



Kansas State University  
Agricultural Experiment Station  
and Cooperative Extension Service

**Bullying, once accepted as mere schoolyard horseplay, can become a serious problem when it escalates to physical violence, sometimes becoming lethal. The bully and victim are often entangled in a hurtful relationship that parents might be at a loss to stop.**

**This intervention program provides parents and caring adults with information on the connection between bullying and youth violence, its possible origins and how it can be effectively decreased, stopped and prevented. References about quality anti-bullying programs are given for those who wish to help develop a comprehensive bullying prevention effort.**

# YOUTH VIOLENCE: BEGINNING WITH BULLYING

## The Facts

Bullying is not just a school problem. It is often a reality for children in youth groups, clubs, in neighborhoods and in their homes.

Young bullies tend to grow up to become adult bullies we fear at work, avoid at sporting events and hear about on the evening news. Aggression, frustration and intimidation can become so easily ingrained in children that, once the pattern is set, it is very difficult to change. Dr. Dan Olweus, an international leader in the study of bullying and victimization, found that 60 percent of Norwegian boys characterized as bullies in sixth through ninth grades had been convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24, compared to 23 percent of boys not characterized as bullies. Olweus estimates that, across most nations, 15 percent of children are involved in bully-victim problems. A 22-year University of Illinois-Chicago study found that young bullies had a one-in-four chance of having a criminal record by age 30. Other children have about a one-in-20 chance of becoming adult criminals.

## What is Bullying?

Bullying is “aggressive behavior or intentional harming carried out repeatedly and over time between one or more child or youth where there is an imbalance of power,” (Olweus, 1994).

Some experts use the term “peer abuse” as a way to characterize the cruelty of bullying. Bullying is repeated and systematic harassment and attacks on others. Bullying can be perpetrated by an individual or group on individuals or groups. Bullying takes many forms where there is an imbalance of power and control. It can be “direct,” such as physical violence, attacks, extortion or stealing; or “indirect,” as put-downs, taunts or exclusion from a peer group.

## Warning Signs of Children’s ...

### *Victimization*

Comes home with dirty, torn clothes  
Has unexplained cuts, bruises, scratches  
Has few friends  
Seems afraid of school, clubs, etc.  
Doesn’t sleep well, complains  
of stomachaches

### *Bullying*

Teases, threatens, kicks others  
Is hot-tempered, impulsive,  
uncontrolled  
Is aggressive toward adults  
Is tough, shows no sympathy  
Is involved with crime, etc.

## The Bullying Triangle

Each side of the bullying relationship—bully, victim and bystander—must be understood for prevention. Each actor in the dangerous relationship must be involved.

Prepared by:  
Elaine M. Johannes,  
Extension Specialist,  
Office of Community Health

Jana Jones,  
Project Associate, OPEN-K  
(Opportunities for Prevention  
Education and Networking  
in Kansas)  
Office of Community Health  
Kansas State University  
Research and Extension



*Bullies tend to:*

- be confident and aggressive, lack empathy, and have a need to dominate others;
- come from homes with little emotional warmth or adult involvement, where aggression is permitted (and sometimes encouraged), and physical punishment is used;
- continue bullying to adult violence—often directed toward mates, children, co-workers, and the community—unless new behaviors and ways of dealing with anger and frustration are learned.

*Victims tend to:*

- be unhappy, fearful, anxious, have low self-esteem, and see themselves as failures, stupid or unattractive;
- not be generally physically different from other children, but often have limited physical strength, see themselves as “targets” and have few friends;
- withdraw when bullied and not retaliate or report the bullying because they fear that adults cannot or will not protect them.

Some victims may try to avoid school or events to escape bullying. Others become so distressed they attempt suicide.

*Bystanders tend to:*

- be involved (watching or intervening) in bullying incidents 85 percent of the time;
- be aware of and fearful about the bullying, but do little to stop it;
- willingly take action to stop bullying once they understand how their nonsupport of the victim continues the cycle, which may eventually be directed at them.

## Call to Action

To help schools and communities succeed in providing a safe place for children to learn, grow and thrive, everyone must become informed and active in bullying awareness and prevention.

*Before bullying is stopped, three elements are necessary:*

1. The environment, setting, community where the bullying is taking place (e.g., school, youth club, home, etc.) must be positive and nonhostile.
2. Adults must be positive role models, monitor child behaviors, and establish and maintain firm limits on aggressive behavior.
3. When rules are violated, immediate, nonaggressive, nonphysical sanctions (not merely punishment) must be consistently applied.

*Community groups can help:*

- collect data and information, identify individuals who should join the effort, engage other groups (e.g., PTO, scout councils, religious groups, etc.), organize and provide information and materials, involve the media, bring up the subject at social gatherings, identify successes, encourage others to join the cause, and help set nonviolent expectations for behavior in the community.

*Bystanders can:*

- draw attention to and reduce bullying by declaring and helping enforce “no-bullying” zones in and out of school, mentoring younger children in conflict-resolution skills, and developing and signing “a no-taunting/no bullying” pledge, which adds to personal commitment against aggression and cruelty.

*“No-Taunting/No-Bullying” pledges can include simple statements such as:*

1. I will not bully others.
2. I will try to help others who are bullied.
3. I will make it a point to include ALL children who are easily left out.
4. I will set an example as a caring person, will not let my words and actions hurt others and will encourage others do to the same.
5. When I know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult.\*

\* This rule also applies to victims of bullying.



4 PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE



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