

Bullying Facts

There are a number of definitions for bullying, however most definitions of bullying have three core elements (stopbullying.gov). Bullying typically involves: intentional aggression, repetition of those intentional aggressive behaviors, and a power difference between the bully and the bullied (stopbullying.gov). Bullying can occur in a number of ways—verbally, socially, and physically (stopbullying.gov). Cyberbullying, a form of bullying that occurs over the internet through social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, Ask.com, etc., can be considered a form of verbal and social bullying (stopbullying.gov). Bullying is a serious issue and is considered a criminal offense in some cases, such as when harassment, hazing, or assault occurs (stopbullying.gov).

Recent statistics reveal that 25-33 % of students in the United States are bullied in school (stopbullying.gov). Bullying is most likely to occur in middle school, and the most common types are verbal and social bullying (stopbullying.gov). Individuals that are most likely to be victims of bullying are: anyone who is perceived as different from the majority, such as individuals who identify as LGBTQ, individuals who are disabled, socially isolated individuals, and individuals of certain religions, races, and nationalities (stopbullying.gov).

Bullying can have negative effects for those being bullied and the individual doing the bullying (stopbullying.gov). That is, victims of bullying are more likely to: struggle with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, report feelings of increased sadness and loneliness, experience negative changes in their sleeping and eating habits, loss of interest in activities they use to find enjoyable, experience a decrease in academic performance and may start to skip school or drop out of school (stopbullying.gov). In fact, in twelve out of the fifteen school shooting cases that occurred throughout the 1990's, the shooters had a history of being bullied (stopbullying.gov). For those individuals that are doing the bullying, they are more likely to abuse substances, drop out of school, be abusive towards a romantic partner or family member, have criminal convictions, and engage in early sexual activity (stopbullying.gov).

There are a number of warning signs that parents, teachers, and friends can be on the lookout for. Warning signs that someone is being bullied include: unexplainable injuries, such as bruises or cuts, lost or destroyed material, such as clothing, jewelry, or money, frequent health complaints, such as headaches or stomachaches, a noticeable increase or decrease in eating habits, sleeping difficulties, decrease in academic performance, not wanting to go to school, loss of interest in socializing with peers, decreased self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and engaging in destructive behaviors like running away from home, harming oneself, or talking about suicide (stopbullying.gov). On the other hand, there are also signs to look out for if you think someone you know is bullying others (stopbullying.gov). Signs include the individual getting into a lot of verbal and physical fights, hanging out with individuals that are bullies, an increase in aggression or aggressive behaviors, and trouble at school, such as being sent to the

principal's office or detention often, blaming others for their actions, not accepting responsibility for their actions, and being overly competitive (stopbullying.gov).

Social Emotional Learning: A key component to bullying prevention

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is most effective when included as a component in a whole-school intervention plan for bullying prevention (Smith, 2013). The whole-school approach to prevent bullying should involve training teachers and other faculty, enacting clear anti-bullying rules and policies, and designing class curricula that encompass social emotional learning. Sufficient staffing and supervising students is also important.

Smith explains that in order to create awareness, students should be taught about the severity of bullying, how to identify the specific types, and its impact on students and their families. With knowledge of these issues, students can learn to advocate for themselves and for each other.

Empathy is the ability to identify and understand another person's emotional state. Unlike sympathy, which is a feeling of sorrow for a person's circumstances, empathy is the ability to actually feel (on some level) another person's emotional pain. If someone is sad, empathizing with that person means having an understanding of the sadness they are feeling. In terms of SEL, empathy can be thought of as *perspective taking*, which is a cognitive process of understanding what the bullied student is experiencing without having to feel that student's emotions (Smith, 2013). For bystanders who witness bullying, the ability to take another's perspective might encourage intervention. The chance of a student stepping in to help a fellow student increases if empathy and positive feelings towards peers are present in the school environment.

Learning to regulate one's emotions and practice self-control is key in bullying prevention. For kids who bully others, learning self-control and emotion-regulation can help if the impulse to bully emerges. The same is true for victims of bullying. An emotional reaction from a student who is being bullied could make her/him a target for further bullying. This is a difficult ability to learn, and students need specific and ongoing instruction in regulating emotions such as anger and embarrassment. Skills such as deep breathing and self-talk can be beneficial in some situations (Smith, 2013).

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the bully NOT to bully. Many students have not naturally mastered social skills and need to be taught how to read social cues or avoid jumping to conclusions, as well as managing their emotions. However, for victims of bullying, learning some skills might help disengage a bully and deescalate a bad situation. For instance, students who react passively or even aggressively are usually bullied more seriously and for longer

periods of time. Using problem solving skills and assertiveness can help in many social contexts, and reduce the chances of being bullied.

References:

Smith, B. H., & Low, S. (2013). The Role of Social-Emotional Learning In Bullying Prevention Efforts. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(4), 280-287. doi:10.1080/00405841.2013.829731

U.S. Government. (n.d.). What is bullying. Retrieved October 20, 2014, from stopbullying.gov website: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/index.html>