, character is lost, not built. Consistently being bullied has dire consequences. Bullying "creates a barrier for young people to develop into well-adjusted adults" (Harris, 2006).

## **What is Bullying?**

Bullying can be defined as: "(1) aggressive behavior or intentional harmdoing (2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power" (Chapell, 2006).

When the act of bullying is carried out, direct verbal and/or physical attacks can occur. Indirect methods, such as rumor spreading or intentional isolation are also forms of bullying.

## **Types of Bullying**

### ***Relational aggression***

This type of bullying "includes behaviors such as giving hurtful nicknames, making humiliating remarks, mocking, and making others feel alone" (Harris, 2006). When a student(s) is a victim of this type of bullying they are socially ostracized. This type of bullying typically occurs during the middle school years, but it has been found in children ranging from three years of age up to high-school.

### *Verbal bullying*

This is the most widespread form of bullying. Students who are victims of this form of bullying are “often called insulting words referring to race/ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation” (Harris, 2006).

### *Racial bullying*

Unfortunately there have not been a lot studies on racial bullying but small scale studies have found that ethnic minorities are at risk of being bullied.

### *Educational bullying*

This type of bullying is often the result of intellectual arrogance. This type of bullying exposes an “educational weakness” and causes psychological distress in the victim (Harris, 2006). These types of offenders typically view themselves as teasers, with the intention of not causing harm when in fact they do.

### *Physical aggression*

This type of bullying involves, but is not limited to kicking, shoving, and punching.

## **Bullying Data**

There is a numerous amount of data provided in all types of literature that supports the premise that bullying is an issue. This data has looked at bullying on many fronts. Examples such as teacher viewpoints on bullying, typical bullying tactics, and male versus female comparisons are just a few of the types of data analysis collected.

- A crime victimization survey showed that “3.7% of 3,494,000 12-18 year old students who had been bullied at school were carrying a gun, knife, or other weapon at school” (Chapell, 2006).
- A 1999 bullying study at a Midwestern middle school found that “four out of five middle school students say that they act like bullies at least once a month” (Study: Bullying, 1999).
- A 2006 study of Texas middle school principals’ perceptions of bullying found that “Principals’ and students’ awareness of bullying on campuses are somewhat different,” and “principals in this study did not report a high level of awareness of the places where bullying was occurring on their campuses” (Harris, 2006).
- One study found that the most frequent reason cited by youth for persons being bullied is that they “didn’t fit in” (National, 2007).
- In elementary school, “boys were over three times more likely to be classified as bully-victims than girls” (Chapell, 2006).
- Loper (2002) found that in their sample of 8,273 American middle school and high school students, “males were six times more likely to be bully-victims than were female students” (Chapell, 2006).
- “Almost 30% of youth 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” (National, 2007).
- 86% of junior high students report that they have been bullied one time or another (Study: Bullying, 1999).

### Characteristics of the Bully

Typically bullies have a positive attitude towards violence and have little, if any, empathy toward their victims. This lack of empathy seems to be an after effect of a “poor attachment between the parent and child” (Harris, 2006). Those who bully, consistently “display poor psychological functioning; demonstrate conduct problems; show a disdain for school; and, show higher levels of insecurities” (Harris, 2006).

### Effects of Being Bullied

Children who are constantly bullied can suffer from a litany of mental health problems. Students victimized over time “are at greater risk for suicidal behavior and violent behaviors” (Harris, 2006). “Bullying is seen as a major cause of children’s depressive conditions and other serious problems, such as criminal acts and alcohol abuse” (Harris, 2006).

Being a constant victim of bullying can result in poor academic performance, school avoidance, low self-esteem, diminished sense of self-worth and anxiety disorders as well. The impact of frequent bullying can accompany victims into adulthood.

In more extreme cases, “a number of studies found that most school shooters, like those at Columbine High in 1999 had been bullied” (Chapell, 2006).

### Preventing Bullying

The first step inferred from all the literature is that students and teachers must be on the same page when it comes to bullying. This means that both students and staff have the same definition of what bullying is. Students rarely report being bullied because they feel that adults can not do anything to solve the issue. “Secondary students are often reluctant to report such incidents, and when questioned, many male victims will deny the existence of a problem” (Brunner, 2007).

Research has found “that bullying is most likely to occur in schools where there is a lack of adult supervision during breaks” (National, 2007). Brunner suggests in her article, *Ten Strategies to Address Bullying*, that staff develop a map of “hot spots” where bullying is most likely to occur and step up adult supervision in these areas.

A simple crack down on the most well-known bullies will not solve the problem. “When there is a school wide commitment to end bullying, it can be reduced by up to 50%” (National, 2007). The reduction of bullying takes multiple steps and must be headed by the administration and staff of the building.

An essential part of reducing bullying is raising awareness. Adults must know what bullying looks like, and know the signs that may indicate victimization. Increasing “teacher and parent involvement and supervision, forming clear rules and strong social norms against bullying, and providing support and protection for all students” will help establish school climates where bullying is minimized (National, 2007).

There are numerous resources for administrators to reference in their attempts to reduce bullying. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and the Center for the Prevention of School Violence are just a few of the resources available to administrators. For the implementation of a program to succeed, all adults must be vested in the adoption of the program. When staff sees trainings as a waste of time, or unnecessary, the chances for a program’s success is greatly depreciated.

## Conclusion

Bullying can no longer be viewed as a rite of passage. The data shows that constant victimization has significant affects on a child that can last well into adulthood. Schools that wish to create a safe environment for their learners must be proactive in their stance against bullying. A code of conduct posted, discussed, enforced, and visible in each classroom is a beginning. Integration of anti-bullying themes into the curriculum and involvement of parents and community leaders is another step to establishing a safe learning environment for students.

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