

# HANDS-ON Health

Health Wave Newsletter, October 2014

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October is National Bullying Prevention Month. In this month's newsletter are some CDC guidelines for defining bullying; risk factors and effects of bullying; and methods for dealing with and preventing bullying. You may also want to go to Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center for more information and activities for students: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/nbpm/>

**bullying** (bool ē ing) **v.** unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both kids who are bullied and who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

## Bullying

According to the CDC, in order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be aggressive and include:

**An Imbalance of Power:** Kids who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.

**Repetition:** Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Bullying can occur during or after school hours. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like on the playground or the bus. It can also happen travelling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or on the Internet.

## TYPES OF BULLYING

There are three types of bullying:

**VERBAL BULLYING** is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes:

- Teasing
- Name-calling
- Inappropriate sexual comments
- Taunting
- Threatening to cause harm

**SOCIAL BULLYING**, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes:

- Leaving someone out on purpose
- Telling other children not to be friends with someone
- Spreading rumors about someone
- Embarrassing someone in public

**PHYSICAL BULLYING** involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes:

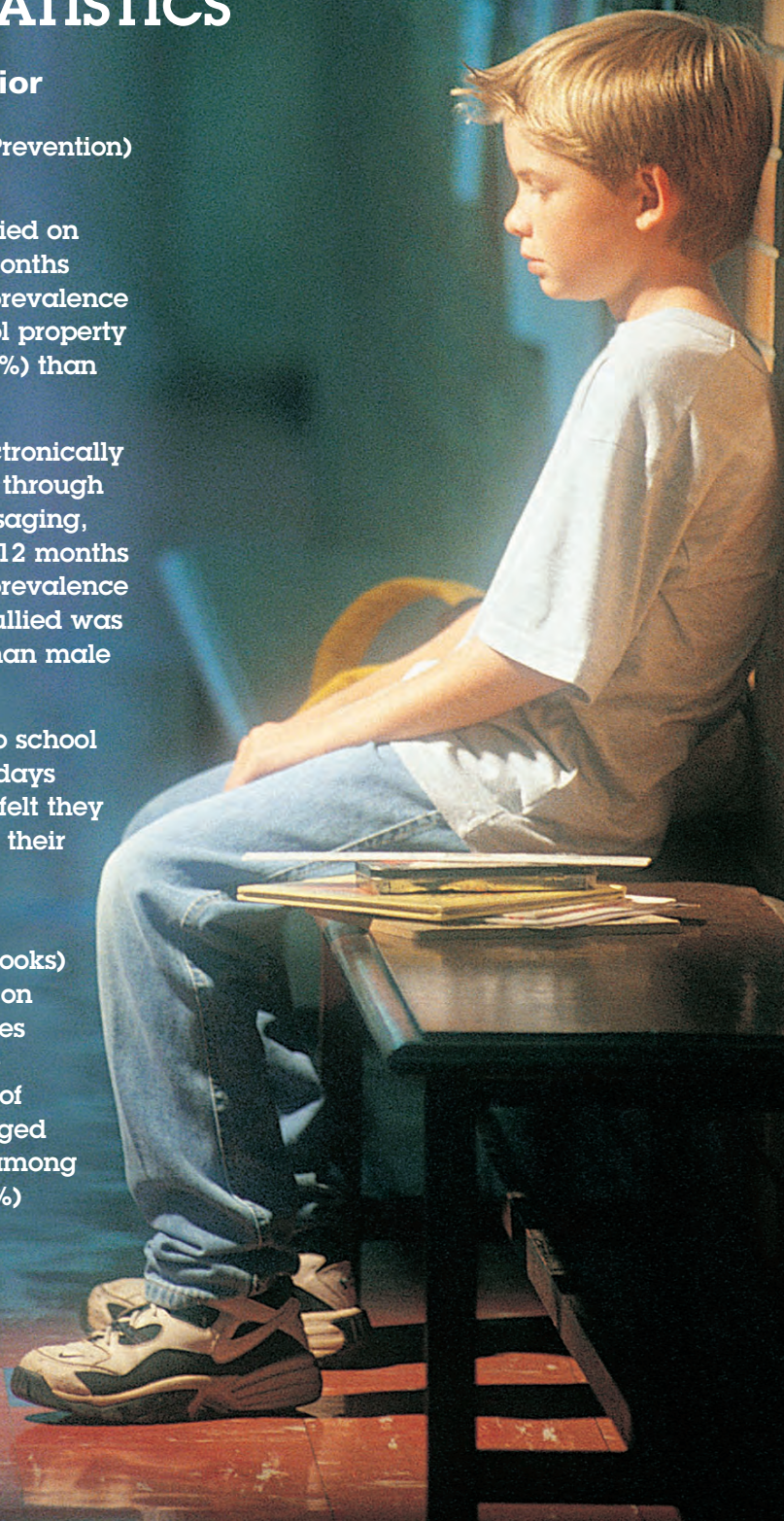
- Hitting/kicking/pinching
- Spitting
- Tripping/pushing
- Taking or breaking someone's things
- Making mean or rude hand gestures

# TRENDS AND STATISTICS

## The 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that nationwide:

- 19.6% of students had been bullied on school property during the 12 months before the survey. Overall, the prevalence of having been bullied on school property was higher among female (23.7%) than male (15.6%) students.
- 14.8% of students had been electronically bullied, including being bullied through e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, or texting, during the 12 months before the survey. Overall, the prevalence of having been electronically bullied was higher among female (22.0%) than male (8.5%) students.
- 7.1% of students had not gone to school on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey because they felt they would be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.
- 26.1% of students had had their property (e.g., car, clothing or books) stolen or deliberately damaged on school property one or more times during the 12 months before the survey. Overall, the prevalence of having property stolen or damaged on school property was higher among male (28.8%) than female (23.4%) students.



## RISK FACTORS

No single factor puts a child at risk of being bullied or bullying others. Bullying can happen anywhere—cities, suburbs, or rural towns. Depending on the environment, some groups—such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) youth, youth with disabilities, and socially isolated youth—may be at an increased risk of being bullied.

### CHILDREN AT RISK OF BEING BULLIED

Generally, children who are bullied have one or more of the following risk factors:

- Are **perceived as different** from their peers, such as being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing, being new to a school, or being unable to afford what kids consider “cool”
- Are **perceived as weak** or unable to defend themselves
- Are **depressed, anxious, or have low self esteem**
- Are **less popular** than others and have few friends
- **Do not get along well with others**, seen as annoying or provoking, or antagonize others for attention

However, even if a child has these risk factors, it doesn't mean that they will be bullied.

### CHILDREN MORE LIKELY TO BULLY OTHERS

There are **two types** of kids who are more likely to bully others:

- **Some are well-connected** to their peers, have social power, are overly concerned about their popularity, and like to dominate or be in charge of others.
- **Others are more isolated** from their peers and may be depressed or anxious, have low self-esteem, be less involved in school, be easily pressured by peers, or not identify with the emotions or feelings of others.

### Children who have these factors are also more likely to bully others:

- Are aggressive or easily frustrated
- Have less parental involvement or having issues at home
- Think badly of others
- Have difficulty following rules
- View violence in a positive way
- Have friends who bully others

Remember, those who bully others do not need to be stronger or bigger than those they bully. The power imbalance can come from a number of sources—popularity, strength, cognitive ability—and children who bully may have more than one of these characteristics.

## WARNING SIGNS

There are many warning signs that may indicate that someone is affected by bullying—either being bullied or bullying others. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying. Not all children who are bullied or are bullying others ask for help.

It is important to talk with children who show signs of being bullied or bullying others. These warning signs can also point to other issues or problems, such as depression or substance abuse. Talking to the child can help identify the root of the problem.

### SIGNS A CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

Look for changes in the child. However, be aware that not all children who are bullied exhibit warning signs.

Some signs that may point to a bullying problem are:

- **Unexplainable injuries**
- **Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry**
- **Frequent headaches or stomach aches**, feeling sick or faking illness
- **Changes in eating habits**, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. Kids may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- **Difficulty sleeping** or frequent nightmares
- **Declining grades**, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school



- **Sudden loss of friends** or avoidance of social situations
- **Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem**
- **Self-destructive behaviors** such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

If you know someone in serious distress or danger, don't ignore the problem. Get help right away.

### SIGNS A CHILD IS BULLYING OTHERS

Kids may be bullying others if they:

- **Get into physical or verbal fights**
- **Have friends who bully others**
- **Are increasingly aggressive**
- **Get sent to the principal's office** or to detention frequently
- **Have unexplained extra money** or new belongings
- **Blame others** for their problems
- **Don't accept responsibility** for their actions
- **Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity**

### Why don't kids ask for help?

Statistics from the 2008–2009 School Crime Supplement show that an adult was notified in only about a third of bullying cases. Kids don't tell adults for many reasons:

- Bullying can make a child feel helpless. Kids may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or a tattletale.
- Kids may fear backlash from the kid who bullied them.
- Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Kids may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak.
- Kids who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or could understand.
- Kids may fear being rejected by their peers. Friends can help protect kids from bullying, and kids can fear losing this support.

## EFFECTS OF BULLYING

### KIDS WHO ARE BULLIED

Kids who are bullied can experience negative physical, school, and mental health issues. Kids who are bullied are more likely to experience:

- **Depression and anxiety**, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy. These issues may persist into adulthood.
- **Health complaints**
- **Decreased academic achievement**—GPA and standardized test scores—and school participation. They are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.

A very small number of bullied children might retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied.

### KIDS WHO BULLY OTHERS

Kids who bully others can also engage in violent and other risky behaviors into adulthood. Kids who bully are more likely to:

- **Abuse alcohol and other drugs** in adolescence and as adults
- **Get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school**
- **Engage in early sexual activity**
- **Have criminal convictions** and traffic citations as adults
- **Be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children as adults**

### BYSTANDERS

Kids who witness bullying are more likely to:

- Have **increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs**
- Have **increased mental health problems**, including depression and anxiety
- **Miss or skip school**

## PREVENT BULLYING

Parents, school staff, and other adults in the community can help kids prevent bullying by talking about it, building a safe school environment, and creating a community-wide bullying prevention strategy.

### How to Talk About Bullying

Parents, school staff, and other caring adults have a role to play in preventing bullying. They can:

### HELP KIDS UNDERSTAND BULLYING

Kids who know what bullying is can better identify it. They can talk about bullying if it happens to them or others. Kids need to know ways to safely stand up to bullying and how to get help.

- **Encourage kids to speak to a trusted adult** if they are bullied or see others being bullied. The adult can give comfort, support, and advice, even if they can't solve the problem directly. Encourage the child to report bullying if it happens.

- **Talk about how to stand up to kids who bully.** Give tips, like using humor and saying “stop” directly and confidently. Talk about what to do if those actions don’t work, like walking away
- **Talk about strategies for staying safe,** such as staying near adults or groups of other kids.
- **Urge them to help kids who are bullied** by showing kindness or getting help.

### KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

Research tells us that children really do look to parents and caregivers for advice and help on tough decisions. Sometimes spending 15 minutes a day talking can reassure kids that they can talk to their parents if they have a problem. Start conversations about daily life and feelings with questions like these:

- *What was one good thing that happened today? Any bad things?*
- *What is lunch time like at your school? Who do you sit with? What do you talk about?*
- *What is it like to ride the school bus?*
- *What are you good at? What would do you like best about yourself?*

Talking about bullying directly is an important step in understanding how the issue might be affecting kids. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but it is important to encourage kids to answer them honestly. Assure kids that they are not alone in addressing any problems that arise. Start conversations about bullying with questions like these:

- *What does “bullying” mean to you?*
- *Describe what kids who bully are like. Why do you think people bully?*
- *Who are the adults you trust most when it comes to things like bullying?*
- *Have you ever felt scared to go to school because you were afraid of bullying? What ways have you tried to change it?*
- *What do you think parents can do to help stop bullying?*

- *Have you or your friends left other kids out on purpose? Do you think that was bullying? Why or why not?*
- *What do you usually do when you see bullying going on?*
- *Do you ever see kids at your school being bullied by other kids? How does it make you feel?*
- *Have you ever tried to help someone who is being bullied? What happened? What would you do if it happens again?*

## Prevention at School

Bullying can threaten students’ physical and emotional safety at school and can negatively impact their ability to learn. The best way to address bullying is to stop it before it starts. There are a number of things school staff can do to make schools safer and prevent bullying.

### ASSESS BULLYING

Assessments—such as surveys—can help schools determine the frequency and locations of bullying behavior. They can also gauge the effectiveness of current prevention and intervention efforts. Knowing what’s going on can help school staff select appropriate prevention and response strategies.

Assessments involve asking school or community members—including students—about their experiences and thoughts related to bullying. An assessment is planned, purposeful, and uses research tools.

#### What an Assessment Can Do

##### Assess to:

- **Know what’s going on.** Adults underestimate the rates of bullying because kids rarely report it and it often happens when adults



aren't around. Assessing bullying through anonymous surveys can provide a clear picture of what is going on.

- **Target efforts.** Understanding trends and types of bullying in your school can help you plan bullying prevention and intervention efforts.
- **Measure results.** The only way to know if your prevention and intervention efforts are working is to measure them over time.

An assessment can explore specific bullying topics, such as:

- Frequency and types
- Adult and peer response
- Locations, including "hot spots"
- Staff perceptions and attitudes about bullying
- Aspects of the school or community that may support or help stop it
- Student perception of safety
- School climate

## Engage Parents & Youth

School staff can do a great deal to prevent bullying and protect students, but they can't do it alone. Parents and youth also have a role to play in preventing bullying at school. One mechanism for engaging parents and youth, a school safety committee, can bring the community together to keep bullying prevention at school active and focused.

### BENEFITS OF PARENT AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Research shows that school administrators, such as principals, can play a powerful role in bullying prevention. They can inspire others and maintain a climate of respect and inclusion. But a principal cannot do it alone. When parents and youth are involved in the solutions:

- Students feel safer and can focus on learning.
- Parents worry less.
- Teachers and staff can focus on their work.
- Schools can develop more responsive solutions because students are more likely to see or hear about bullying than adults.

- School climate improves because students are engaged in taking action to stop bullying.
- Parents can support schools' messages about bullying at home. They are also more likely to recognize signs that a child has been bullied or is bullying others.

### HOW PARENTS AND YOUTH CAN CONTRIBUTE

Schools can set the stage for meaningful parent and youth involvement, but it doesn't happen overnight. Parents and youth need to feel valued and be given opportunities to contribute their expertise. To sustain parent and youth involvement, schools need to provide meaningful roles for them. For example:

- Students can contribute their views and experiences with bullying. They can take leadership roles in school to promote respect and inclusion, communicate about bullying prevention with their peers, and help develop rules and policies.
- Parents can contribute to a positive school climate through the parent teacher association, volunteering, and school improvement events.
- School staff can keep parents informed, make them feel welcome, and treat them as partners. Schools can consider identifying a school coordinator to support parent and youth engagement strategies. Schools can set meeting times that are convenient for parents and youth and may consider additional incentives such as providing dinner or child care.

### SCHOOL SAFETY COMMITTEES

A school safety committee—a small group of people focused on school safety concerns—is one strategy to engage parents and youth, as well as others, in bullying prevention. The following people can make positive contributions to a school safety committee:

- Administrators can answer questions about budget, training, curriculum, and federal and state laws such as Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Inventive, respected teachers with strong classroom and "people" skills can give insights.
- Other school staff, such as school psychologists, counselors, school nurses, librarians, and bus drivers, bring diverse perspectives on bullying.
- Parents can share the family viewpoint and keep other parents in the loop on committee work.
- Students can bring fresh views and help identify real-life challenges to prevention.
- Other community stakeholders, such as police officers, clergy members, elected officials, and health care providers can provide a broader perspective.

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