

# Bullying: A Portrait of Diversity



## A Damage Assessment

Bullying is when an individual or group repeatedly tries to hurt someone who is at some kind of disadvantage. Bullying can be physical, verbal or social. It generally happens among young people, particularly in school settings. While bullying behavior does occur among adults, in that context it is usually called harassment or stalking.

A key component of bullying is that there is often some kind of unequal power the bully is taking advantage of. Maybe the bully is bigger than the victim, more popular, or has numbers on their side.

Bullying has been around for ages and has moved into cyberspace. Cyberbullying is the use of e-mail, blog, social network posts and text messages to attack someone. This form of bullying, while not physical, can be especially damaging because it follows the victim wherever they go.

## Bullying: A Damage Assessment

If you compare a fight or act of violence to water boiling, bullying is like a slow simmer that goes on and on.

Victims of bullying can become depressed and anxious. They may have thoughts of suicide or develop lifelong self-esteem issues.

According to the National Association of School Psychologists, 160,000 kids actually stay home from school each day to avoid bullying. Even if attending school, victims may have difficulty focusing on learning.

The damage not only affects the victim, it effects the bully as well. The home life of the bully may be very violent so they think bullying is normal. If a bully grows up thinking all relationships are about power, control and violence, they could have difficulty functioning in society. Studies have even shown bullies to be more likely to run afoul of the law when they become adults.

Witnesses to bullying also experience negative effects, such as anxiety that they may be bullied or guilt that they did nothing to stop it.

**For victims, bullies and bystanders, bullying is a no win situation.**

Schools have become more aware of bullying, but it is difficult to stop. Bullies can be patient, waiting to take advantage of any unstructured situation.

Harsh policies that ostracize bullies may simply drive the behavior deeper underground or even push the bullies into true delinquency. The best policies seek to help the victim while also helping the bully learn to function more normally. Instead of convincing bullies they are bad people, the idea is to convince them they are engaging in bad behavior.

Creating a culture where bystanders are willing to help stop bullying is enormously valuable.

For parents, it is important to stay tuned in to children's lives. Eating together regularly is a good way to keep up with what is going on. Parents should not be afraid to get the school involved in a bullying situation, or even the police if there is a threat of real violence.

Simple advice to fight back is not recommended. These days, fighting back may come in the form of a gun rather than a playground tussle.

Many states have passed laws against bullying. Go to [www.bullypolice.org](http://www.bullypolice.org) to learn more about the laws in your state. Contact your child's school to find out what their school's policies are.

## Are you being bullied? Are you bullying?

Answer these questions. Remember one person can be both a victim and a bully.

1. Do you routinely get called names or ridiculed for the way you look or act?
1. Do you routinely call people names or ridicule the way they look or act?
2. Have you had mean rumors spread about you, either verbally or electronically?
2. Have you spread mean rumors about someone, either verbally or electronically?
3. Do you regularly get pushed or hit by someone?
3. Do you regularly push or hit someone to make them feel bad?

## Ask Yourself