



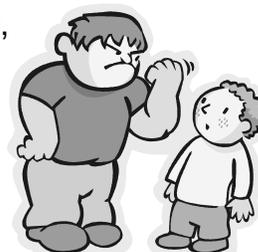
PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #12

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Bullying is a Big Deal

Being bullied or bullying is not just a part of growing up!

Bullying is a repeated physical, psychological, or verbal attempt to threaten and scare a victim. It can be done by a single person or several students, and can be against individuals or groups. Bullying can be direct behaviors such as shoving, tripping, punching, hitting, teasing, taunting, threatening, and stealing, which are typically done by boys. It may also be indirect, such as spreading rumors and excluding people, causing them to be isolated from their peers. This method is usually used by girls. Bullying can also involve sending cruel instant or email messages or even posting insults about a person on a website—practices that are known as cyberbullying.



Bullying is widespread. According to the National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center: “Almost 30 percent 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 6 to 10, 13 percent reported bullying others, 11 percent reported being the target of bullies, and another 6 percent said they bullied others and were bullied themselves.” Direct bullying increases through the elementary school years, peaks in the middle school/junior high school years and declines during the high school years. Boys are more likely to engage in bullying behaviors and to be the victim of bullies.

Who Bullies?

Both boys and girls can be bullies. Bullies may be outgoing and aggressive, or bullies can appear detached on the surface, but may try to control people in sneaky, vague ways, like secretly starting a damaging rumor just to see what happens. Many bullies share some common characteristics. They tend to

- ✓ be impulsive, hot-headed, dominant
- ✓ be easily frustrated
- ✓ have poor social skills and poor social judgment
- ✓ think they have the right to push others around, but are actually insecure
- ✓ put other people down to make themselves feel more interesting or powerful
- ✓ act the way they do because they've been hurt by bullies in the past (maybe even a bullying figure in their own family, like a parent or other adult)
- ✓ lack the ability to show kindness, concern, and caring for others
- ✓ have difficulty following rules
- ✓ view violence in a positive way.

If your child is a bully:

- Talk to him/her and make it clear that you will not allow this kind of behavior, then increase supervision.
- Set a meaningful, *non-violent* consequence that is age-appropriate.
- Ban violent television, including cartoons and violent video games which tend to increase mean behavior.

Teasing, taunting, ethnic slurs, and sexual harassment are all forms of bullying.

Some people think bullying is just part of growing up and a way for young people to learn to stick up for themselves. However, bullying can make young people feel lonely, unhappy, and frightened. It makes them feel unsafe. They think there must be something wrong with them. They lose confidence and may not want to go to school any more.

Why is bullying harmful?

- ✓ Children who are bullied often experience low self-esteem and depression.
- ✓ Children who are bullied feel unsafe and frightened.
- ✓ Children who are bullied are more likely to skip school often or drop out altogether.
- ✓ Children who are bullied are socially isolated and unhappy.
- ✓ Children who are bullied either don't report the bullying or wait a long time before reporting it because they are afraid adults cannot or will not protect them.

Victims of bullying are generally very unhappy children who suffer from fear, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem—problems that can continue into adulthood. The victim may try to avoid school or social interactions and can even be so troubled that he/she commits or attempts to commit suicide. And even when bullying does not drive victims to the extremes of suicide, they experience major psychological harm, which gets in the way of their social, academic and emotional development. The sooner the bullying stops, the better the long-term outcomes are for the victim.

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/or illegal behavior (vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and drug use) into adulthood. They are four times more likely than nonbullies to be convicted of crimes by age 24, with 60 percent of bullies having at least one criminal conviction. (Source: National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center)

What can parents do if their child is being bullied?

- Ask your child directly. Children don't tell about bullying because they are ashamed and embarrassed or are afraid of the bully getting revenge.
- Work with your school immediately by first going to his teacher to make sure your child is safe, that effective consequences are applied and that there is sufficient monitoring.
- Explain to children the difference between tattling and telling. The secrecy of bullying only protects the bully and allows the behavior to continue.
- If your child is shy and lacks friends, try to get him/her involved in positive social groups that meet his/her interests.
- Ask to be notified if your child is involved in a bullying incident—whether the victim or the bully.
- Insist that schools adopt a broad anti-bullying program. This program must involve the entire school, community, and parents.
- To really know what goes on at school and to help create a positive atmosphere, volunteer to be a playground supervisor or a classroom assistant.

Bullying is a serious problem that can affect a student's academic and social progress. The best way to combat bullying is to have a school and community where the message is clear: ***Bullying is not tolerated.***