

Bullying – Causes and Countermeasures

What can we do about bullying?

The Goals:

1. To reduce or (eliminate) both direct bullying, open physical and verbal attacks and indirect bullying (social isolation, confidence reduction).
2. To achieve better peer relations at school.
3. To create conditions that enabled victims and bullies to function better in and out of the school setting.

Preventative measures operate on several levels.

1. The school
2. The classroom
3. The bully
4. The Victim and
5. The parents

Results have shown That schools and parents who have taken these preventative measures have succeeded in reducing the incidence of bullying (repeated events) and that the children / students themselves when asked, state that there are fewer cases of bullying overall then previously.

What is bullying?

A general definition is as follows; Bullying: An individual (student) is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more individuals or other students. Negative actions can be physical, verbal or social, or any combination of all three types or categories.

The term bullying should not be applied whendifferences arise between two students of the same relative size strength (psychological or physical) and the same relative social status among peers. To be defined as bullying there needs to be an asymmetrical power relationship - an imbalance in strength. The victim has difficulty defending Him /Herself and is somewhat helpless against the student or students carrying out the harassment.

The number of students bullied in grades 2-6 (11.6 percent) is approximately twice as

high as that in grades 7- 9 (5.4 percent). It is the younger and weaker students who are most exposed and at a greater risk to be the victim of bullying. A considerable part of the bullying being carried out on these younger students is carried out by older students, (About 50 percent). It is important also to be aware that bullying is not just boys to boys or girls to girls but that it crosses over boys to girls and girls to boys in significant amounts of incidents.

Where does bullying take place?

Contrary to the popular belief (influenced by movies and TV) that bullying occurs either going to or from school, the school is without doubt where most bullying occurs. However when students were bullied while traveling to or from school, that is where the victims report that they feel the most alone and without help.

In most cases the parents of both the victims and bullies, especially the bullies, were also parents who were the most unaware of the "bully" problem and the least likely to have talked to their children about the subject of bullying. And, in terms of supervision at schools, both the student teacher ratio and the importance of the teachers attitudes toward the bully/victim problems and their reaction/ actions to bullying situations were of major significance to the extent of bully/victim problems in the school or classroom.

Who is The Victim?

Typical victims are; more anxious, less assertive and more insecure. They are often cautious sensitive and quiet. They often react to attacks by crying and withdrawal. They often suffer from low self esteem and often look upon themselves as failures, feel stupid, ashamed or unattractive. They often have a negative attitude toward violence and the use of violent means. In boys they are often physically weaker than other boys. These victims can be characterised as having an *anxious or submissive reaction pattern* combined with physical weakness.

In general you could categorize them as a passive or submissive victim. It is important to

understand that this behaviour (passive/ submissive) signals to others that they are insecure, timid and non-aggressive individuals who will not retaliate if they are attacked or insulted. It is also interesting to note that in this group were boys who had closer contact with their mothers than with their fathers and that the over protectiveness of the mothers relationships had a factor both as a cause and consequence of bullying.

Who is the bully?

The most distinctive characteristic of the typical bully is their aggression toward peers. But they tend to also be aggressive towards adults as well, both parents and teachers. They have little empathy towards/with their victims. And contrary to common belief they have an internal, positive view of themselves as opposed to the "tough on the outside, insecure on the inside," view that is so commonly espoused.

There are also the passive bullies, the minions, followers or supporters of the leader. These individuals while possessing many of the same traits as their "leader" do possess some insecurities and self esteem issues. The lead bully does not suffer from low self esteem and is generally physically stronger or larger than his followers or henchmen, the passive bullies . The general contrast between the two groups, Bully and Victim can be generalized as the following;

Bully - aggressive reaction pattern combined with physical strength/ dominance.

Victims - submissive reaction pattern combined with physical weakness/ diminutive physical size or nature.

The bully has a strong need for power and dominance and enjoys being in control by subduing others. To the bully from his own internal view these attributes and the result of their implication provide a reward in the form of prestige. It has been found that bullying is more often found in conjunction with other overt anti-social and rule breaking behaviour. It is further shown that these individuals are far more likely to be at risk for later engaging in other behaviors such as criminality and alcohol/ substance abuse. Approximately 60

per cent of bullies in grades 6-9 had at least one criminal conviction by the age of 14.

Identifying Your Child--Bully or Victim?

Signs of A victim

1. Child is often teased (in a nasty way) called names or ridiculed.
2. Child is made fun of often given a derogatory nickname.
3. Child is picked on physically, shoved punched or kicked.
4. Child has books, money or belongings taken damaged or scattered around, often explained (covered up) as being lost.
5. Child has bruises, cuts or other injuries that cannot be naturally explained, often in conjunction with torn clothes.
6. Child does not seem to have one or two good friends (best friends)
7. Child appears afraid or reluctant to go to school in the morning often having repeated headaches or stomach aches- especially in the morning.
8. Child may choose a different route for going to school or choose to arrive right before the morning bell.
9. Child has interrupted or restless sleep, bad dreams or may cry in their sleep.
10. Child may ask masked questions; "Is it ok to...? What should a person do if...?"
Or describe a scenario involving "other" kids and what "they" are dealing with.
11. Child may lose interest in school, after school activities, school work or get lower grades.

Signs of a Bully

1. Child may be physically larger and /or stronger than peers of the same age.
2. Child may have strong need to dominate and subdue other children to, "get their way".

3. Child may be hot tempered, easily angered, impulsive, have low tolerance for frustration have difficulty conforming to rules, and may engage in cheating to “win”.
4. Child may be oppositional, defiant and aggressive toward adults including teachers and parents and are often good at talking their way out of “difficult situations.”
5. Child is seen as being tough, hardened and show no empathy for other children.
6. Child is not anxious or insecure and typically has a positive view of themselves (average or above average self esteem)
7. Child may engage at an early age (compared to their peer group) in anti-social behavior, stealing, vandalism, drinking and associate with “bad companions.”
8. Child may be average student in regard to grades in elementary school, but grades and performances usually decline in junior high, often exhibiting a negative attitude to school.

Size Matters

As discussed earlier, victims as a whole clearly have less than average physical strength. Bullies on the other hand are often physically stronger and larger than victims. However, not all strong boys are bullies. Most larger and stronger boys are not bullies. But characteristically, physical size and strength when combined with an aggressive reaction pattern is common in almost all typical bullies. Correspondingly, as previously mentioned, a victim is usually characterised by a combination of an anxious reaction pattern along with physical weakness. Conversely, physical strength gives a potential victim the means of defending himself and thus does function as good protection and effective deterrent against bullying and victimization.

What Are Your Rights?

Having a “guaranteed right” on paper does not guarantee its existence in real life. To secure that right, it must be fought for and once secured it must be maintained by a vigorous and ongoing defense of its existence. The bully in this case, does not care about “guaranteed rights” he just does.

The scorpion and the frog

It is best illustrated by the story of the scorpion and the frog. A scorpion comes to a stream and cannot swim across it. Seeing a frog, he asks for help. “Can you carry me across on your back?” The frog replies, “No way, you’re a scorpion, you’ll sting me”. The scorpion promises not to sting the frog and the frog finally relents and allows the scorpion onto his back. The frog swims across the stream and as they reach the dry land on other side, the scorpion strikes the frog with his stinger. As the frog lies dying on the ground he asks, “Why did you sting me? You promised not to.” The scorpion simply looks back and replies, “I don’t know, I’m a scorpion”.

Your children’s rights, in this case are the ones you must defend. And at times, this requires a little personal courage on the part of the parent, even at the risk of being labeled, “one of those parents.” You must speak up and speak out when you become aware of bullying against your own child or any other children. Would I defend and protect my own child, any child, at the risk of being labeled with some stupid social stigma? In a heartbeat! Do I, should you, care for one instant what some other parent or their peers thinks about me or you for doing the right thing? Not for one second! Your Childs welfare is the only thing that should matter. Yet, there are many parents who will not, “embarrass” themselves for protecting or defending the rights of their own child.

What are those rights? Very simply they are this; no child should ever have to be afraid of going to school, of being on the playground or among their peers for fear of being harassed, humiliated or degraded and correspondingly no parent should need to worry about any of these things happening to their child!

It does not require much imagination to understand the effects of going through the school years in a state of more or less permanent anxiety and insecurity and with poor self-esteem and little hope of relief or rescue. In some cases this downward spiral of exasperation, fear and hopelessness becomes so overwhelming that it has driven the most vulnerable to seeing suicide as the only possible solution.

Countermeasures

It is highly imperative to counteract the bullies behavior at the earliest possible discovery or the best moment for interdiction. As previously stated bullies are far more likely to continue on an ever increasing pattern of anti-social behaviour. It is essential that this behavior be stopped or redirected to "break the pattern" that is being constantly reinforced and developed by the bully. There is no evidence that suggests that a "tolerant" and permissive attitude by adults helps these children outgrow their anti-social behavior patterns but in almost all cases contributes to the problem by not inducing consequences to bad behaviour and becomes tacit approval of such. In fact, research has shown that these same bullies carry this behavior forward into adulthood.

At the same time individuals who are the victims of bullying can be given tools, both educational and physical, that can remove them from the radar screen of bullies as they search for their next victim. These tools can include a good and ongoing parent/child discourse about the subject of bullying and further discussions to break the stigma of being labeled a "tattle tale" if they report bullying against either themselves or others to parents or school authorities. By instilling the idea that they are doing the right thing morally and ethically by protecting themselves and others from being bullied by reporting it can be stressed that they are being heroic and showing courage by coming forth in reporting such behavior.

The same openness and involvement with the parents can alert you to the fact that your child may be being victimized. If you are not aware, then your child is truly alone against the bully. By being aware if your child is being bullied you can step in to alert school authorities or even law enforcement if necessary. Too many times, too late, parents are heard saying. 'I did not know anything was going on.'

Active Countermeasures

Physical training is also a definite factor in creating a non-victim child. Children that are involved in sports become more assertive, more daring and develop an athleticism that deters bullies from seeing them as an easy target. And, contrary to what many sensitive, passive or politically correct parents may think, physical retaliation is the greatest deterrent against bullying. But, being aware that almost all schools have a no violence or zero-tolerance stance in regard to “fighting,” this is often a difficult aspect to address. Yet it has been proven that just like large physical size, the ability and the willingness to “flight back”, is one of the best and most effective countermeasures against bullying. Children that take boxing, karate, Judo or Jiu Jitsu learn skills that will not only protect them if attacked but often will deter an attack because the bully has merely heard that this boy or girl knows how and will fight back if provoked. Even a child who is forced against their will to take martial arts classes will benefit once it becomes known to others (the bad guys) that they are training in martial arts. Once a child becomes convinced that they are not helpless, that they can defend themselves (whether they actually can or can't) and that they have now taken a pro-active role in their own defense and protection, it translates to an aura that they exude and that aura will most often prevent attacks without ever any need for actual physical action. Remember that bullies are no more than a predator in the predator/prey relationship. If there is any doubt in the bullies mind for any of the above reasons, just like a predator, they will move on to an easier target. So the old scenario, “son put on these boxing gloves. I'm going to teach you how to defend yourself” has been proven to be one of **the most effective countermeasures** to bullying on a number of effective levels.

In the end to effectively deal with the bullying problem there must be cooperation on different levels from the schools, the parents and the child. Non involvement or worse, non-cooperation, (denial) by any of the three makes solving the problem much more difficult. And if both the school and the parent refuse to become involved unfortunately, sometimes the results are disastrous (Columbine or child suicide).

Schools may indeed hide behind the (it sounds good) zero-tolerance policy for bullying. But unfortunately zero-tolerance is **always** after the fact and the fact is that bullying takes place at every school, everyday regardless of the schools policy. Most schools only become involved after the damage has already been done to the victims and often, almost always, after it has been going on for a very long time. Rather than dealing with bullying in a proactive, preventative way, it is just easier to hide behind a zero tolerance boiler plate and deal with bullies after they have committed their crime, often by expelling both the bully and the innocent victim who may have been pushed so far that physical retaliation was their last resort. That serves no one well and should not be tolerated within our school system. A victim of a bully is a victim of a crime, a criminal assault, no matter the age, and it is just as serious and psychosocially damaging as an adult being beaten and robbed in a baseball stadium parking lot. A victim is a victim whether they are four years old or forty and they should be treated as such with no penalty or repercussion for either reporting the abuse or standing up to it and defending themselves against it if necessary. We throw people in jail for abusing a dog. Shouldn't we be as protective of the welfare and safety of our own children?