

Bullying

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The Mecca of Black Wellness



Long gone are the days where bullies are the biggest children on the playground or in the neighborhood. Bullying is not about physical strength. It is about power and control. Bullying may come in the form of spreading rumors, verbal threats, negative and hurtful comments, purposefully excluding someone from a group, taking something from someone else, physical attacks, and much more. People who bully others typically gain satisfaction from their ability to manipulate, control, and harm someone else. Youth who bully others vary widely in their characteristics as there are those who bully who are popular and perform well academically, and there are those who are socially isolated and readily surrender to peer pressure. Some children who bully others may enjoy dominating their peers, and also suffer from anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem. While it may seem surprising to some, it can also be the case that a child who is bullied may subsequently bully others.³

Children who bully others are more likely to:⁴

- Be aggressive or have difficulty managing their emotions
- Have less parental involvement or experience more problems at home
- View others negatively
- Have trouble following rules
- Have positive views of violence
- Have friends who bully others

Where does bullying occur and who is impacted?

Bullying occurs daily in our schools, neighborhoods, and online. Estimates suggest that approximately 20% of students ages 12-18 have experienced bullying,¹ with upwards of 70% of students who report they have witnessed bullying at school.² Many students who are bullied often live in a constant state of fear, helplessness, and despair and can sometimes lead to significant mental health problems. For instance, youth who are bullied often report higher rates of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and for some youth those experiences may even contribute to suicidal thoughts.

Although bullying can happen anywhere and to anyone, there are certain groups of youth who tend to be at a higher risk of being bullied. For instance, youth with disabilities, youth of color, and LGBTQ youth often report higher rates of bullying, compared to other youth. In general, youth who are perceived as different, weak, unpopular, or who lack positive peer relationships may be at a higher risk of experiencing bullying.

Unfortunately, due to embarrassment, fear of not being believed, or thoughts that nothing can be done, the majority of children who experience bullying often fail to report it.⁵ Therefore, it is important for adults to foster open communication with the youth in their lives and remain aware of the signs of bullying so they can intervene if needed.

What can we do to stop bullying?

Combatting bullying takes an entire village. Schools can help by creating positive school climates that foster respect and safety, and implementing effective anti-bullying policies. Social media companies can enhance their methods of identifying and responding to cyberbullying. It is also important for adults to teach young people how they can help. When youth are passive and stand by and watch bullying when it occurs, they often do not realize that this serves to encourage the behavior. Further, many youth do not know how much of an impact they can have on decreasing incidents of bullying. When a peer intervenes, bullying stops within 10 seconds, almost 60% of the time.⁶ If youth do not feel comfortable intervening directly, they can help by making sure they do not give the bully any attention for their behavior, telling an adult, or providing a distraction.

We can all play a role to help reduce bullying in our communities. What will you do? Talk to your child? Advocate for anti-bullying policies? Mentor a child who needs additional support? Organize an anti-bullying event in your community? If you are engaged in anti-bullying efforts in your school or community, let us know! Tag us on Facebook or Instagram and let us know what you are up to.

Questions you can ask your child to open up communication about bullying:

- Do you feel safe at school?
- Has anyone at school ever been mean to you or hurt you?
- Are there students at school who pick on or tease other students a lot?
- Have you ever received mean or hurtful messages on social media?
- What would you do if you saw someone getting bullied at school?

Students who experienced bullying have found the following actions by their peers to be helpful:⁷

- Spent time with them
- Helped them get away from the situation
- Helped them tell someone else
- Listened to their experience
- Confronted the bully
- Provided advice about how to handle the situation

RESOURCES

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/> Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center leads social change to prevent bullying and provides resources and guidance for family members, students, school staff to increase their understanding about bullying

<http://www.stopbullying.gov> This website, sponsored by the federal government, provides information about State and local laws and policies about bullying, bullying prevention training courses, a community action toolkit, and much more

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