



Children Who Bully

Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, it is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms such as hitting or punching (physical bullying); teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying); intimidation through gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by e-mail (cyberbullying).

There is no one single cause of bullying among children. Rather, individual, family, peer, school, and community factors can place a child or youth at risk for bullying his or her peers.

Characteristics of children who bully

Children who bully their peers regularly (i.e., those who admit to bullying more than occasionally) tend to

- Be impulsive, hot-headed, dominant;
- Be easily frustrated;
- Lack empathy;
- Have difficulty following rules; and
- View violence in a positive way.

Boys who bully tend to be physically stronger than other children.

Family risk factors for bullying

Children who bully are more likely than their nonbullying peers to live in homes where there is:

- A lack of warmth and involvement on the part of parents;
- Overly-permissive parenting (including a lack of limits for children's behavior);
- A lack of supervision by parents;
- Harsh, physical discipline; and
- A model for bullying behavior.

Peer risk factors for bullying

Children and youth who bully are more likely to have friends who bully and who have positive attitudes toward violence.

Common myths about children who bully

"Children who bully are loners."

- In fact, research indicates that children and youth who bully are not socially isolated.
- They report having an easier time making friends than children and youth who do not bully.
- Children and youth who bully usually have at least a small group of friends who support or encourage their bullying.

"Children who bully have low self-esteem."

- In fact, most research indicates that children and youth who bully have average or above-average self-esteem.
- Interventions that focus on building the self-esteem of children who bully probably will be ineffective in stopping bullying behavior.

Bullying and other violent or antisocial behaviors

Research shows that bullying can be a sign of other serious antisocial or violent behavior. Children and youth who frequently bully their peers are more likely than others to

- Get into frequent fights,
- Be injured in a fight,
- Vandalize property,
- Steal property,
- Drink alcohol,
- Smoke,
- Be truant from school,
- Drop out of school, and
- Carry a weapon.

Research also shows that

- Children who bully are more likely to report that they own guns for risky reasons, such as to gain respect or frighten others.
- Boys who were identified as bullies in middle school were four times as likely as their non-bullying peers to have more than one criminal conviction by age 24.

What do I do if my child is bullying others?

- Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously and that you will not tolerate this behavior.
- Develop clear and consistent rules within your family for your children's behavior. Praise and reinforce your children for following rules and use non-physical, non-hostile consequences for rule violations.
- Spend more time with your child and carefully supervise and monitor his or her activities. Find out who your child's friends are and how and where they spend free time.
- Build on your child's talents by encouraging him or her to get involved in prosocial activities (such as clubs, music lessons, nonviolent sports).
- Share your concerns with your child's teacher, counselor, or principal. Work together to send clear messages to your child that his or her bullying must stop.
- If you or your child needs additional help, talk with a school counselor or mental health professional.

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