

A Primer on Bullying

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Definition of Bullying:

Per Texas Education Code §37.0832: **Bullying** is engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct that occurs on school property, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, or in a vehicle operated by the district and that:

1. Has the effect or will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student’s property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student’s person or of damage to the student’s property; **or**
2. Is sufficiently severe, persistent, and pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for a student.

Conduct described in the definition of bullying is considered bullying if the conduct:

1. Exploits an imbalance of power between the student perpetrator and the student victim through written or verbal expression or physical conduct; **and**
 2. Interferes with a student’s education or substantially disrupts the operation of a school.
- ◆ Bullying involves repeated acts of physical, emotional, or social behavior that are intentional, controlling, and hurtful. (US Dept of Health & Human Services)
 - ◆ Bullying is NOT a fact of life. It is a life changing event. Bullying can cause serious and lasting harm.
 - ◆ Most adults who were bullied as children maintain vivid memories of the events throughout their lifetime. (www.eyesonbullying.org)
 - ◆ Bullying is a form of abuse, harassment, and violence. It is not a phase children have to go through.
 - ◆ Bullying is a learned behavior. It is not just ‘a part of growing up’ or ‘boys being boys’ or an ‘unavoidable part of life’. Parents and teachers greatly underestimate the frequency of bullying compared to student responses.
 - ◆ Bullying is persistent, pervasive, and intentional behavior.
 - ◆ The bully intentionally hurts the other person by using emotional and/or physical pain. The bully gets pleasure watching the other person hurt. Bullying isn’t an accident or mistake. It’s not a “sorry, I didn’t mean it” or “I was just messin’ with ya”. The person bullying has a goal to cause harm to someone else.
 - ◆ Bullying is persistent and pervasive. Both the bully and the bullied know that the bullying can and most probably will occur again. It’s not a one-time happening. Bullying is used to intimidate and control – it’s violence, abuse, and harassment. Once the intimidation happens, the bully knows s/he can continue to act without any fear of being found out. The bullied child will not do anything to retaliate or tell on the bully. The bullied child buys into the belief that they can’t do anything to stop the abuse and that maybe it is their fault.
 - ◆ The bully has something making an imbalance of power between the two people, such as: being a different race, older, bigger, stronger, of the opposite sex, more verbally adept, more athletic,

more intelligent, or higher up the social ladder to name a few. The bully uses their power to control or harm someone. A group of kids banded together to bully can create an imbalance.

- ◆ Bullying is not sibling rivalry or fighting between two equally matched kids. It's not about anger or conflict. Bullying is arrogance in action.

The Seriousness of the Problem

- ◆ 86% of children between the ages of 12 and 15 said that they get teased or bullied at school. (Kaiser Foundation, 2001)
- ◆ Of children in 6th – 9th grade, more than 3.2 million (nearly 1 in 6) are victims of bullying each year, while 3.7 million bully other children. (Fox, et al, 2003)
- ◆ Nearly 60% of boys who researchers identified as bullies in grades 6-9 were convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24. 40% of them had 3 or more convictions. (Fight Crime Advocacy Group)
- ◆ School is the place where the majority of bullying occurs. Research shows that two to three times as many students are bullied at school as compared to on the way to school. About 40-70% of bullying takes place during breaks in the schoolyard, in corridors, or in secluded places such as the bathroom. (USDHHS)

Perception is Key

- ◆ 23 % of the students bullied and 71% of the teachers reported that teachers intervened often or almost always. (Zeigler and Rosenstein-Manner, 1991)
- ◆ Bullying IS happening ALL around us. It happens under our radar MOST of the time.
- ◆ Kids don't want to report it because:
 - ◆ They don't think we will believe them.
 - ◆ They think they will get blamed.
 - ◆ They think the bully will retaliate.
- ◆ Parents and teachers greatly underestimate the frequency of bullying compared to student responses.
- ◆ Kids also think that we are part of the problem as some adults bully.
- ◆ Students usually don't tell us they are being bullied because they are embarrassed, ashamed, or even frightened of the child who is bullying them as well as they often feel they are tattling.

Social Cruelty

- ◆ By age 4 or 5, children learn to use name-calling or teasing as a form of social power.
- ◆ That power continues through the years– in the classroom, the cafeteria, hallways, playgrounds, buses, and more recently on computer screens and cell phones.
- ◆ Research has shown the early isolation some children experience can follow them throughout their careers leading to depression, low self esteem, and violence.

- (Teaching Tolerance, www.tolerance.org)

Where Social Cruelty Leads – The Roles of Bullying

- ◆ **The Bully** feels contempt for another person who is different from them. Kids who bully have an air of superiority that masks deep hurt and a feeling of inadequacy. Some bully to not be bullied themselves.
- ◆ The contempt can range from disregard to scorn to hate.
- ◆ Warning Signs of a Bully include:
 - ◆ Feel contempt for another human being.
 - ◆ View violence more favorably.
 - ◆ Is aggressive, nasty, spiteful, and/or oppositional.
 - ◆ Has a marked need to dominate or manipulate others.
 - ◆ Find it difficult to fit in with rules.
 - ◆ Often hot tempered, impulsive, intolerant towards differences.
 - ◆ **Good at talking their way out of situations.**
- (US Dept of Health & Human Services)
- ◆ Children Who Bully are More Likely than their Peers to:
 - ◆ Get into frequent fights
 - ◆ Be injured in a fight
 - ◆ Vandalize or steal property
 - ◆ Drink alcohol or smoke
 - ◆ Be truant from school
 - ◆ Drop out of school
 - ◆ Carry a weapon
 - ◆ Research has also shown that children who bully are more likely to report that they own guns for risky reasons, such as to gain respect or to frighten others.
- (Stop Bullying Now – The Scope and Impact of Bullying, US Dept of Health and Human Services: Nansel et al., 2001, 2003; Olweus, 1993)
- ◆ **The Bullied** is the victim of bullying and is different in some way. Warning Signs of Bullying include:
 - ◆ Loses interest in school or is afraid to go or refuses to go.
 - ◆ Chooses an illogical route to or at school.
 - ◆ Suffers a drop in grades.
 - ◆ Withdraws from family or school activities.
 - ◆ Is hungry after school.
 - ◆ Steals money from home or asks for extra \$\$ from family.

- ◆ Goes to the bathroom first thing upon arriving home.
 - ◆ Comes home with torn, dirty, wet or missing clothes or keeps losing things.
 - ◆ Stops talking about peers and everyday activities.
 - ◆ Has little appetite, stomachaches, headaches, panic attacks, is unable to sleep or sleeps too much, is exhausted.
 - ◆ Has physical injuries (bruises, cuts, scratches) inconsistent with the explanation.
 - ◆ Seems unhappy, downhearted, depressed or has mood swings with anger or irritation.
- (US Dept of Health & Human Services)
- ◆ Talks about suicide.
 - ◆ Feels helpless.
 - ◆ Often feels like they are not good enough.
 - ◆ Blames themselves for their problems.
 - ◆ Suddenly has fewer friends.
 - ◆ Avoids certain places.
 - ◆ Acts differently than usual.
 - ◆ Runs away from home.
 - ◆ Hurts themselves.
- (www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov)
- ◆ Compared to their peers, kids who are bullied are 5x more likely to be depressed.
 - ◆ Bullied boys are 4x more likely to be suicidal while bullied girls are 8x more likely to be suicidal.
- (U.S. Dept of Justice)
- ◆ **The Bystander** is the person who stands by and watches or looks away, joins in the bullying or encourages the bully to continue. The bystander fears the bully and being targeted.
 - ◆ Blames the target for being bullied.
 - ◆ Watches and/or joins in with the bullying.
 - ◆ Walks away or ignores the bullying.
 - ◆ Sees no need to stop it.
 - ◆ May grow up guilt ridden for not intervening or become desensitized to violence.
- (US Dept of Health & Human Services)
- ◆ **The Defender** is the person who dislikes the bullying and helps or tries to help the one who is bullied.
 - ◆ Tries to stop the bullying or tells an adult.
 - ◆ Stands up for the victim.

- ◆ Speaks out against injustices.
- ◆ Takes responsibility for what happens among themselves.

Types of Bullying

◆ **Physical:**

- ◆ Accounts for 1/3 of all bullying.
- ◆ Includes slapping, hitting, choking, poking, punching, kicking, biting, pinching, scratching, twisting limbs into painful positions, spitting, and damaging or destroying clothes and property belonging to the bullied child.

- (US Dept of Health & Human Services)

◆ **Verbal:**

- ◆ Verbal abuse is the most common form of bullying and accounts for 70% of bullying. Verbal abuse is easy to get away with as it can be whispered in the presence of adults and peers without detection or it can be yelled across the recess playground and blend in with all the other noise.
- ◆ Verbal abuse can stand alone the easiest. Very often it is the first step to physical or relational bullying which can then move toward more cruel and humiliating violence. It can be a direct or indirect form of bullying as verbal abuse can be stated to the victim or through rumors, gossip, or cyber-bullying.
- ◆ Boys and girls use verbal bullying equally.
- ◆ "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is a lie. "Sticks and stones may not break bones, but they can break a child's spirit and self-esteem."
- ◆ Verbal bullying is quick and painless for the bully yet is usually extremely harmful to the target/victim.
- ◆ Younger children who haven't developed a strong sense of self are the most vulnerable to verbal abuse, although repeated and persistent attacks can wear down almost any child regardless of age.
- ◆ Can involve taking of lunch money or possessions, abusive phone calls, intimidating e-mails, anonymous notes with threats of harm, lies, false and malicious rumors, and gossip.
- ◆ Cyber bullying involves the use of information and communication technologies to deliberately harm or injure an individual or group.

- (Teach Tolerance, "A Primer for Parents", www.tolerance.org)

◆ **Cyber-bullying:**

- ◆ Harassment using technology, such as email, instant messaging, or social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter.
- ◆ "Sexting" is sending nude or sexually suggestive pictures and accompanying text via cell phone. This is considered child pornography depending on the age with a felony charge if caught.

- ◆ Although the original “sexter” may only send the suggestive message to one person—a girlfriend or boyfriend, for example—that message can be forwarded to anyone in the recipient’s address book, and from there, all across a school or community. Once it’s out there, there’s no way to take back the message or the accompanying embarrassment or humiliation.
- ◆ There are possible long-term consequences, too. Since school admissions officers and potential employers often look at online profiles, the repercussions and consequences of sending an inappropriate message could be endless. And one newspaper reports that sexters can “face felony charges for child pornography” (Borgman, 2009), landing them on the registry for sexual predators, a label they’ll bear for the rest of their lives. The Texas legislature is looking into this area and working to help young people not end up on the sexual predators list.
- (From Committee for Children: www.cfchildren.org/spring09/text-bullying)

◆ **Relational:**

- ◆ Relational bullying is the most difficult to detect from the outside.
- ◆ Girls use this method more than boys.
- ◆ It includes intentionally ignoring, isolating, excluding, shunning, spreading rumors and gossip. It is when someone is intentionally excluded from a sleepover, birthday party, or games.
- ◆ Relational bullying is used to alienate a peer or make fun of them using back biting comments and manipulation of friendships. The intent is to be mean and cruel. One day you are best friends and the next you don’t know what happened but you are on the bad list.
- ◆ It can involve subtle gestures such as aggressive stares, rolling of eyes, sighs, frowns, sneers, snickers, antagonistic posturing or hostile body language, or damaging property.
- ◆ Relational bullying is most powerful in the middle years with the onset of adolescence and the accompanying physical, mental, emotional, and sexual changes. It is the mean girl cliques.
- (US Dept of Health & Human Services)

What to Do if a Student is Bullied?

- ◆ Listen to them. Tell them: I hear you; I am here for you; I believe you; It is not your fault. It takes courage to tell me. Thank you.
- ◆ Talk about what happened what s/he can do if it happens again; such as, turn around and walk away; tell a teacher or staff; be in a group for more protection.
- ◆ Bring the bullying out into the open. Address it right when it happens. Zero tolerance. The benefit of bringing bullying out in the open is that the bully is no longer in control.
- ◆ Teach students:
 - ◆ what bullying is, how to handle it, and how to report it.

- ◆ the difference between teasing and taunting. Teasing is poking fun between friends and stops if one asks for it to stop. Taunting is intentionally hurting someone and doesn't stop when asked to stop.
- ◆ skills: friendship making, conflict resolution, problem solving, etc..
- ◆ If the student has some mental health issues or is hyperactive, get him/her help to develop their social skills. Educate those around them to support them and help if bullying occurs.
- ◆ Help students bully proof themselves. Bully proofing consists of having the student stand up straight, look people in the eye, smile, stay calm, talk in a confident/firm voice, and have an air of self-confidence. Bullies often pick on students who are shy, looking down, have poor posture...in essence have low self-esteem or low self-confidence.
- ◆ Help strengthen self confidence by stimulating the development of talents.
- ◆ Encourage students to be in groups for more protection and safety.
- ◆ Help students be responsible for their own behavior. Teach that the bullying behavior really has nothing to do with them and everything to do with the bully.
- ◆ Try making friends with the bully. That might surprise him or her.
- ◆ Encourage students to stand up for each other (when it is safe to do so). Help students know what to say when/if bullying occurs. The victim of bullying and/or friends can say to the bully:
 - ◆ "Bullying is not okay here."
 - ◆ "We help each other out here. We don't hurt each other."
 - ◆ "We don't like how you are treating our friend. Stop it."
 - ◆ "Why don't you go pick on someone twice your size?"
 - ◆ "You are so funny!"
 - ◆ "No, thanks. I'm out of here."
 - ◆ "I don't need this."
 - ◆ "Boy you laid that on thick."
 - ◆ "You know you are right, I do have four eyes. Better to see you with!"
 - ◆ "I'll report it if you don't stop bothering me."
 - ◆ "Come on with me, you don't need this kind of behavior."
- ◆ Use the monthly ethical behavior packets that Mary Ann Kluga sends out which have bullying information 4x/year with lessons, discussion questions, newsletter ideas, PA announcements and more.
- ◆ Use the PA announcements in the packets before the minute of silence. The students will have something to contemplate.
- ◆ Educate staff, parents and students (PTA meetings, open houses, etc.)

- www.cyberbullying.us provides up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyber-bullying among adolescents.
- www.eyesonbullying.org – provides activities, resources, teleseminars, a tool kit for action and more focused on preventing bullying in children’s lives.
- www.tolerance.org - a project of the southern poverty law center with professional development, classroom activities, teaching kits, and resources to teach tolerance.
- www.stopcyberbullying.com –provides information on how cyberbullying works, why children cyberbully, how to prevent it and take action against it and much more.
- www.samhsa.gov –provides information on how to start a conversation about bullying with your child and how to take action against bullying.
- www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov – provides information on what is bullying, recognizing the warning signs, knowing the risk factors, getting help, and more.
- www.trevorromain.com (“15 Days of Caring Curriculum”) –promotes social, emotional and physical fitness for kids.
- The Bullied, The Bully, and The Bystander, Barbara Coloroso. From Pre-School to High School how parents and teachers can help break the cycle of violence.
- Bullies are a Pain in the Brain – Trevor Romain. A book for kids and grown ups alike about how to deal with bullying.
- Girl Wars, Cheryl Dellasega Ph. D. and Charisse Nixon Ph.D. 12 Strategies that will end female bullying.
- I Wish I Knew What to Do, Edited by Beth Carls and Amy Looper. Stories from teens about what really goes on before, during, and after school about bullying.
- Odd Girl Out, Rachel Simmons. Female bullying and the hidden culture of girls’ aggression in our schools.
- Odd Girl Speaks Out, Rachel Simmons. Girls write about bullies, cliques, popularity, and jealousy.
- Please Stop Laughing at Me, Jodee Blanco. A powerful memoir chronicling how one child was shunned and physically abused by her classmates from elementary school through high school. This is a vivid story that can open our eyes to the harsh realities and long-term consequences of bullying.
- Take the Bully by the Horns, Sam Horn. Stop unethical, uncooperative, or unpleasant people from running and ruining your life.
- Tongue FU! At School, Sam Horn. 30 ways to get along better with teachers, principals, students, and parents.
- “Words Will NEVER Hurt Me” – Helping Kids Handle Teasing, Bullying and Putdowns, Sally Northway Ogden. A practical guide for parents and educators making complicated human behaviors simple.