

Sylvia Burton, Glenda Beegle, and Kevin Sheehan

Dr. William Warrick

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Bullying

While there is no legal definition of bullying, in general terms bullying is the intentional tormenting of another person or persons. Bullying can take on many forms, both direct and indirect. Direct forms may include verbal, physical abuse and/or assault. Indirect kinds of bullying are more subtle, and take the form of coercion and/or manipulation. Combating bullying is needed in order to insure that students have a safe and secure learning environment. Experts agree that such an environment is needed in order for learning to occur.

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators need to be mindful of bullying and its effects on the target, the perpetrator, and the climate of the learning community. Prevention initiatives need input from all stakeholders, so that policies which address bullying can be easily adopted and implemented. Continued research in this social phenomenon is a key component to helping communities change behavioral patterns and instill civility.

Sensitivity awareness to aspects of bullying is the starting point for all stakeholders – students, parents, and school officials. Schools are uniquely qualified to provide educational training in this area by hosting conferences, workshops, and extracurricular activities devoted to bully/victim problems and advocacy. Conferences should be open to the public, with advance notice going out to all parents and guardians. The objective of this training would be to disseminate that bullying is never acceptable, that there are consequences to hurting others, and

there exist extracurricular activities within the school system to develop positive peer relations and team building.

Schools can improve communication among school administrators, teachers, parents and students. Disciplinary action can be consistent with immediate consequences for aggressive behaviors. Adult supervision can be increased in the school, particularly in areas where bullying is known to take place – PE classes, recess, hallways, bathrooms, and in the lunchroom. Using parent volunteers and other adult community groups to assist with this supervision in the school would be ideal way to involve the community. Another area which could be pursued by students, teachers, and administrators, would be to form an Anti-Bullying Club in the school (Craig, 1999). The club could hold monthly meeting, and invite experts from the community to conduct workshops/lectures.

Research suggests that 20% of school children have been victims of bullying, and 15% of school children engaged in bullying. Seventy five percent of bullies are boys, and bullying peaks in the age group between 11 and 12 years old. A dis-aggregation of data suggests that 38% of special education students compared to 18% of other students reported being bullied (Ziegler, Rosenstein-Manner, 1991). Bullying incidents lasted an average of 37 seconds, and 79% of the episodes were direct bullying, 18% were indirect bullying, and 3% were both direct and indirect forms of bullying. Weapons were visible in 4% of the episodes. Peers intervened in 11% and school staff intervened in 4% of bullying episodes.

Causes of bullying are varied as the individuals who engage in it. Some of the reasons include: trying to get things (property) for themselves; being impulsive and active in temperament; impressing others; needing social influences; getting attention; needing power over

other people; experiencing lack of warmth and attention at home; modeling aggressive behavior from home; having poor supervision at home; and, viewing violence as a way to settle problems.

Victims of bullying tend to be quiet, shy, lack friends and social support, lack confidence, feel isolated and helpless, and are reluctant to report offenses because they think it will get worse. N.M. Floyd, in his article, *Pick on somebody your own size*, summarizes the bullying cycle in a succinct manner:

“Bullying tends to start off in a tentative way, with some trial and error as the bullying settles on a victim. At first, the incidents may be playful consisting of pranks, jokes, and some rough and tumble. As victims succumb to this treatment and prove submissive, the incidents become more hurtful, escalating from criticizing the victim, to name-calling and taunting, then to personal attacks and public humiliation. In response to this increasingly hostile treatment, the victims change and become more accepting and submissive. The rough and tumble plays give way to slapping, punching, kicking, and beatings. The attacks become more systematized as victims are scapegoated.”

Possible actions for the victims of bullying are: stay calm without looking like a victim; ignore the bully by keeping quiet and walk away; if the aforementioned are not possible, maintain good eye contact and use a calm voice, and try to get help. It goes without saying that school staff should intervene in bullying episodes immediately. Officials should talk to the bully and the victim separately. Involve the administration so that a wider reading on the problem can be obtained, and school policies are followed.

Works Cited

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