Bullying in Children and Adolescents

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Definition of Bullying

- Definition of bullying from AACAP:
  - Bullying is a serious form of mistreatment manifested by the repeated exposure of one person to physical and/or relational aggression where the victim is hurt with teasing, name calling, mockery, threats, harassment, taunting, social exclusion or rumors.
  - Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior that can present in the form of threats, physical assault and intimidation that is intentional and involves a difference in power and/or strength
Bullying vs. Teasing Between Friends

- Behavior becomes bullying when:
  - It is repeated and consistent
  - Difference is evident between the bully and the victim
  - A bully may feel excited and empowered
  - A victim may feel fear, humiliation and/or shame
Bullying

- Bullying is a common experience for many children and adolescents, but can also occur across the lifespan (college, dating relationships, workplace, etc.)
- As many as half of all children are bullied at some point during school years
  - Study by AACAP estimated 14% of children in grades 6-10 had been the victim of cyberbullying within the past 2 months
- At least 10% are bullied on a regular basis
- Bullying has an impact on the victim, the bully and the bystander
Bullying

- Bullying can be physical, verbal or electronic
- Boys - typically use physical intimidation or threats, regardless of the gender of their victims
- Girls - more often verbal, typically target other girls
- Bullying via social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) is increasingly common (cyberbullying)
Cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying includes a range of harmful words and actions that take place online.
- Some examples include:
  - Sending mean messages
  - Sharing embarrassing pictures
  - Making up and spreading untrue stories
  - Telling others to ignore someone or leave them out of activities
Cyberbullying vs. Bullying

- Cyberbullying and bullying are more alike than different, but there are a few differences:
  - When and Where: face-to-face bullying normally takes place during the day, but cyberbullying can happen any place, any time.
  - Cyberbullying can happen without knowing who is sending the messages
  - Mean or embarrassing posts on social media can spread quickly online and go viral. This can increase the hurt or embarrassment from a bullying experience.
About the Victims

- Any child, regardless of age or gender, has the potential to be bullied.
- However, certain populations are more vulnerable due to disability, sexual orientation, physical appearance and numerous other factors including race, gender, income and religion.
- Bullies often tend to choose children who are passive, easily intimidated and/or have few friends.
- Victims may be smaller, younger, struggle with self-esteem, have depression and/or anxiety, struggle to defend themselves.
About the Victim

- Potential family issues
  - Look for domestic violence at home
  - Look for parental strife
  - Look for the parent bully and/or parent victim
  - Where there is emotional neglect, look to the peer group for modeling
Bystanders

- Kids who assist - may not start the bullying, but serve as an “assistant” to children who are bullying; may encourage the behavior and sometimes join in
- Kids who reinforce - not directly involved, but give the bully an audience; will often laugh or provide support to the bully
- Outsiders - remain separate from the bullying situation, neither reinforce the bully nor defend the victim
- Kids who defend - actively comfort the child being bullied and may come to the child’s defense when bullying occurs
About the Bully

- Typically thrive on controlling or dominating others
- Often have been a victim of bullying or even physical abuse
- Potential individual characteristics:
  - Impulsive
  - Become angry quickly
  - Want to feel in charge; dominating
  - Poor frustration tolerance
  - Difficulty following rules
  - View violence in a positive manner
About the Bully

- Potential characteristics of the families of bullies:
  - May show a lack of warmth or involvement
  - May be overly permissive
  - May be harsh, corporal disciplinarians
  - May be physically or sexually abusive
  - May be none of these

- Identifying family characteristics that may be playing a role in the bullying behavior can be vital for clinicians to determine an appropriate response/treatment plan
About the Bully

- Tend not to be loners and may have “henchmen”
- Outwardly have a positive view of self, although the bullying may play a vital role in maintaining this image as true sense of self-esteem may be quite low
  - May use aggression to hide his or her own pain
  - Pain of the victim may soothe the bully’s pain
- Behavior may be part of conduct disorder
- May be abusing substances
About the Bully

- Caution others against “labeling” the bully
- This can unintentionally “lock in” the bully identity
- It is much more effective to label the bullying behavior
Impact on the Victim

- Bullying can result in suffering that interferes with social and emotional development and school performance.
- Children involved in bullying may struggle with a number of physical and emotional symptoms. They are also more likely to be absent from school.
  - Depression
  - Irritability
  - Anxiety
  - Sleep problems
  - Headaches
  - Stomachaches
Impact on the Victim

More serious consequences of bullying can include:

- Eating disorders
- School avoidance/truancy
- Substance use
- Self-harm (cutting, burning, scratching, etc.)
- Victims of bullying have attempted suicide to avoid further bullying
Impact on the Bystander

- Bystanders are more likely to feel guilt regarding inaction and may experience fear that the environment is unsafe.
- They can feel powerless or may feel pressured or drawn to participate in the bullying.
- Bystanders are at increased risk for depression and anxiety, abuse drugs and alcohol, and miss school.
Impact on the Bully

- Bullies are at increased risk for getting into fights and committing crimes
- Most likely to abuse alcohol and drugs as a youth
- More likely to drop out of school
- As an adult, those who have bullied in their youth are at an increased risk to have criminal convictions and at increased risk for being abusive toward their romantic partners and children
Warning Signs that a Child is Being Bullied

- Missing personal items
- Physical complaints hoping to stay home from school
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- A drop in grades
- Unhappiness regarding school or trouble over behavior
- Defensive behavior and attitude
Assessment Tools

- Measuring Bullying Victimization, Perpetration, and Bystander Experiences: A Compendium of Assessment Tools
- Publication of the Nation Center for Injury Prevention and Control of the CDC
- Contains 33 measures organized into categories:
  - Bully only
  - Victim only
  - Bully and Victim
  - Bystander, Bully and/or Victim Scales
Measuring Bullying Victimization, Perpetration, and Bystander Experiences: A Compendium of Assessment Tools

This compendium provides researchers, prevention specialists, and health educators with tools to measure a range of bullying experiences: bully perpetration, bully victimization, bully/victim experiences, and bystander experiences. Some researchers continue to examine the risk and protective factors associated with bullying experiences. Others are working to design, implement, and evaluate bully prevention interventions aimed at reducing bully victimization and perpetration, as well as increasing prosocial bystander involvement in bullying situations. The ability to measure bullying experiences broadly and completely is crucial to the success of these activities. Given that numerous measures of bullying experiences exist, researchers and practitioners—particularly those new to the field—may find it challenging to identify which of the available measures is appropriate for assessing a particular bullying experience. This compendium represents a starting point from which researchers can consider a set of psychometrically sound measures for assessing self-reported incidence and prevalence of a variety of bullying experiences.
How to help the Victim

- Encourage parents to ask the child what is going on
  - Children and teens may not tell adults that they are being bullied because they are embarrassed or frightened
- Parents can help by providing opportunities for the child to talk
- Parents should let the child know it is not his or her fault and that he or she did the right thing by telling the parent
- If the child knows another child who is being bullied, encourage the child to tell an adult and get help
Specific Ways to Help (AACAP)

- Ask your child what he or she thinks should be done. What’s already been tried? What worked and what didn't?
- Seek help from your child's teacher or the school guidance counselor. Most bullying occurs on playgrounds, in lunchrooms, and bathrooms, on school buses or in unsupervised halls. Ask the school administrators to find out about programs other schools and communities have used to help combat bullying, such as peer mediation, conflict resolution, and anger management training, and increased adult supervision.
- Don't encourage your child to fight back. Instead, suggest that he or she try walking away to avoid the bully, or that they seek help from a teacher, coach, or other adult.
Specific Ways to Help (AACAP)

- Help your child practice what to say to the bully so he or she will be prepared the next time.
- Help your child practice being assertive. The simple act of insisting that the bully leave him alone may have a surprising effect. Explain to your child that the bully's true goal is to get a response.
- Encourage your child to be with friends when traveling back and forth from school, during shopping trips, or on other outings. Bullies are less likely to pick on a child in a group.
Specific Ways to Help (AACAP)

- Do not encourage your child to "work things out" on their own with a young bully, and avoid contacting the parents of students who have bullied your child. Instead, work with your child's school to ensure protection from bullying through adult supervision, consequences for young people who bully, and the school's clear message that bullying will be taken seriously.

- Explore bullying websites with your child online. Your child may be comforted by knowing that they are not alone and find additional ways to cope.
Specific Ways to Help

- If the child becomes withdrawn, depressed, tries to avoid going to school or there is a decline in school performance, seek additional help from a mental health professional.

- Professional assistance earlier on can lessen the risk of lasting emotional consequences.
Specific Ways to Help - Cyberbullying (AAP)

- **The Takeaway.** Don’t threaten to take away your child’s device or cut their time online. They may see this as punishment and be less willing to tell you about bullying situations in the future.

- **Document.** If there is online evidence, save a screenshot. This may be helpful if it becomes necessary to report the event.

- **Support.** Talk with your child about the experience. Studies show that having just one person listen and support kids who have been bullied helps them better able to handle the situation in a healthy way.

- **Report.** Most social media platforms have a process for reporting bad behavior. If a classmate is bullying, you can report it to the school. If the bullying involves threats of physical harm, you can consider reporting to the police.
How Parents of a Bully Can Help

- It is difficult for most parents to learn that their child may be bullying others
- However, parents must recognize that children who bully are at risk for more serious behavior problems
- It is important for parents to take immediate action
How Parents of a Bully Can Help

- Talk with your child. Offer a calm explanation of what your child is accused of, and ask for their account of the incident.

- Hold the young person fully accountable for their actions. Calmly but firmly tell your child that bullying will not be tolerated, and that their behaviors will be taken seriously.

- Develop clear rules and expectations for your child's behavior. Provide fair but consistent consequences if your child breaks the rules, and recognize and affirm appropriate behavior.
How Parents of a Bully Can Help

- Spend more time with your child. Carefully monitor their activities, including where and with whom they spend their time. Supervise their use of social networking sites and texting.

- Work with your child's school to ensure that your child is held accountable for his or her bullying behavior. Ask the school to keep you informed about any further incidents.

- Build on your child's strengths and positive attributes. Encourage them to become involved in social activities with positive role models.
How To Help the Bully

- Seek help for him or her as soon as possible - child & adolescent psychiatrist or psychologist
- Without intervention, bullying can result in academic, social, emotional and legal troubles
- An evaluation with a mental health professional will help the parent and child understand what is causing the bullying and create a plan to stop the behavior
Encourage parents to support the school in evolving their policy regarding bullying. Legislation varies among States, but most States now require a specific anti-bullying policy, and many required (as of 2011) that this include responding to bullying events outside of school (such as cyber-bullying) that affect student interactions during the school day.

Encourage parents to adopt a position of "partnering" with the school. Accusing a school of not being responsive, or of allowing bullying, perpetuates conflicts (sometimes perceived by schools as "reverse bullying" by parents of bullied students). Instead, discuss with your school staff what would benefit your child and other students impacted by a bullying event.
What Does NOT Work

- Putting bullies and victims in the same room to work out their differences in front of school staff is ineffective.

- It is absolutely necessary that schools clearly state that bullying won’t be tolerated. However "no tolerance" policies ignore the fact that some teasing and unkind behavior to others is part of typical development. No tolerance policies may result in schools over reacting to certain events.
What Does NOT Work

- Telling students to report events of bullying to school staff works poorly in middle/high school students. Encourage students to talk to a trusted adult (parent, therapist, physician, etc.)
- When teachers and administrators are the bullies: If administrators/teachers intimidate students, or tolerate hazing rituals, it's very difficult to develop an anti-bullying school climate.
Prevention of Bullying Related Morbidity and Mortality

AACAP advocates for public policy and legislation that addresses:

- Promotion of public awareness about the nature, impact, and prevention of bullying;
- Development of safe schools through evidence-based prevention and intervention bullying programs that enhance mutual respect, sensitivity and support of others, tolerance to diversity, and disapproval of bullying;
- Fostering the necessity to report incidents of bullying to school authorities, with safeguards against any threat of retaliation or liability for those who report;
Prevention of Bullying Related Morbidity and Mortality

- AACAP advocates for public policy and legislation that addresses:
  - Monitoring and detecting ongoing bullying incidents, including oversight to ensure the bully is accountable for his/her actions;
  - Providing school intervention through school counselors or nurses to protect and support students who are being bullied, as well as counseling for perpetrators about the harm inflicted, respect, empathy, tolerance and sensitivity to others; and
  - Referral for victims and perpetrators who experience physical and psychological symptoms linked to bullying for medical evaluation and treatment.
Prevention - Cyberbullying (AAP)

- **Discuss digital citizenship.** Talk with your children about being respectful online and how negative messages can hurt others. And remember, you are a role model. So if you use social media yourself, be sure to set a good example of positive online interactions.

- **Check in early & often.** Ask your children about what kind of messages they are seeing, sending, and getting and how they feel about them. Early experiences online are important and can set the tone and expectations your child has going forward.

- **Make a plan.** Use AAP’s family Media Use Plan to set guidelines and rules that are important to your family.
Family Media Plan

Media should work for you & work within your family values & parenting style. When media is used thoughtfully & appropriately, media can enhance daily life. But when used inappropriately or without thought, media can displace many important activities such as face-to-face interaction, family-time, outdoor-play, exercise, unplugged downtime & sleep.

By creating a Personalized Family Media Use Plan, you can be aware of when you are using media to achieve your purpose. This requires parents & users to think about what they want those purposes to be. The tool below will help you to think about media & create goals & rules that are in line with your family’s values.

To make YOUR family’s Media Use Plan, start by entering your family’s information. This information will remain private and confidential.

Get Started

Create Your Family Media Plan

Media Time Calculator

To find this information in Spanish, click here.
A study presented in 2017 at the AAP National Conference in Chicago looked at cyberbullying in children ages 8 to 11 years old.

Researchers collected survey data on 4,584 students in grades 3, 4 and 5 between 2014 and 2016.

Overall, 9.5% of children reported being a victim of cyberbullying. Children who owned cell phones were significantly more likely to report being a victim of cyberbullying, especially in grades 3 and 4.
According to the researchers, the increased risk of cyberbullying related to phone ownership could be tied to increased opportunity and vulnerability. Continuous access to social media and texting increases online interactions, provides more opportunities to engage both positively and negatively with peers, and increases the chance of an impulsive response to peers’ postings and messages. It may be helpful to start talking to parents about kids and cellphones starting at younger ages than previously and encourage parents to create a family media plan.
Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention

- From the Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention
- Published in Pediatrics July 2009, 124 (1) 393-402

Abstract: Youth violence continues to be a serious threat to the health of children and adolescents in the United States. It is crucial that pediatricians clearly define their role and develop the appropriate skills to address this threat effectively. From a clinical perspective, pediatricians should become familiar with *Connected Kids: Safe, Strong, Secure*, the American Academy of Pediatrics' primary care violence prevention protocol. Using this material, practices can incorporate preventive education, screening for risk, and linkages to community-based counseling and treatment resources. As advocates, pediatricians may bring newly developed information regarding key risk factors such as exposure to firearms, teen dating violence, and bullying to the attention of local and national policy makers. This policy statement refines the developing role of pediatricians in youth violence prevention and emphasizes the importance of this issue in the strategic agenda of the American Academy of Pediatrics.
Connected Kids: Safe, Strong, Secure offers child healthcare providers a comprehensive, logical approach to integrating violence prevention efforts in practice and the community. The program takes an asset-based approach to anticipatory guidance, focusing on helping parents and families raise resilient children.

Connected Kids includes a Clinical Guide and 21 handouts for parent and teen topics such as bullying, discipline, interpersonal skills, parents, suicide and television violence.

Some Connected Kids materials are available for purchase at ShopAAP.

Connected Kids Handouts

INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD
- Welcome to the World of Parenting!
- Parenting Your Infant
- How Do Infants Learn?
- Your Child is On the Move: Reduce the Risk of SIDS

EARLY CHILDHOOD
- Growing Independence: Tips for Parents of Young Children
- Bullying: It’s Not OK
- Drug Abuse Prevention Starts with Parents
- Friends are Important: Tips for Parents

ADOLESCENCE
- Talking with Your Teen: Tips for Parents
- Staying Cool When Things Heat Up
- Expect Respect: Healthy Relationships
- Teen Dating Violence: Tips for Parents
Program launched by the AAP in 2005 that addresses violence prevention in the context of routine child health care

The final AAP product consists of a clinical guide, 21 parent/patient information brochures, and supporting training materials

Because of the recent recognition of the primary importance of individual and family resilience discussed above, the Connected Kids program implements a strength-based approach to anticipatory guidance, helping parents and families raise resilient children

Includes a Clinical Guide available in PDF form which provides an overview to the entire Connected Kids program and its component parts

Prevention: Learn how to identify bullying and stand up to it safely

Become an upstander

Stop Bullying on the Spot

When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior, they send the message that it is not acceptable. Research shows this can stop bullying behavior over time.

Parents, school staff, and other adults in the community can help kids prevent bullying by talking about it, building a safe school environment, and creating a community-wide bullying prevention strategy.
StopBullying.gov

- Federal government website managed by DHHS that provides information from various government agencies on what bullying is, what cyberbullying is, who is at risk, and how to prevent and respond to bullying.

- State laws and policies - a helpful section on the website also provides state anti-bullying laws and policies.
## Components of State Anti-Bullying Laws and Regulations

<table>
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<th>Component</th>
<th>Included</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prohibiting statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protected groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>District policy requirement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reporting and investigations</td>
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<td>Consequences</td>
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<td>Communication of policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safeguards and supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review and update of local policies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff training</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent engagement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Books Recommended by AACAP for Kids

- Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls by Rachel Simmons
- The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes (Grades 1-4)
- Bully by Patricia Polacco (Grades 2-5)
  - Includes cyberbullying
- The Bully Book: A Novel by Eric Kahn Gale (Grades 3-7)
- Dear Bully: Seventy Authors Tell Their Stories by Dawn Metcalf (Grades 8 and up)
  - Includes resources for teens, educators, and parents, and suggestions for further reading
- Real Friends by Shannon Hale (grades 4-6)
- Side Effects May Vary by Julie Murphy (Grades 9 and up)
Videos

A collection of videos which are created by us or for us, along with a few sent in by our audience. All are curated around content themes of bullying prevention, kindness, acceptance and inclusion.

Featured

Popular

PACERTalks About Bullying
Ten-Year Trends in Bullying and Related Attitudes Among 4th- to 12th-Graders

- A study by Waasdorp et al. over the course of a 10 year period did show that bullying is decreasing.

- Additionally, more youth feel that adults are now helping to prevent bullying than 10 years ago (rising 39% to 71%).

- However, 48% of youth still report that bullying is a problem and about 40% report they are witnessing bullying behaviors.

- This study found at that time that the frequency of cyberbullying was relatively small, but the impact can be quite traumatic because the victim may be retraumatized by being drawn to and repeatedly viewing the harmful words or pictures.
References

- https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Bullying_Resource_Center/FAQ.aspx#question2
- https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Cyberbullying.aspx
- https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/139/6/e20170504
- https://www.aappublications.org/news/2017/09/15/NCECellPhone091817
- https://www.aappublications.org/collection/bullying
- https://www.stopbullying.gov/
- https://medicalsocietyofdelaware.org/
- https://www.pacer.org/bullying/video/