

The Battle Against Bullying

Research suggests a significant minority of Canadian youngsters are teased and tormented on playgrounds, in schoolyards and even in their own homes – places where they should feel safest. In a 1997 survey of nearly 5,000 Canadian children in

Grades 1 to 8, six percent said they had bullied others more than once or twice in the past six weeks. 15 percent said they had been victims of bullies, and two percent said they had been both bullies and bullied.

It's unclear whether the incidence of bullying is on the rise, but a number of high-profile cases have recently brought the issue to the forefront of public attention. As a result, there are now extensive efforts to understand what causes it, and what impact it can have on victims, bullies and bystanders – in both the near and longer term.

For many children and youth, bullying takes the form of taunts, isolation or rejection – the upturned nose of the school's most popular girl, leading her whispering acolytes past the child judged uncool and invisible.

Kinds of Bullying

- Teasing
- Physical intimidation such as: hair pulling or pushing
- Pinching or touching without consent
- Insulting somebody by making crude, sexist, or racist remarks
- Spreading rumours
- Threatening looks, unsightly gestures
- Writing unpleasant things about somebody (on paper or by e-mail)
- Threatening or scaring somebody
- Stealing, "taxing" (extortion of money and personal items)

Symptoms of Bullying

- Feelings of rejection
- Low self-esteem
- Poor grades at school
- Isolation, withdrawal
- Aggressiveness, nervousness, extreme sensitivity
- Fear or refusal to go to school
- Inexplicable cuts and bruises
- Never inviting friends over at home
- Constantly asking to be driven to school

Targets for Bullying

- Choice of clothing
- Physical differences or faults (fast, slow, big or small development)
- Distinctive characteristics of parents (different education from other parents of the region, religion, origin, language)
- Nutritional habits
- Speech impediments
- Introverted personality, solitary person

What Children Should Do

- Do not answer back with verbal violence
- Ignore the insults by walking with your head up high
- If you witness bullying towards another student, it is best to immediately refer what you have seen to an adult

What Parents Should Do

- Discuss the problem with your child and try to obtain the name of the bully
- Discuss the problem with the teacher and the principal of the school
- Advise the child but try not to do everything in his or her place
- Guide the child towards out-of-school activities
- Do not encourage verbal or physical violence as a suitable means of defence
- Do not trivialize the problem, take it seriously.

Young and Old

Most bullying happens among children, some as young as tots, in the sandbox. Younger children are more likely to be victims of older bullies, while older kids are more likely to be the same age as their bullies. And sometimes, young people – including volunteer referees and coaches for house league sports teams – are victimized by particularly aggressive and insensitive adults.

Experts aren't sure what triggers bullying, although most feel that bullies are made, not born. Psychologist Dr. Peter Jaffe blames society's acceptance – even glorification – of violence in professional sports, films, TV, video games and rap music.

"We're raising children in a toxic environment," laments the father of four boys, noting that by the time they graduate from elementary school, children will have seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence in the media. Such signals desensitize children, and even if a child does not become a bully, he or she becomes less likely to intervene to stop bullying among others.

Definition of Bullying

Psychologists define bullying as a power relationship carried on by one individual or a group of individuals towards another person. Bullying does not necessarily need to be brutal or physical violence. Rumours, threats, hurtful words also lead to feelings of rejection.

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The Bully Bystander

A new public service announcement designed to reach children aged 8 to 10 takes aim at the bully bystander: the individual who watches incidents of bullying without taking action. The commercial is an initiative of Concerned Children's Advertisers, a non-profit organization of 24 Canadian companies which market and advertise products and services to children and their families.

"Bullying affects just about every child in Canada, either as a victim, bystander, or bully," notes Cathy Loblaw, president of Concerned Children's Advertisers. "Our hope is that this commercial will help children understand that by doing nothing - just standing there and watching - they are actually contributing to the problem. We want to help kids realize that they also have the power to play an important role in putting an end to bullying." That role, simply put, is to "walk away," which is also the title of the TV ad.



The Bully,
the Bullied,
and the
Bystander

Breaking the Cycle of Violence

Umbrella has Barbara Coloroso's book- The bully, the bullied and the bystander - in our resource centre.

CONCERNED



CHILDREN'S
ADVERTISERS

Bullying is not a normal part of childhood.

Children need adults to intervene.

Contrary to popular thought, bullying is not a normal part of childhood. Children generally cannot sort out these conflicts by themselves. They need adults to intervene, whether parent or caregiver or teacher, to teach pro-social behaviours to bullies and to teach victims and bystanders how to deal effectively with bullying and harassment.

Bullies are often natural leaders. They need to learn new ways to behave that allow them to lead plus allow them to get along with others. Once the cycle is reversed, these ex-bullies start to get more positive feeling about themselves and find life is a lot more fun. They have friends who like them for themselves, not because they are afraid of them.

For children to develop successfully into healthy individuals, they have to feel safe, secure and comfortable. They have to be able to play and socialize freely. They need to feel supported as they engage in learning activities that encourage their abilities and interests.

The information contained in this article was obtained from "Building Safer Communities", the National Crime Prevention Strategy newsletter. A copy of the newsletter is available in the Umbrella Resource Centre.