Introduction

Today, we often hear about someone being bullied, someone being a bully, or someone who has witnessed bullying. This does not have to be the case. Bullying is often misunderstood and believed, by many, to be a normal part of life. Most of us have felt bullied at least once in our lives. Likewise, many of us have also been a been bully. Moreover, some may have been bullied and have also been a bully. However, bullying should not be normalized by society. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates the effects of bullying can be devastating for the person being bullied, those who witness the bullying, and, perhaps surprisingly, the bullies themselves (CDC 2020; Evans 2019).

Definition and Types of Bullying

Bullying is defined by the CDC (2021) as “any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings or current dating partners, that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance, and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated.”

According to the CDC (2020), there are several types of bullying. The first type of bullying is physical. Physical bullying is any type of physical aggression, including but not limited to hitting, kicking, spitting, slapping, pushing, and tripping, and stealing someone’s personal possessions. The second type of bullying is emotional. Emotional bullying usually involves some type of verbal or written assault, such as name calling, malicious teasing, making sexual comments, or making threats. Social bullying, or relational bullying, is another common type of bullying. Social bullying involves making up and/or spreading rumors about a person, deliberately excluding someone from an activity, making embarrassing comments about someone, extortion, and intimidation. Finally, property damage is also considered a form of bullying.

New Form of Bullying in the Twenty-First Century

Cyberbullying is when an individual uses digital media to intentionally harass and embarrass someone repeatedly. This type of bullying often includes lies, pictures, embarrassing texts, and/or videos that could cause stress to the person being bullied. The recipient of cyberbullying often feels angry, sad, and/or scared (CDC 2020).

Over 25 percent of thirteen-year-olds have been a victim of cyberbullying. Additionally, 27 percent of fourteen-year-olds, 27.7 percent of fifteen-year-olds, 20.2 percent of sixteen-year-olds, and over 16 percent of seventeen-year-olds have been cyberbully victims. Females are more likely to be cyberbullied (23.7 percent) than males (21.9 percent). However, at 35.4 percent, transgender youth are the most likely (Hinduja 2021).

The effects of cyberbullying can be destructive and disastrous. Youth who are cyberbullied feel anger, sadness, frustration, and fear (CDC 2020). They have reported experiencing anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts/behaviors, and they often have increased school problems, including poor grades, violence, and delinquency. Reactions such as suicidal thoughts and suicide are more prevalent with cyberbullying than any other type of bullying (Kuehn, Wagner, and Velloza 2019). Comparitech (2022) indicated that cyberbully victims (under the age of twenty-five) were twice as likely to commit suicide or self-harm.
Bullying Can Happen Anywhere

Bullying can occur wherever youth and adolescents can be found. For example, studies have shown that bullying can be found in schools, neighborhoods of all types, homes, and online. Indeed, almost 12 percent of public schools have reported that some form of bullying occurs in the schools at least once a week. Moreover, bullying can happen within any age group. Reports of bullying can be found in middle school (28 percent), combined-age schools, (12 percent), high schools (16 percent), and primary schools (9 percent) (Diliberti, Jackson, and Kemp 2016). Moreover, disturbingly, one in five high school students has indicated he or she has been bullied while at school or on school property, and one in six students says he or she has been cyberbullied in the last year (CDC 2020).

In another national report, bullying was found to happen in the hallway or stairwell at school (43 percent), inside the classroom (42 percent), in the cafeteria (27 percent), outside on school grounds (22 percent), online or by text (15 percent), in the bathroom or locker room (12 percent), and on the school bus (8 percent) (National Center for Educational Statistics 2019).

Who Is Getting Bullied?

Anyone could be a victim of bullying; nevertheless, your child's race, gender, and sexuality may affect the likelihood that he or she will be bullied. For example, according to that the CDC report (2020), females experience bullying more than males (30 percent of females compared to 19 percent of males). Moreover, almost 29 percent of White high school students experienced bullying compared to 19 percent of Hispanic students and 18 percent of Black students. In the area of sexuality, students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (40 percent) and those who are unsure of their sexuality (33 percent) are bullied at a much higher percentage than those who identify as heterosexual (22 percent).

Negative Effects of Bullying

Parents, you are probably aware of the possibility that your child could be bullied (or is being a bully), but you may not understand the effects bullying can have on your child and others. Bullying, like many other topics, should be openly discussed with your child. There are many negative consequences to bullying. Youth who are bullied often experience academic problems, including earning lower grades, skipping school, or dropping out of school. Children and youth who are bullied are at greater risk for depression, anxiety, and/or sleep issues. In addition, bullying has been linked to physical injury, social issues, and emotional challenges (CDC 2020), and self-harm, which can include suicidal thoughts and behaviors and death (Kuehn, Wagner, and Velloza 2019).

However, children who bully others and are bullied often experience the most significant problems. These individuals have increased risk for exhibiting problem behaviors and suffering from mental health issues (CDC 2020).

What Parents Can Do

If you suspect your child is being bullied, here are some steps you can take to help alleviate the bullying:

- Know the definition of bullying and be able to explain to your child and others (such as administrators or teachers at the school) why you believe the action/behavior is bullying. Most schools and states now have an anti-bullying policy. Document any observations, incidents, and/or conversations you have had with your child about the bullying. Tell your child that he or she is not in trouble and that openly talking about it is going to help. In addition, tell your child that the person bullying him or her might be getting bullied by others. Teach your child that you both are advocating for him or her and others.
- Learn about the different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), and ask the school, local authorities, and other community organizations what you can do as a parent to help prevent and/or stop bullying.
- Be proactive about bullying and learn the facts about bullying. Recognize if your child has a higher chance of being bullied because of his or her race, gender, or sexuality so you can be proactive in having regular discussions with your child.
- Know the warning signs that your child may be experiencing bullying in some way. Understand that a bullying situation could include your child being bullied, witnessing bullying, or even being the bully. Research has indicated that any type of involvement in bullying can be detrimental. Warning signs that a child may be being bullied include the following (the more of these warning signs your child displays, the more likely there is a bullying issue):
  - Unexplainable injuries
  - Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
  - Frequent headaches or stomach aches, complaints of feeling sick, or faking illness
  - Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating; children may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch
  - Difficulty sleeping or having 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 himself or
Tattling is when you report on someone or something just because someone or something (such as the environment) is in danger.

Listen and understand. If your child is being bullied, stay calm and give him or her plenty of time to tell you how he or she feels. If you find yourself getting upset during the conversation, tell your child you are not upset with him or her, but you are sad and/or angry that someone is hurting someone you love. Again, remind him or her that there is nothing to be ashamed of and it is not his or her fault. In fact, tell your child you are proud he or she is trusting you to help.

Know what not to say. Do not tell your child who is being bullied to just ignore the situation! Tell your child that bullying is not something that can be easily addressed without help and you will support and help him or her. Asking your child to ignore the situation or try to fight back could increase your child’s level of victimization.

Consult your child. Tell your child you must speak to authorities, such as school administrators/teachers, when your child, others, or the environment might be in danger. However, always be clear that you will work with your child and use strategies to help stop the bullying. For example, if your child is getting bullied during recess, he or she could always have a buddy with him or her. Knowing the situation is being addressed and handled will help your child because he or she will be relieved and have some power in the situation.

Know where to go get help. If you suspect your child or any other child is experiencing bullying, contact one or more of the following:

- Teacher
- School counselor
- School principal
- School superintendent
- State Department of Education

Work with the school to increase school safety. Your child’s school could use different strategies to increase school safety and decrease bullying activity, such as peer mediation, increased and targeted supervision, and community-awareness programs. Peer mediation is a safety program that trains staff and students in nonviolent conflict resolution. Increased and targeted supervision programs address prime areas of bullying, such as the bathroom, hallways, school bus, and playground. Community-awareness programs are often offered by the police department, child care services, and/or your state’s Cooperative Extension service.

If you suspect your child may be suicidal or going to harm someone else or the environment, call 9-1-1.
References


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