

# Understanding Respect

## Bullying

### What is Bullying?

Bullying is repeated and unnecessary aggressive behavior, or quite simply, unprovoked meanness. It's a form of intimidation, behavior designed to threaten or frighten or to get someone to do something they wouldn't normally do. Bullies have learned that bullying works. They do it to feel powerful and in control.

Bullying includes

- Fighting, threatening, name-calling, teasing, or excluding someone repeatedly and over time
- An imbalance of power, such as size or popularity
- Physical, social, and emotional harm
- Hurting another person to get something

Bullying is often dismissed as part of growing up. But it's actually an early form of aggressive, violent behavior. Statistics show that one in four children who have bullied will have a criminal record by age 30.

Bullies often cause serious problems that school, families, and neighbors ignore. Teasing at bus stops, taking, taking another child's lunch money, insults and threats, kicking and shoving—it's all fair game to a bully. Fears and anxieties about bullies can cause some kids to avoid school, carry a weapon for protection, or even commit more violent activity.

### Signs and Symptoms of Bullying

Many kids are embarrassed to be bullied and may not tell anyone right away. If someone you know comes to you and asks for help with a bully, take it seriously. Probing a seemingly minor complaint may uncover more serious grievances. Children are often afraid or ashamed to tell anyone that they have been bullied, so listen to their complaints. Many times, if kids aren't taken seriously the first time they ask for help, they don't ask again.

Even if a child doesn't turn to you for help, you can watch for these warning signs that he or she is being bullied. Kids who are bullied often experience

- Withdrawal
- A loss of friends
- A drop in grades
- A loss of interest in activities he or she previously enjoyed

- Torn clothing
- Bruises
- A need for extra money or supplies

Most bullying happens when adults aren't around, such as in between classes, at lunch or recess, after school, and online. Still, bullying rarely takes place without an audience - kids are around to see bullying 85 percent of the time. But even though they see it, kids usually don't try to stop bullying, and may even be unknowingly encouraging it.

Most of the time that kids witness bullying, they stand by passively. This causes bullying to last longer because it reinforces the bullies' power and status, two reasons that people bully. Most kids don't want to watch bullying, and don't want it to happen at all. But many kids don't know how to do this and worry that by stepping in they might become the next victim. These worries, and witnessing verbal and physical abuse, take a toll on bystanders.

#### Possible effects on bystanders

- Feel angry, helpless, and guilty
- Don't feel safe where bullying takes place, like in certain hallways in school, on the bus, in the park, or online
- Fear of becoming the next victim

Two out of three kids want to help when they see bullying, and helping out is one of the most effective ways to stop bullying and prevent it from happening again. When friends help out, 57 percent of the time bullying stops in 10 seconds (*Hawkins, Pepler, and Craig, Social Development, 2001*).

### **Risk Factors for Being Bullied**

Anyone can be the target of bullying behavior. However, a typical person who is bullied is likely to be shy, sensitive, and perhaps anxious or insecure. Some kids are picked on for physical reasons, such as being overweight or small, wearing different or "weird" clothing, having a physical disability, or belonging to a different race or religious faith.

Kids who are bullied often

- Are different from other kids, whether by size, race, sexually, or have different interests
- Seem weak, either physically or emotionally
- Are insecure
- Want approval
- Won't tell on their bullies

### **If You Are Being Bullied**

If you are being bullied, there are things you can do to deal with the situation without making things worse. No one solution works well in every situation, but there are a variety of strategies you can try.

- Avoid or ignore the bully.
- Hang out with friends. There is safety in numbers.
- Say "no" to a bully's demands from the start. If the bully threatens you with a weapon, give in to the demands and immediately tell an adult.
- Tell the bully assertively to stop threatening you (for example, "I don't like what you're

doing. Stop it!” or “Get a life—leave me alone.”)

- Do not physically fight back: experience shows that this actually increases the likelihood of continued victimization.
- Seek immediate help from an adult.
- Report bullying to school personnel.
- If your safety is at stake, walk away or run if you need to.

## **Characteristics of Bullies**

**Intimidators.** Some bullies are outgoing, aggressive, active, and expressive. They get their way by brute force or openly harassing someone. They may carry a weapon. This type of bully rejects rules and regulations and needs to rebel to achieve a feeling of being better than everyone else.

**Smooth Talkers.** Other bullies are more reserved and tricky and may not want to be recognized as harassers or tormentors. They try to control by talking, saying the right thing at the right time, and lying. This type of bully gets his or her power secretly through manipulation and deception.

As different as these two types may seem, all bullies have these characteristics in common:

- Concern with their own pleasure
- Desire for power over others
- Willingness to use and abuse other people to get what they want
- Feeling of pain inside, perhaps because of their own shortcomings
- Inability to see things from someone else’s perspective.

## **Stop the Bullying**

It’s everyone’s responsibility to stop bullying. And seek help when necessary. It takes courage, but you will be preventing the intimidation from continuing and possibly escalating. You can report the problem to authorities anonymously.

- Refuse to participate in taunting and teasing.
- Treat others the way you would like to be treated.
- Tell adults if you witness cruelty or hear about violence that might occur.
- Walk away from fights.
- Speak out against the bully.
- Stand tall and walk with confidence and in a way that commands respect.
- Hang out with friends who don’t get involved in bullying.
- Stand up for others who are being intimidated.
- Include the person who is being bullied in your activities.
- Show compassion for the victim.

# **Cyberbullying**

## **What is Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is similar to other types of bullying, except it takes place online and through text messages sent to cell phones. Cyberbullies can be classmates, online acquaintances, and even anonymous users, but most often they do know their victims.

Some examples of ways kids bully online are

- Sending someone mean or threatening emails, instant messages, or text messages
- Excluding someone from an instant messenger buddy list or blocking their email for no reason
- Tricking someone into revealing personal or embarrassing information and sending it to others
- Breaking into someone's email or instant message account to send cruel or untrue messages while posing as that person
- Creating websites to make fun of another person such as a classmate or teacher
- Using websites to rate peers as prettiest, ugliest, etc.

Both boys and girls sometimes bully online and just as in face-to-face bullying, tend to do so in different ways. Boys more commonly bully by sending messages of a sexual nature or by threatening to fight or hurt someone. Girls more often bully by spreading rumors and by sending messages that make fun of someone or exclude others. They also tell secrets.

## **The Effects of Cyberbullying**

Victims of cyberbullying may experience many of the same effects as children who are bullied in person, such as a drop in grades, low self-esteem, a change in interests, or depression. However cyberbullying can seem more extreme to its victims because of several factors:

- It occurs in the child's home. Being bullied at home can take away the place children feel most safe.
- It can be harsher. Often kids say things online that they wouldn't say in person, mainly because they can't see the other person's reaction.
- It can be far reaching. Kids can send emails making fun of someone to their entire class or school with a few clicks, or post them on a website for the whole world to see.
- It can be anonymous. Cyberbullies often hide behind screen names and email addresses that don't identify who they are. Not knowing who is responsible for bullying messages can add to a victim's insecurity.
- It may seem inescapable. It may seem easy to get away from a cyberbully by just getting offline, but for some kids not going online takes away one of the major places they socialize.

Cyberbullying can be a complicated issue, especially for adults who are not as familiar with using the Internet, instant messenger, or chat rooms as kids. But like more typical forms of bullying, it can be prevented when kids know how to protect themselves and parents are available to help.