



## Physical, Relational & Cyber Bullying

Bullying is defined by the American Medical Association (AMA) as a pattern of repeated aggression with deliberate intent to harm or disturb a victim despite apparent victim distress and a real or perceived imbalance of power (e.g. due to age, strength, size, social status). The AMA recognizes bullying as a complex and abusive behavior with potentially serious social and mental health consequences for children and adolescents. The prevalence of bullying is staggering and its implications are widespread, in part because it negatively affects not only the victim and perpetrator but all youth involved including the witnesses or “bystanders.”

Bullying presents itself in many forms, including verbal and/or physical threats and assaults, teasing and name calling, intentional exclusion from a group, spreading rumors, menacing gestures and faces, and racial or ethnic slurs. A relatively new but potentially more serious arena is cyber-bullying—the use of electronic information and communication devices, text messages, websites, etc. to willfully harass or personally attack an individual or group.

While boys tend to engage in more direct, overt physical or verbal bullying behaviors, girls often use more indirect, discrete means such as building alliances, manipulating relationships, intentionally leaving someone out of a group activity or spreading rumors.

Bullying is often dismissed by adults as typical, unavoidable adolescent behavior. But ignoring bullying is serious because it causes physical, psychological and emotional harm to students and interferes with student's ability to learn and participate

in school activities. Chronic victims report physical and mental health problems, may develop low self-esteem or depression, and may contemplate suicide more often than their non-bullied peers. Youth who exhibit bullying behavior are also prone to academic underachievement, and anti-social or criminal behavior such as skipping school, vandalism, abusing drugs and alcohol, fighting and domestic violence.

Bullying is a complex problem and one that takes the entire school community to resolve. Teachers, staff, administrators, parents and students must work together to address the issue by:

- Clearly defining bullying behavior to ensure that students, staff and parents don't dismiss it as harmless horseplay, teasing or joking around.
- Establishing and enforcing clear school policies on bullying that define the problem, describe the consequences, establish methods of data collection, outline adult intervention, and require staff development and prevention education.
- Teaching and role playing strategies for bullying prevention and providing students the means to safely and discreetly report bullying incidents to school staff.
- Providing parents information on how to prevent bullying behaviors in their children, encourage their children to intervene or speak up when they witness bullying incidents, and support their child when targeted by a perpetrator.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Learn about bullying prevention. Set clear expectations for behavior. Parents play a critical role in this issue.
- Be alert to the warning signs of bullying which include social withdrawal, poor academic performance, depression, excessive anger, and lack of interest in school.
- Teach and role model empathy, peaceful conflict resolution, good communication skills, and problem solving strategies.
- Take bullying seriously. Don't be afraid to admit your child may be exhibiting bullying behavior or be a victim. Work cooperatively with your school.
- Discuss your school's bullying policy with your child.

## BULLYING RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:  
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/15plus/aboutbullying.asp>

*The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*, by Barbara Coloroso (2003)

## WHAT IS SEL?

### SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

is the process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively. SEL is fundamental to teen's social and emotional development – their health, ethical development, citizenship, academic learning, and motivation to succeed. Not only does SEL enhance academic outcomes for students, it also ensures that schools will address a broader mission of educating students to be good problem-solvers and caring, responsible, and engaged citizens.



Funding provided by the Illinois State Board of Education and supported by the Children's Mental Health Partnership.