



Children Who Bully

Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, it is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms such as hitting or punching (physical bullying); teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying); intimidation through gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by instant message, text, or e-mail (cyberbullying).

Children who bully fall into one of two categories: (1) those who bully others but are not bullied themselves, and (2) those who bully others *and also are bullied* (often referred to as provocative victims, bully-victims, or aggressive victims). These terms are often used by researchers to understand the different behaviors and reactions, but the labels should never be used in a negative way or to blame children for being bullied. Most children fall into the first of these two categories.

There is no one single cause of bullying among children. Rather, individual, family, peer, school, and community factors can place a child or youth at risk for bullying his or her peers.

Children who bully

Characteristics of children who bully

Children who bully their peers regularly (i.e., those who admit to bullying more than occasionally) tend to (Olweus, 1993; Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010):

- Be impulsive, hot-headed, dominant;
- Be easily frustrated;
- Lack empathy;
- Have difficulty following rules; and
- View violence in a positive way.

Family risk factors for bullying

Children who bully are more likely than their nonbullying peers to live in homes where there is (Olweus, 1993; Nickerson, Mele, & Osborne-Oliver, 2010):

- A lack of warmth and involvement on the part of parents;
- Overly-permissive parenting (including a lack of limits for children's behavior);
- A lack of supervision by parents;
- Harsh, physical discipline; and
- A model for bullying behavior.

Peer risk factors for bullying

Children and youth who bully are more likely to have friends who bully and who have positive attitudes toward violence (Olweus, 1993; O'Brennan et al., 2009).

Common myths about children who bully

"Children who bully are loners."

- In fact, research indicates that children and youth who bully are not socially isolated.
- They report having an easier time making friends than children and youth who do not bully.
- Children and youth who bully usually have at least a small group of friends who support or encourage their bullying (Cairnes et al., 1988; Nansel et al., 2001; Juvonen et al., 2003).

"Children who bully have low self-esteem"

- In fact, most research indicates that children and youth who bully have average or above-average self-esteem (Olweus, 1993; Rigby & Slee, 1993; Slee & Rigby, 1993).

- Interventions that focus on building the self-esteem of children who bully probably will not be ineffective in stopping bullying behavior.

Bullying and other violent or antisocial behaviors

Research shows that bullying can be a sign of other serious antisocial or violent behavior. Children and youth who frequently bully their peers are more likely than others to (Byrne, 1994; Haynie et al., 2001; Nansel et al., 2003; Olweus, 1993):

- Get into frequent fights,
- Be injured in a fight,
- Vandalize property,
- Steal property,
- Drink alcohol,
- Smoke,
- Be truant from school,
- Drop out of school, and
- Carry a weapon.

Research also shows that

- Children who bully are more likely to report that they own guns for risky reasons, such as to gain respect or frighten others (Cunningham et al., 2000).
- Boys who were identified as bullies in middle school were four times as likely as their non-bullying peers to have more than one criminal conviction by age 24 (Olweus, 1993).

Children who bully others and also are bullied

Children who bully others and also are bullied tend to have the following characteristics (Cook et al., 2010; Kumpulainen & Raasnen, 2000; Olweus, 1993):

- Be impulsive and/or hyperactive;
- Be quick-tempered and quick to fight back if provoked;
- Have low social competence (e.g., have trouble reading the social cues of peers);
- Lack good social problem-solving skills;
- Be more immature than their peers;
- Have negative attitudes and beliefs about him/herself and others;

- Perform poor academically;
- Be isolated and rejected by peers;
- Be easily influenced by peers.

There is a particular reason to be concerned about children who bully and who also are bullied. Research shows that these children tend to have some of the social and emotional problems of bullied children (e.g., poor relations with classmates, loneliness, depression, suicidal thoughts) and the behavioral problems of children who bully (e.g., involvement in fights, lower academic achievement, smoking). (Cook et al., 2010; Haynie et al., 2000); Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Kim, Koh, & Leventhal, 2005; Nansel et al., 2001; O'Brennan et al., 2009).

What do i do if my child is bullying others?

- Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously and that you will not tolerate this behavior.
- Develop clear and consistent rules within your family for your children's behavior. Praise and reinforce your children for following rules and use non-physical, non-hostile consequences for rule violations.
- Spend more time with your child and carefully supervise and monitor his or her activities. Find out who your child's friends are and how and where they spend free time.
- Build on your child's talents by encouraging him or her to get involved in prosocial activities (such as clubs, music lessons, nonviolent sports).
- Share your concerns with your child's teacher, counselor, or principal. Work together to send clear messages to your child that his or her bullying must stop.
- If you or your child needs additional help, particularly if your child is also bullied by other children, talk with a school counselor or mental health professional.

References and Resources

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