

Spotlighting Teen Issues

for
Teens

Bullying

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Every day thousands of teens find themselves being bullied. Bullying is a huge problem; however, parents, teachers, and other adults don't always see it. They may not understand how extreme bullying can get.

Bullying behavior is sometimes hard to define. What is the difference between good-natured ribbing and bullying? Sometimes teasing resembles bullying, but teasing is less hostile and is done with humor, rather than harmful intentions. Teasing usually promotes an exchange between people and is done in fun, whereas bullying is a one-sided dose of intimidation.

Bullying Is a Big Deal

Bullying occurs when a person does or says things to have control or power over another person. Some of the things bullies do to their victims are make threats, call them names, say or write mean things about them, leave them out of activities, make them feel uncomfortable or scared, take or damage their things, hit or kick them, or make them do things they don't want to do.

Bullying is painful because it is relentless. The constant harassment from bullying can cause a person to be in constant fear and can make them physically sick. Children and teens who are bullied may find their schoolwork suffering. Studies show that teens who are abused by their peers are at risk for depression, anxiety and mental health problems. They may even think about suicide.

Different Ways of Bullying

- **Racist bullying** attacks through racial slurs, offensive gestures or jokes about a teen's cultural traditions.
 - **Sexual bullying** involves unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive or inappropriate comments.
 - **Verbal bullying** usually involves name-calling, incessant mocking and ridicule.
- Despite the common notion that bullying is a problem mostly among boys, both boys and girls bully. The difference is in the way they bully. Girls tend to inflict pain on a psychological level. For example, they might ostracize victims by freezing them out of the lunchroom seating arrangements, ignoring them at the mall or not inviting them to a slumber party.
- Boys aren't as subtle and can get physical. For example, boy bullies are more apt to insult their victims than to ignore them. Instead of isolating a non-athletic victim during a gym class dodgeball game, they might relentlessly target the person throw after throw.
- **Cyber bullying** - Bullies forward and spread hurtful messages and/or images through e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms and electronic gadgets like camera cell phones. Cyber-bullies use this technology to harass victims at all hours, in wide circles, at high speed.
 - **Emotional bullying** involves isolating or excluding a person from group activities, shunning them at the mall, and spreading rumors. This kind of bullying is especially common among girls.
 - **Physical bullying** involves things like kicking, hitting, biting, pinching, hair pulling or threats of physical harm.



Why Teens Bully

Often, a teen bully will exhibit abusive behavior as a way of dealing with their own personal problems, such as parents divorcing. Some bullies might not even realize how hurtful their actions can be. However, many bullies know exactly what they are doing because they've been bullied or abused themselves. Some bullies think their behavior is normal because they come from families in which everyone regularly gets angry, shouts and/or calls names. They copy what they know.

Sometimes, bullies pick on someone because they need a victim — someone who seems emotionally or physically weaker. Although some bullies are bigger or stronger than their victims, bullies can come in all shapes and sizes. Some bullies are trying to gain acceptance and to feel more important, popular or in control. However, whatever the cause, bullying is an unacceptable behavior.

Dealing with Bullies

According to the National School Safety Center, there are some things you can do to combat bullying. These are also good tips to share with a friend as a way to show your support.

- **Walk away and/or ignore the bully.** — Bullies thrive on the reaction they get. If you walk away or ignore hurtful emails or instant messages, you're telling the bully that you just don't care. Sooner or later the bully will probably get bored with trying to bother you. Walk tall and hold your head high. Using this type of body language sends a message that you're not vulnerable.
- **Don't show your anger** — It is normal to get really upset with a bully. That's exactly the response the bully is trying to get. Bullies want to know they have control over your emotions. If you're in a situation where you can't walk away, try using humor. It can throw the bully off guard.
- **Don't get physical** — Using physical force (like kicking, hitting or pushing) will only add to the problem. You can never know what a bully might do in response. You could put yourself in a very dangerous situation because many teens carry weapons.
- **Talk to someone about the situation** — It may help to talk to a guidance counselor, teacher or friend — anyone who can give you the support you need. Talking can be a good outlet for the fears and frustrations that can build when you're being bullied.

- **Look for your (true) friends** — A very important step in dealing with bullies is to find one or two true friends. It will help with the feelings of hurt and isolation. Tell your friends about the mean gossip that has hurt your feelings. Set the record straight by telling your friends quietly and confidently what's true and not true about you. Hearing a friend say, "I know the rumor's not true. I didn't pay attention to it," can help you realize that most of the time people see gossip for what it is — petty, rude and immature.

For More Information

American Academy of Adolescent & Child Psychiatry – Bullying

<http://www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/80.htm>

Bullying and Harassment Information for Teens

http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/html/cd_rom/school_safety/pubs/NCVC02.pdf

Dealing with Bullies and How Not to Be One

<http://www.ncpamd.com/Bullies.htm>

National Educational Association

<http://www.nea.org/index.html>

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center

<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/topics/bullying.asp>

Teenagers Today — Cyber Bullies

<http://teenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/cyberbullies.htm>

References

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Hoover, J.H., & Oliver, R. (1996) *The bullying prevention handbook: A guide for principals, teachers, and counselors*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

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