

What Is Bullying?

Here are some definitions, according to the experts...



“I define bullying or victimization in the following general way: A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.”

—Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), p. 9.

“Bullying among children is commonly defined as intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words, or other behavior, such as name-calling, threatening and/or shunning committed by one or more children against another. These negative acts are not intentionally provoked by the victims, and for such acts to be defined as bullying, an imbalance in real or perceived power must exist between the bully and the victim. Bullying may be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual in nature.”

—“Preventing Bullying: A Manual for Schools and Communities,” U.S. Department of Education: p. 1.

Bullying has these characteristics...

1. Intent to harm—the perpetrator finds pleasure in the taunting and continues even when the victim’s distress is obvious.
2. Intensity and duration—the teasing continues over a long period of time and the degree of taunting is damaging to the self-esteem of the victim.
3. Power of the abuser—the abuser maintains power because of age, strength, size, and/or gender.
4. Vulnerability of the victim—the victim is more sensitive to teasing, cannot adequately defend him or herself, and has physical or psychological qualities that make him or her more prone to vulnerability.
5. Lack of support—the victim feels isolated and exposed. Often, the victim is afraid to report the abuse for fear of retaliation.
6. Consequences—the damage to self-concept is long lasting, and the impact on the victim leads to behavior marked by either withdrawal or aggression.”

—Suellen and Paula Fried, *Bullies & Victims: Helping Your Child Through the Schoolyard Battlefield* (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1996), pp. 9-10.]

Some Facts About Bullying

- Victims are always vulnerable in some way. They are more anxious and insecure than other students. [Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), p. 32.]
- While there is a long-standing myth that bullies are insecure, in fact bullies are abusers. Bullies are typically aggressive toward adults as well as peers. Bullies are often impulsive; they demonstrate a need to dominate. They typically lack empathy and are often more willing to resolve conflict through violence. They are more likely than other children to be convicted of a crime in adulthood. [Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 34-36.]
- The most common reason for bullying in middle and high school is physical appearance, perceived sexual orientation or gender expression, and showing perceived LGBT-related characteristics. [Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, *The Principal's Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment: A Survey of Public School Principals*, May 2008, p. 1.]
- Bullying occurs in all geographic regions and all types of schools.
- Boys and girls become bullies. Victims are both male and female. Methods of bullying may vary by gender.
- Most students report that when they are bullied, adults do not notice.
- Adults can stop bullying. A community can cease to accept uncritically that "boys will be boys," or that "girls are mean in fourth grade." Parents need to discuss bullying and help children develop strategies to deal with it.
- Cyber-bullying now occurs through cell phone texting, instant messaging, blogging and social networking sites. Children must be made aware that they should tell a responsible adult. One guidance counselor reports that she finds students' blogs on-line and alerts the parents: "I'll call and say, 'I would like Susy to show you her blog.'" ["E-Bully," *Teaching Tolerance*, Number 29, Spring 2006.]
- Anti-harassment policies in schools make a difference. Today 73 percent of teachers report that it is their obligation to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for LGBT students, and 91 percent of teachers report that their school has a policy for reporting incidents of harassment. Still, 52 percent of teens report that they hear homophobic remarks from their peers at school. [Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network, *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America: A Survey of Students and Teachers*, 2005, p. 7.] This is a significant improvement, however, since a 1993 study reported that 97 percent of students in public high schools reported regularly hearing homophobic remarks from their peers and 53 percent of students reported hearing homophobic comments made by school staff. ["Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth: Report of the Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth," 1993.]
- The culture of a school or a congregation or a community can affect the degree of bullying that is happening. If a school can institute a program that significantly reduces bullying, the bullying does not seem to be displaced to other settings outside of school.

