

Some

# FACTS

About Bullying among Children and Young People



## **GENERALLY, WE CALL IT BULLYING**

when one or more persons repeatedly say or do hurtful things to another person who has problems defending himself or herself. Direct bullying usually involves hitting, kicking, or making insults, offensive and sneering comments, or threats.

Repeatedly teasing someone who clearly shows signs of distress is also recognized as bullying. However, indirect bullying—the experience of being excluded from a group of friends, being spoken ill of and being prevented from making friends—can be just as painful.

Most bullying takes place at the same grade level. However, many times older students bully younger students. Although direct bullying

is a greater problem among boys, a good deal of bullying takes place among girls. Bullying between girls, however, involves less physical violence and can be more difficult to discover. Girls tend to use indirect and subtle methods of bullying, such as exclusion from a group of friends, backbiting, and manipulation of friendships. Far more boys than girls bully, and many girls are mostly bullied by boys, but both can be victims of bullying.

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**DIRECT BULLYING USUALLY INVOLVES HITTING, KICKING, OR MAKING INSULTS, OFFENSIVE AND SNEERING COMMENTS, OR THREATS.**

These three conditions create a bullying situation:

1

Negative or malicious behavior.

2

Behavior repeated over a period of time.

3

A relationship in which there is an imbalance in strength or power between the parties involved.

## Fact: How Much Bullying Goes On?

**MAJOR STUDIES IN NORWAY** in the 1980s and 1990s with more than 150,000 students found that about 15 percent of students in primary and lower secondary school, or approximately one in seven students, were involved in bullying with a degree of regularity—as a victim, as a bully, or both. At least 5 percent (more than 1 in 20) of all students were involved in more serious bullying at least once a week.

In the United States in 1998, the prevalence of bullying was found to be even more substantial. A study carried out with a national sample of more than 15,000 students in grades 6 through 10 found about 30 percent of the sample reported

moderate or frequent involvement in bullying—as a bully, as a victim, or both. Students in middle school (grades 6 through 8) reported greater frequency of bullying than did students in grades 9 and 10.

Similar results were obtained in another study of more than 6,000 middle school students in rural South Carolina. About 23 percent reported that they had been bullied by other students “several times” or more frequently during the past three months.

Approximately 20 percent reported that they had bullied other students with the same frequency.

## **Fact:** Where Does Bullying Take Place?

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**THE CLAIM IS SOMETIMES MADE THAT** most bullying takes place on the way to school, not at school. However, research shows that two to three times as many students are bullied at school compared to those who are bullied on the way to school. Approximately 40 to 75 percent of bullying takes place during breaks—in the schoolyard, in the corridors, at recess, or in more secluded places, like bathrooms. It can also take place during classes unless the teacher is attentive and cracks down on any tendencies toward bullying. Without a doubt, school is the place where most bullying occurs. This puts particular responsibility on school leaders and teachers. It is clear that the behavior, attitudes, and routines of teachers and other

school personnel have a decisive effect on the extent of bullying in the individual school or class. Of course, parents, caregivers and supervisors in many other places—in kindergartens, playgrounds, and sports and youth clubs, for example—also need to be alert to detect bullying or tendencies toward bullying.

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## **Fact:** Who Gets Bullied?

### **RESEARCH GIVES A FAIRLY CLEAR PICTURE OF THOSE WHO ARE POTENTIAL VICTIMS OF BULLYING.**

They tend to have at least one, or usually several, of the characteristics listed below. These lists only indicate main trends; in some cases, victims may be quite different. Potential victims of bullying can be divided into two main groups:

#### **The passive or submissive victim**

Most children in this category are not aggressive or teasing in their manner and usually do not actively provoke others in their surroundings. However, passive victims of bullying generally signal, through their behavior and attitudes, that they are a bit anxious and unsure of themselves.

Detailed interviews with parents of bullied boys predominantly of the passive/submissive type indicate that these boys were

characteristically rather careful and sensitive from an early age. Having this kind of personality (possibly in addition to physical weakness) may have made it difficult for them to assert themselves in their group of playmates, which may have contributed to these boys becoming victims of bullying. At the same time, it is obvious that long-term bullying probably increased their anxiety, insecurity, and negative self-image.

The features that can be seen in long-suffering victims of bullying may be both a cause for, and a result of, being bullied.

**These students are usually quiet, careful, sensitive, and may start crying easily.**

**They are unsure of themselves and have poor self confidence (negative self-image).**

**The boys in this group do not like to fight, and they are often physically weaker than their classmates, especially the bullies.**

**They have few or no friends.**

## **The provocative victim**

This category is less common and accounts for only about 10 to 20 percent of the victims.

A class with a provocative victim of bullying generally has somewhat different problems than a class with a passive victim. It is more common that a number of students, sometimes the whole class, may be involved in harassing the provocative victim.

They can be quick tempered and may try to retaliate if they are attacked or harassed, but often without much success.

They are often restless, clumsy, immature, unable to concentrate, and generally considered difficult.

They may themselves try to bully weaker students.

Some may be characterized as hyperactive (unsettled and restless because of concentration difficulties) and often have reading/writing problems.

They may also be disliked by adults—their teacher, for example—because of their irritating behavior.

## Fact: Who Bullies?

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE** potential bullies have a number of common features. Again, it must be emphasized that these points are just the main trends. All the same, it is likely that an active bully will have one or more of the following characteristics.

It has often been presumed that bullies are anxious and unsure of themselves underneath their tough surface. However, research finds that bullies are characterized by either unusually low or about average levels of anxiety and insecurity. Their self-image is also about average or even relatively positive.

Some bullies are popular, others are not. A bully will often have a group of two or three friends who provide him or her with support

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and often join in the bullying. However, the popularity of the bully lessens at the higher class/grade levels.

They view violence more favorably than most students do.

They are often aggressive toward adults, both parents and teachers.

They have a marked need to dominate and suppress other students, to assert themselves by means of force and threats, and to get their own way.

Boys in this group are often stronger than their peers and, in particular, their victims.

They are often hot-tempered, impulsive, and not very tolerant of obstacles and delays (frustrations).

They find it difficult to fit in with rules.

They appear to be tough and show little sympathy toward students who are bullied.

They are good at talking their way out of difficult situations.

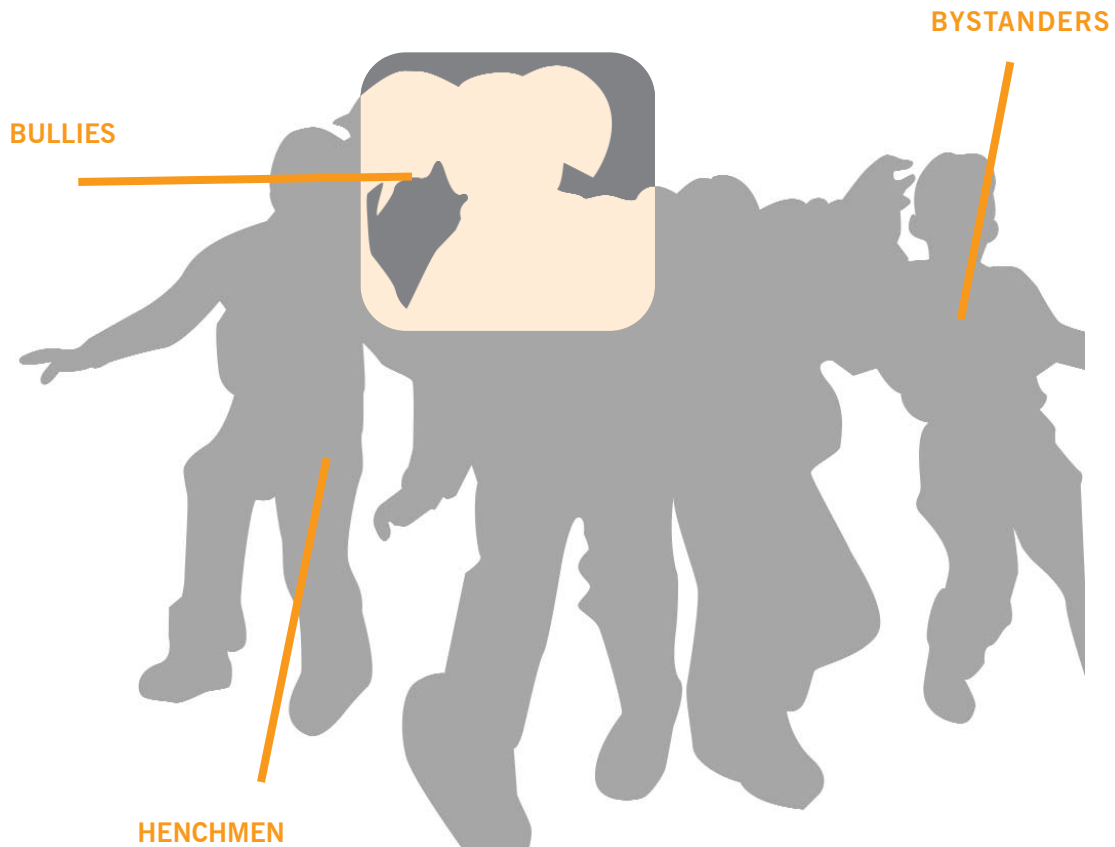
## “The Real Story”

For 2 years, Sam, a quiet 13-year-old, was a human plaything for some of his classmates. The teenagers badgered Sam for money, forced him to **swallow weeds** and **drink sour milk**, beat him up in the rest room, and tied a string around his neck and led him around as a “pet.” When Sam’s torturers were asked about the bullying, they said they pursued their victim because “**it was fun.**”



## Fact: Group Bullying

**BULLYING MAY ALSO BE A GROUP PHENOMENON WITH PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS.** This means that there are a number of children and young people who may at times be involved in bullying, but who would not usually take the initiative themselves. These are called **passive bullies, henchmen, or bystanders**. The group of passive bullies is quite mixed and may include uncertain or anxious students.



## SOME OF THE MECHANISMS THAT MAY BE ACTIVE IN GROUP BULLYING ARE:

### **Social contagion**

Some students may be influenced to take part in bullying if the student leading the bullying is someone they admire. Children or young people who are themselves somewhat insecure and who want to assert themselves are mostly the ones who join in.

### **Weakening of normal controls**

If neither the teachers nor the other students try to stop bullying, the bully or bullies are rewarded through their “victory” over their victim. This can contribute to weakening the controls against the aggressive tendencies of neutral students and may contribute to their participation in bullying.

### **Decreased sense of individual responsibility**

Social psychology notes that a person’s sense of individual responsibility for a negative action such as bullying may be considerably reduced when several people participate. In this way, students who are usually nice, but easily influenced, can at times take part in bullying without particular misgivings.

### **Gradual changes in the perception of the victim of bullying**

As a result of repeated attacks and degrading comments, the victim will gradually be perceived as a fairly worthless person who almost “begs to be beaten up.” This also results in lesser feelings of guilt in those who are taking part in the bullying and may be part of the explanation of why other students do not try to stop the harassment of the victim.