

# BULLYING

## *What Should I Know About Bullying?*

Bullying is a significant problem for many children, adolescents, and adults worldwide. Many individuals will be involved in bullying at some point during their school years or in the workplace, either as a perpetrator, a target, a witness, or some combination of roles. Bullying behaviors are intentionally mean and repetitive, often leaving victims feeling unable to defend themselves. Bullying behaviors can be:

1. Physical – includes punching, kicking, shoving, destroying objects, stealing objects, and other physical actions
2. Verbal – includes name calling, threats, and intimidation
3. Relational – includes spreading rumors and exclusion from a group
4. Electronic – includes any form of bullying that occurs online, over the phone, or via video games

Males are more likely to be involved in physical bullying, whereas females are more likely to be involved in relational bullying. However, **both genders can be involved in any type of bullying.**

Bullying is often incorrectly characterized as a problem between a single bully and a single victim. Bullying is better thought of as a group phenomenon in which individuals may be involved in multiple roles:

- Perpetrator – bullies others
- Victim – targeted by bullying
- Bystander – witnesses bullying
- Bully/Victim – an individual who engages in bullying others is victimized by others
- Uninvolved – not involved in bullying situations

These roles are dynamic. That is, individuals move in and out of roles across situations and over time. For example, an individual student may bully others in elementary school, be victimized in middle school, and be a bystander in high school.

## *Why Should I Be Concerned About Bullying?*

Bullying significantly impacts the mental and physical health of the students involved. Specifically:

- *Individuals who are perpetrators* of bullying are at risk for developing conduct disorder, additional aggressive behaviors, and future problems with the law.
- *Targets* of bullying are at risk for developing depression and anxiety disorders and experiencing suicidal ideation. Targets of bullying are also at risk of experiencing a negative school climate, which could impact their ability to learn and subsequently affect their academic engagement and academic achievement.

## **What Is Cognitive Behavior Therapy?**

Behavior Therapy and Cognitive Behavior Therapy are types of treatment that are based firmly on research findings. These approaches aid people in achieving specific changes or goals.

Changes or goals might involve:

- **A way of acting**, like trying not to shout at others.
- **A way of thinking**, like understanding that most situations aren't catastrophic.
- **A way of coping**, like training people to see the cause of their anger before becoming angry and to accept the sometimes negative reality of life.

Behavior Therapists and Cognitive Behavior Therapists usually focus more on the current situation and its solution, rather than the past. They concentrate on a person's views and beliefs about their life, not on personality traits. Behavior Therapists and Cognitive Behavior Therapists treat individuals, parents, children, couples, and families. Replacing ways of living that do not work well with ways of living that work, and giving people more control over their lives, are common goals of behavior and cognitive behavior therapy.

**HOW TO GET HELP:** If you are looking for help with bullying, either for yourself or someone else, you may be tempted to call someone who advertises in a local publication or who comes up from a search of the Internet. You may, or may not, find a competent therapist in this manner. It is wise to check on the credentials of a psychotherapist. It is expected that competent therapists hold advanced academic degrees and are trained in techniques for treating anger management. They should be listed as members of professional organizations, such as the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies or the American Psychological Association. Of course, they should be licensed to practice in your state. You can find competent specialists who are affiliated with local universities or mental health facilities or who are listed on the websites of professional organizations. You may, of course, visit our website ([www.abct.org](http://www.abct.org)) and click on "Find a CBT Therapist."

*The Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) is an interdisciplinary organization committed to the advancement of a scientific approach to the understanding and amelioration of problems of the human condition. These aims are achieved through the investigation and application of behavioral, cognitive, and other evidence-based principles to assessment, prevention, and treatment.*

- Individuals who are *both perpetrators and targets of bullying* (bully-victims) are the most impacted, and tend to experience the adverse effects that both bullies and victims experience. Additionally, bully victims are at risk for feeling reduced social support from their peers.
- *Witnesses* of bullying can experience negative mental health effects as well. Simply by observing bullying, bystanders are more likely to experience increased feelings of vulnerability, which may prohibit them from feeling able to intervene during bullying situations. Depending on the frequency and severity of bullying situations in the school context, bystanders may also have a negative perception of the school's climate.

### ***What Can I Do to Reduce Bullying?***

*Efforts that parents and school personnel can take to help reduce bullying:*

1. Create an antibullying committee that includes members from the following groups: administrators, teachers, parents, coaches, students, nurses, and mental health professionals. An effective committee must represent the diverse voices in a given school.
2. Develop and follow an antibullying policy that emphasizes the use of assessment and intervention, as opposed to strictly punitive measures (e.g., suspension and/or expulsion).
  - To best assess bullying, multiple measures should be used (i.e., self-report and observations), and students, teachers, and parents should all complete the assessments in order to accurately capture what is happening within the school; assess for things like school climate, social relationships, and where bullying occurs within the school.
  - Interventions can be administered at the school-wide level (e.g., positive reinforcement for prosocial behaviors), at the small-group level (e.g., social skills instruction), and at the individual level (e.g., CBT to help restructure maladaptive thoughts and behaviors).
3. Increase awareness of the negative consequences associated with bullying through the use of videos, books, and classroom presentations.
4. Use data-based decision-making to address the school's specific needs related to bullying. Collect and analyze data annually because bullying behaviors will change from year to year as group dynamics change from year to year.
  - To best utilize the data collected, classroom presentations should be conducted by the school's antibullying committee. It is important to share the findings with students and teachers, as well as with parents via Parent Teacher Organization meetings to maintain strong lines of communication and a common understanding of the specific bullying issues at school.
5. Use data to create or select evidence-based interventions for bullying that best address the bullying reported by students, teachers and parents. Some examples of evidence-based bullying prevention and interventions are:

- **Steps to Respect** ([www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org))

- **Second Step** ([www.cfchildren.org](http://www.cfchildren.org))
- **Bully Busters** (<https://www.researchpress.com/books/455/bully-busters>)
- **Bully Proofing Your School** (<http://www.soprislearning.com/school-climate/bully-proofing-series>)
- **Peaceful Schools Project** (<http://www.backoffbully.com/Pages/peacefulSchools.html>)
- **The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program**  
(<http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/olweus.page?gclid=CNqFgtzozLUCFShgMgodFTToA9A>)

6. Develop a way to document bullying incidents and a confidential system where students and staff can feel comfortable reporting bullying situations (i.e., H&H Publishing, [www.bullysurvey.com](http://www.bullysurvey.com)).

7. Avoid common pitfalls in bullying prevention and intervention, such as use of group treatment for perpetrators of bullying or peer mediation between the perpetrator and target of a bullying situation; these types of interventions have been found ineffective and may in fact, be damaging.

8. To specifically help prevent relational bullying situations, involve children in classroom activities that promote teamwork, and encourage extra-curricular activities that will help children develop positive relationships and friendships.

*Efforts that adults can take to help create resilient youth and to reduce bullying:*

1. Model kind and respectful behaviors, as well as prosocial skills. Think before you speak!
2. Establish rules within the home to address bullying that occurs either at school and/or at home.
3. Keep the lines of communication open so that children can seek advice as needed; it is helpful to ask children specific questions to better understand how their day was (e.g., what was lunch time like, what is it like to ride the bus) ([www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov))
4. Teach children how to be a positive bystander, by helping and supporting students who are bullied; suggest using humor, finding a trusted adult, or saying “stop” directly to the person bullying someone else to help diffuse the situation ([www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)).
5. Learn about cyberbullying and communicate with children how to appropriately use social networking sites in a safe and respectful manner ([www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)).
6. Monitor your child’s use of social networking (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, SnapChat, online gaming, etc.).
7. Encourage children to develop their strengths and acknowledge their positive aspects; encourage them to do what they enjoy because special interests and hobbies can boost their confidence, help them make friends, and help protect them from future bullying ([www.braverytips.org](http://www.braverytips.org), [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)).
8. Advise children to stick with a friend throughout the school day across various settings (e.g., playground, cafeteria, hallway, walking to and from

school) or staying near adults in order to stay safe

9. Help children learn how to positively and assertively resolve conflicts.
10. Develop and maintain clear, consistent, and positive communication with school personnel, the administration, and teachers.

There are signs that children may display if they are either being bullied or bullying others that could indicate it is time to seek out treatment or make use an intervention program. **If a child is being bullied**, he or she may have unexplainable injuries, have lost or destroyed possessions, have difficulty sleeping, have changes in eating habits, have a decline in grades, have a loss of interest in school or hobbies, or express self-destructive behaviors. **If a child is bullying others**, he or she may seem increasingly aggressive, get frequently sent to the principal's office, have unexplained new possessions, or have an increased tendency to blame others for things without accepting responsibility.

***For more information or to find a therapist:***

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