

Bullying in Schools: Finding a Solution, or  
Looking for the Next Best Thing?

Presented by: Ken Merrell, Ph.D., University of Oregon  
Sponsored by BYU McKay School of Education, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006

**Definition:**

Bullying can be defined as repeatedly harming others. This can be done by physical attack or hurting others' feelings through words actions, or social exclusion. Bullying may be done by one person or by a group. It is an unfair match since the bully is either physically, verbally, or socially stronger than the victim (Hazler, 1996).

**Prevalence** (Center for Disease Control data):

- Rates of bullying involve 10 to 20% of students involved as victim or perpetrators of repeated abuse.
- Similar rates of bullying are reported in urban, suburban, and rural schools.
- Bullying that is random, is reported by 75% of students (random = occasional violence or intimidation as opposed to repeated victimization)

**Setting** (CDC data):

Most frequent school settings for bullying and intimidation as reported by victims include the following.

- School yard or playground (74% of victims)
- Hallways (53% of victims)
- Cafeteria (45% of victims)

**Parental/Home Characteristics (of aggressors):**

- Inconsistent parenting (fluctuation between harsh discipline and absent discipline)
- Hostile atmospheres (much use of coercive pain control in the home)
- Harsh physical discipline

**Typical Victims:**

- Physically smaller, less developed
- Fear of attending school developed over time
- Increased risk of school dropout
- Poor self-esteem, fewer friends
- May seek retribution: more likely than perpetrators to bring weapons to school (FBI)

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**Bullying and Victimization Increases Internalizing Problems:**

- Children who are already traumatized, submissive, or anxious are likely targets
- Social withdrawal, school refusal, loss of interest in activities, and somatic symptoms may result
- Prolonged, repeated bullying increases victim’s risk of depression, anxiety disorders, panic attacks, and suicide

**Gender and Bullying:**

Although males are more likely than females to be perpetrators and victims, female bullying is significant and possibly on the rise

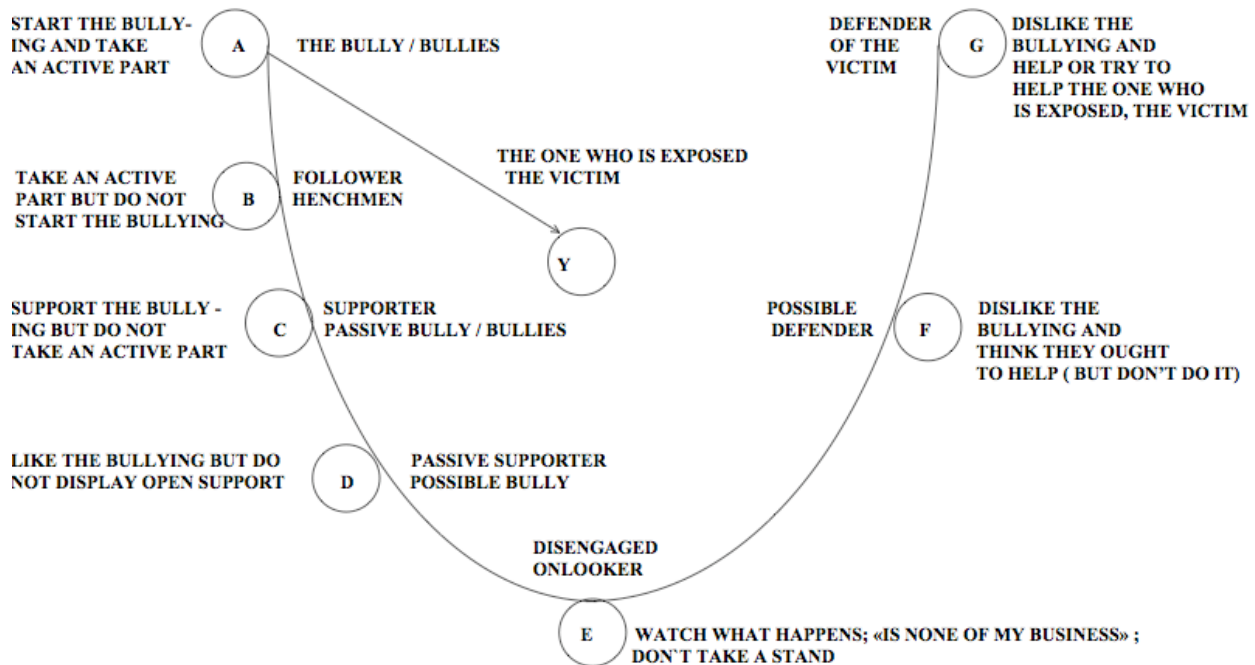
Relational aggression

**Developmental Aspects:**

- Bullying behavior occurs at all ages but tends to peak between ages 9 and 13 years old
- Bullying and teasing may lead to sexual harassment and other coercive behaviors in adulthood
- Bullies do not typically “grow out” of the behavior, the behavior typically becomes covert over time but is still prevalent at high levels

**Peer Dynamics ( The Bullying Circle, by Dan Olweus, Ph.D.):**

**THE BULLYING CIRCLE: STUDENTS’ MODES OF REACTION / ROLES IN AN ACUTE BULLYING SITUATION**



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## Recommendations:

Typical simple responses for schools:

- Increased supervision
- Give staff authority to enforce consequences for misbehavior
- Encourage reporting and ensure responsiveness to reports (e.g. anonymous reporting with 24 hour turn around by staff)
- Peer conflict resolution
- Adopt anti-bullying intervention curriculum

Comprehensive approach for schools includes the following:

- Staff training
- School-wide positive behavior support
- Dispel false beliefs about aggressive behavior, bullying
- Conduct a school-wide assessment
- Develop a student code of conduct with input from students
- Provide services such as individual counseling and group skill-building services for bullies and victims
- Emphasize skill development
- Involve parents in general, not just when problems arise
- Implement intervention strategies specific to aggressive students
- Teach students to make appropriate and objective evaluations of peer behavior
- Build in accountability and evaluation

Resources

[www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org)

<http://orp.uoregon.edu>

[www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

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## Meta-analysis of Bullying Intervention (Merrell et al. in press)

- Rationale
  - Most research on school bullying has primarily focused on describing the problem
  - Need to know what works
- Method
  - 1980-2004 search (25 year inclusion)
  - Refereed journal, book chapter, dissertation, master's thesis
  - School based intervention
  - 35 studies reviewed
  - 16 met inclusion criteria (included 8 nations and 16,000 students)
- Types
  - Bullying intervention program
  - Peer support model
  - Programs that addressed helping victims of bullying
- Positive Effects (more self report): 39 out of 107 possible effects: 36%
  - Teacher self-reported increase in knowledge of bullying intervention skills
  - Teachers self-report of feeling more effective
  - Decreases in teacher disciplinary referrals
  - Teacher reports of improved student social competence
  - Student victims reported improved global self worth and greater peer acceptance
- Negative effects:
  - 7 out of 107 possible effects: 6.5%
  - Some teachers observed an increase in student emotional and behavioral problems (strong effect >1.0)
  - Peer nominated more students as reinforcers, assistants, outsiders, defenders (i.e. peripheral participants bullying)
- No effects:
  - 60 of 107 possible effects: 56%
- Summary
  - Bullying interventions have a positive effect on student and teacher perceptions, but seldom reduce actual bullying behavior

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