

## Bullying in Schools

Some sociologists argue that our culture, the North American culture, values "winning at all costs". Sociologists believe that this attitude is reinforced through the media in sports, video games, movies and television shows and this mind set creates a culture where bullying is tolerated.

While you watch the clip from *CBC News in Review* on bullying, answer the following questions in your notes.

### Questions:

1. Is a violent culture a culture that accepts bullying?
2. What common characteristics do bullies have? Victims?
3. How should a parent with an aggressive child try to teach appropriate behaviour?
4. What future impact does bullying have on a victim? The person doing the bullying?
5. Why is bullying only now being recognized as a serious matter?

## BULLY PROOF Documentary

### Discussion Questions:

1. What do you know about bullying?
2. Have you ever bullied another student, experienced bullying yourself, or been a bystander to someone else bullying?
3. How does experiencing or witnessing bullying make you feel?
4. After experiencing or witnessing a bullying incident, have you noticed any effect on your surrounding (classroom, circle of friends, school)? If so, what?

### Viewing questions:

1. Consider the stories presented by the two victims, the principal, the teachers and the bullies themselves. Can you identify with these people, their stories, and their efforts? Do you relate to anything in particular about their experiences?
2. Are there people in your school that come to mind when you hear these stories?
3. What are the bullies saying about why they bully?
4. Do they even want to be bullies, or is that a role being "assigned" to them through misconception?
5. What are your thoughts on what you, your classmates or your community can do to implement change and reach out to those who are marginalized because of ability, social groups, race, religion, and socioeconomic status?

# A NEW CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT BULLYING

## What is Bullying?

### Definition

*Bullying* is when someone repeatedly and intentionally does things to hurt another person physically or emotionally.

### Did you know . . .

The “power-hungry bully” enjoys the feeling of having power over another person. He or she also enjoys the attention that accompanies this demonstration of power.

### Reading Prompt

Bullying can be terrifying and can destroy a person’s life. Like many problems in society, stamping out bullying when children are young is more effective than trying to deal with a bully later in life. As you read the following information think about strategies that might work to reduce bullying among young children.

There are three types of characteristics associated with bullying: a) the bully intentionally targets the victim; b) the bully repeatedly goes after the victim; and c) there is a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. The bully enjoys the prospect of humiliating his or her victim and often thrives on the public attention given by bystanders—whether that attention is fear or support. Victims of bullying are either unlikely or incapable of defending themselves.

### Physical Bullying

This involves any kind of physical assault on the victim, including shoving, punching, kicking, and spitting. This type of bullying may also involve taking things from the victim. With physical bullying, the bully is trying to arouse a victim’s fear for their own safety.

### Verbal Bullying

a) Teasing — using insults, slurs, or taunts to belittle another person. This is not the general teasing that friends use to poke fun at one another. This type of teasing is designed to belittle the victim. Bullies often resort to homophobic, racist, sexist, and offensive language when targeting their victims.

b) Threatening — a form of verbal bullying where a person says they are going to do something even though they may not necessarily follow through on the threat. For example, a bully may threaten to spread rumours about the victim if they don’t do something for them.

c) Spreading lies and rumours — this type of bullying goes beyond simple gossip; instead the goal of the bully is to spread false information about the intended victim. This type of bullying involves a leader working through a group in a campaign to humiliate the victim.

d) Exclusion — when a bully leads a group in a public decision to exclude the intended victim from participation in activities. The goal of this type of bullying is to make the victim feel as isolated as possible.

e) Cyber-bullying — using electronic media to bully another person. This could involve phones, texting, social networking sites like Facebook, or chat rooms. Cyber-bullying has been cause for tremendous concern recently because the bullies are often difficult to identify since they can hide behind the technology. They can also inspire others to take part in their bullying campaign with a kind of gang mentality eventually emerging. On the other hand, the victim is completely exposed—the target of a person or group that they cannot easily identify.

What can you do if you are bullied?

- Monitor your feelings. Assess the situation and make sure you are not overreacting. Try to determine if the bully is intentionally doing harm and how the harm is being delivered. If it’s bullying it will be clear the bully is intentionally trying to hurt you.

- Talk to an adult or someone in charge. Talk to your parents, your teacher, or your boss to let them know that the bullying is taking place. Bullies get most of the power from the silence of others. Don't maintain your silence.
- Demand action. If authorities are not handling the situation properly, get your parents involved and demand action. School boards, workplaces, and governments all have regulations to deter bullying. Use the policies or laws available to force the hand of people who are reluctant to deal with the bullies.
- Appear strong in the presence of the bully. While this may be easier said than done, bullies are less likely to persist if they can see that they are not getting to you. If you can project an image of confidence—even if you are terrified inside—the bully may back off. However, there is no guarantee that the bully will not simply persist until they break your confident exterior.
- Stay close to your friends. Avoid situations where you are isolated or on your own. Bullies like to target their victims when they are at their most vulnerable. They are less likely to bully when their victim is part of a cohesive group.
- Take care of yourself. Bullying can cause serious emotional damage. Make sure you do things to keep your self-esteem intact. Activities might include playing sports, pursuing a hobby, or joining a club.

Source: The Canadian Safe Schools Network, [www.canadiansafeschools.com](http://www.canadiansafeschools.com); Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, [www.olweus.org](http://www.olweus.org); "Attacked Online," *Girls' Life*, August-September 2010; "What to do if you are being bullied," American Mental Health Channel: Healthy Place, [www.healthyplace.com](http://www.healthyplace.com)

## Analysis

Complete a written response to the opening reading prompt and compare your response with that of a classmate. Add any points you had not considered to your own notes.

# TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO CARE

## **Bullying**

### **Did you know . . .**

Cyber-bullying is one of the latest forms of bullying. Bullies send their victims abusive e-mails and text messages, spread mean rumours in Internet chat rooms, and often make harassing cellphone calls. When cyber-bullying occurs it can often be difficult to identify who is doing it and therefore very difficult to stop.

### **What is it?**

You probably are familiar with bullying. Bullying is a repeated, persistent form of harassment that can include physical violence, verbal abuse, or "indirect" humiliation. This last category includes things like spreading vicious rumours or gossip about someone. You may have been a victim of bullying yourself, you may have bullied someone else, or you may have witnessed bullying in your school.

If you've never been a victim of bullying, you might not fully understand how hurtful it is to be bullied. You may think bullying is mostly harmless. But it is not. Students who are bullied suffer from some or all of the following problems:

- nightmares and sleep disorders
- stomach aches and ulcers
- high levels of fear and anxiety
- physical injuries
- loneliness and depression
- suicidal thoughts

### **Why does it occur?**

Bullying occurs because bullies themselves are usually lonely and have few friends. They have trouble in relationships and lash out at others to get attention. They may be angry at someone else in their lives who has hurt them, and they redirect that anger at someone more vulnerable than they are.

But studies have also shown that bullies can also be hurt if their behaviour is not corrected. Bullies who go unpunished for their actions often grow up to become aggressive adults. Studies show that adults who were bullies as children have a much higher than average chance of being convicted of multiple criminal charges.

Bullying also occurs because most kids who witness bullying do not intervene to stop it. And there are a number of reasons why kids do not intervene. One study conducted by the University of British Columbia found that:

- 64 per cent of kids consider bullying a normal part of school life
- 61-80 per cent of kids believe bullies are popular and enjoy high status among their peers
- 25-33 per cent of kids believe bullying is sometimes okay and/or that it is okay to pick on "losers"
- 20-50 per cent of kids think that bullying can be a good thing (makes people tougher, is a good way to solve problems, etc.).

Source: "Sticks, stones and bullies." CBC News Online. March 23, 2005, [www.cbc.ca/news/background/bullying/](http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/bullying/)

But onlookers are also hurt by bullying behaviour. Although they may not initiate bullying behaviour, they often will follow the lead of the bully out of fear. When they see that there are no negative consequences to bullying, chances are they will become more aggressive in the future.

### **What if bullying is unchecked?**

In the most extreme cases, bullies end up killing their victims, the victims commit suicide, or the victims resort to violence to try to make the bully pay for the abuse. Canada has unfortunately seen a number of young lives cut short as a result of bullying.

- In 2005, 16-year-old Gary Hansen, hanged himself in Roblin, Manitoba, after persistent bullying at the local high school. Gary had been taken out of school and home-schooled for two

years because of earlier bullying. But in 2005, he had returned to school and his marks were increasing when the bullying began again. He was taunted, beaten up, and accused of being gay.

- In 2004, 16-year-old Travis Sleeve shot himself after being beaten up and having his car defaced. His mother says that the school board had not responded to her complaints when the bullying was occurring.
- In 2004, a 14-year-old girl named Dawn-Marie Wesley hanged herself in her bedroom after constant bullying by three girls at school. Her suicide note said that "If I try to get help it will get worse. . . . If I ratted they would get suspended and there would be no stopping them."
- In 2000, bullying drove 14-year-old Hamed Nastoh to kill himself by jumping off a bridge. He left a seven-page suicide note for his family.
- In 1998, 10-year-old Myles Neuts was found hanging, unconscious, from a coat hook at an elementary school in Ontario. He died four days later. A coroner's inquest later revealed that Myles was hung on the hook by two older boys who had waited for him in a washroom, suspended him from the coat hook as he slowly strangled, and brought friends in to watch "the dummy" until one told a teacher.
- In 1997, 14-year-old Reena Virk was attacked and beaten by six teenaged girls and a teenaged boy. These schoolmates of Virk's beat her unconscious and left her to drown.

After Reena Virk's death, Yasmin Jiwani, executive co-ordinator of Vancouver's FREDA Centre for Re-

search on Violence against Women and Children ([www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/index.htm](http://www.harbour.sfu.ca/freda/index.htm)), wrote an essay on the tragedy. She argued that Virk desperately tried to fit in but she failed. "She was brown in a predominately white society. She was supposedly overweight in a society which values slimness to the point of anorexia, and she was different in a society which values 'sameness' and uniformity."

Source: "Sticks, stones and bullies." CBC News Online. March 23, 2005, [www.cbc.ca/news/background/bullying/](http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/bullying/)

### Who are the targets?

Many experts point to a typical profile of bullying victims.

- They are quiet and shy and when they are bullied they do not fight back.
- They tend not to be confident in their physical abilities or strength.
- They may not have a lot of friends.
- They are afraid of reporting bullying because they fear retaliation or are ashamed they can't protect themselves.
- They believe that adults will not be able to protect them from the bullying.
- They feel powerless.

But experts are also quick to note there is no typical victim. They believe this is because there is no real reason for someone to be targeted. If one child decides that another one is wearing "stupid shoes" or is a "loser" sometimes the labels stick. So, anyone can become a victim. These experts believe that this is an important message to send to children. All of us have flaws. All of us have characteristics that might seem odd or quirky at times. But we are all human and deserve to be treated fairly.

### Activity

Produce a pamphlet or poster describing the problem of bullying. Design your product for kids your age or younger. See if you can arrange to display your products in your school foyer or deliver them to an elementary school near you.

# TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO CARE

## What Research Says

### Quote

"Once children are of school age, the single most important thing that we can do to advance pro-social (non-violent) behaviour and effective parenting for the next generation is to foster the development of empathy." — Mary Gordon, founder, Roots of Empathy

### Further Research

To learn more about the program, visit the Roots of Empathy Web site at [www.rootsofempathy.org](http://www.rootsofempathy.org).

### The Roots of Anti-social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour can be defined as any behaviour that differs from established social norms. This definition will vary to some degree based on the social environment in which a child lives.

Examples of anti-social behaviour include:

- skipping school
- getting into fights
- running away from home
- persistently lying
- using illegal drugs or alcohol
- stealing, vandalizing property
- engaging in aggressive or violent behavior toward other individuals (including bullying)
- violating school rules, home rules, or local criminal laws

There are several factors that can lead a young person to engage in anti-social behaviours. These generally fall into three separate areas: family, individual, and school.

### Family Factors

Studies have shown that most bullies come from homes where the child receives very little attention and warmth. The child also often sees aggressive behaviour being used at home. Children who are victims of violence, or who witness violence being used against other family members, tend to grow up believing that "might makes right." Psychologists believe that children model this behaviour in their own relationships with peers and other adults. As well, children from violent households do not learn non-violent conflict resolution strategies. Children learn what they live, and if they never

see conflicts being resolved in a positive manner, they will not be able to resolve conflicts successfully themselves.

Sociologists also point to the breakdown of the nuclear family as another factor that has resulted in an increase in anti-social behaviour. Since the 1960s, the rate of divorce has soared. As a result, fewer people live in nuclear families—one where a man and woman marry and have children and live together as a single family. Sociologists argue that many single parents are so overburdened with their responsibilities for working and taking care of household duties that they simply can't spend a sufficient amount of time with their children. This may result in children being poorly supervised or feeling neglected or ignored. (Of course, this can also happen in two-parent families as well.)

Sociologist Freda Adler studied several countries with low rates of violence to determine why they experienced less crime than North American countries. She found that all countries with low rates of violence had strong family systems. Businesses in these countries promoted the family structure by providing good child care, leisure activities, and good vacation plans to help support workers with families. This support of families resulted in happier, more stable individuals and reduced incidence of crime.

### Individual Factors

Studies show that children who bully tend to have an active and impulsive temperament. Frequently they are physically larger and stronger than their

classmates (this is more true of boys who bully than of girls) but it should be noted that not all physically strong and active students are bullies—in fact the majority are not.

Psychologists like Harry Harlow strongly believe that the attachment between a child and his or her primary caregiver is the most important relationship of a person's life. Harlow believed that the quality of this relationship determined an individual's ability to form other lasting relationships in life. In studies conducted in the 1950s, Harlow found that a connection with a warm, loving caregiver is so important that baby rhesus monkeys would only leave such a caregiver for up to one hour a day and only when they absolutely had to eat. For the remaining 23 hours of the day, the monkeys would stay with the caregiver that provided warmth and security.

### **Analysis**

Review the family, individual, and school factors linked to anti-social behaviour. Identify and record the three specific elements that you believe play the biggest role in creating bullies.

### **School Factors**

Teachers and school administrators have learned they can reduce incidents of violence and bullying in and around the school through increased supervision on the playground and in the hallways and cafeteria. Immediate adult intervention whenever a bullying incident is witnessed is also important. Both of these elements send the message that bullying behaviour will not be tolerated. It also sends an important message to the victim that he or she has support within the school.

But school administrators also acknowledge that these steps alone cannot solve the problem of bullying. They believe that programs designed to encourage pro-social behaviour and increase empathy are an important component of achieving more supportive school environments—in other words, programs like Roots of Empathy.