

Information Sheet: Bullies and Victims

Bullying is:

- Hurting someone with words or actions, repeatedly and over time;

Bullying behaviors encompass a wide range of actions and interactions, ranging from physical assaults to verbal abuse to social ostracism. What distinguishes bullying from teasing is the repetition of the behavior and the clear intent to inflict harm on the victim.

- Usually done by someone with “power” over someone else;

A real or perceived power imbalance usually exists between the bully and the victim. Often a student who is the bully in one situation is the victim in another. Typical sources of power are age, size, and social standing within the peer group.

- Never acceptable.

Attitudes and actions that suggest that “boys will be boys,” that bullying is “normal kid stuff,” or that “kids can take care of it themselves” can be extremely detrimental. Studies have found that the actions of educators can have a significant impact on the incidence of bullying within a school or class. When instructors call attention to the problem of bullying and establish the attitude that “we don’t accept bullying,” bullying incidents do decrease in severity.

Typical bullies are aggressive, impulsive, and hostile. They reap benefits from their bullying behaviors, including a measure of prestige. Bullies typically do not suffer from poor self-esteem; they often have an inflated notion of their popularity and a distorted view of the costs and benefits of their aggressive behaviors. Boy bullies most often engage in active, physical bullying behaviors, including open attacks. Girl bullies most often engage in indirect bullying behaviors, involving others in isolating the victim socially. Bullies benefit from intensive, focused work on anger management, social skills, and decision-making.

Typical victims are anxious, insecure, passive, and weak. They tend to be isolated at school and submissive in their responses. More than any external characteristic, it is the victim’s reaction pattern that results in him/her becoming and remaining the target of the bully’s negative attention. Victims benefit from working on self-confidence and assertiveness.



Information Sheet: What Can Schools Do?

Schools can have significant impact on the behaviors and attitudes of their students with regard to bullying. A clearly-defined, comprehensive anti-bullying program resulted in dramatically reduced numbers of incidents in schools studied.

The single most important element in such a program is the involvement of the teacher, the counselor, and the principal. Adults must set the standard by doing the following:

- Drawing attention to the problem;
 - Establishing (preferably with student input) clear anti-bullying rules;
 - Imposing fair and consistent consequences for bullying behaviors;
 - Encouraging students who observe bullying incidents to report their observations and seek adult help and intervention;
- Increasing supervision of students in areas and at times in which bullying is likely to occur (i.e., lunchrooms, hallways, restrooms);
 - Involving students in discussions of bullying through frequent class-wide meetings;
 - Identifying and working with individual students involved in bullying incidents, both bullies and victims;
 - Encouraging and facilitating the participation and involvement of all students in school and class-wide activities; and
 - Involving parents by:
 - a. informing them of the extent of the problem in your school;
 - b. making them aware of the rules and consequences established; and
 - c. soliciting their support in reinforcing the principles and goals of the anti-bullying program.

