



Bullying is an intentional form of aggression involving groups or individuals. This abuse can be verbal, physical, emotional or any combination of all three. More recently, exclusion has been added to most definitions of bullying. Definitions of bullying tend to differ widely according to social and cultural environments.¹



Bullying can also be understood by its direct and indirect forms. *Direct* bullying includes physical harassment such as hitting, punching, poking, and kicking; as well as verbal aggression like taunting, name-calling, and threats. *Indirect* forms of bullying may involve gossip, exclusion, criticism, threatening to withdraw from friendship, or spreading malicious rumours.

Frequency of bullying can vary in schools. 5-27% of students in grades 4 to 6 report to being bullied. Conversely, 6-17% of students admitted to bullying others.²

Specific Types of Bullying

Racist Bullying is motivated to offend someone based on a racial/ethnic characteristic such as skin colour, speech, ethnic grouping, religious affiliation, or cultural practices. Racial bullying can include behaviours such as derogatory comments about a person's cultural or religious background, calling someone racist names, or telling racist jokes.³

Homophobic bullying can involve physical violence or mental torment, and is distinguished from other forms of bullying by the language that is used. Words like "queer", "poof", and "lezzie" have been used abusively for many years. They have now been joined by words (such as "gay" and "lesbian") which were formerly descriptive but which now may be used as general insults. In some youth cultures, "gay" is now used as a derogatory adjective to describe objects and people that may have no connection whatsoever with homosexuality.³

Sexual bullying is based on a person's sexuality or gender, and is more commonly directed towards girls. Sexual bullying includes behaviours such as leaving someone out or treating them poorly because they are a boy or a girl, making someone feel uneasy because of their gender, making sexist comments or jokes, touching, pinching or grabbing someone in a sexual manner, making crude comments about someone's sexual behaviour, or spreading a rumour about someone's sexuality.³



Cyber bullying is the use of electronic means to harass, abuse, and/or ridicule another person. Bullying can be done through social media sites such as Facebook or MySpace, e-mail, and instant messaging services like Yahoo and MSN. Cyber bullying is deemed to be a trickier form of bullying to identify due to the widespread use of the internet and different forms of social media. Taunting can happen on multiple sites, and much of internet use is unsupervised. Additionally, the internet allows bullies to attack anonymously, making cyber bullying a very cowardly means of bullying.⁴

A 6-year study (2004-2010) on cyber bullying in the United States, conducted by the Cyberbullying Research Center, found that:

- Approximately 20 % of students since 2004 have been victims of bullying;
- 20 % of students have admitted to displaying bully behaviours either through phone or computer;
- Young girls are more likely to report, as well as be victims of, cyber bullying than boys.⁵

Impacts and Consequences

Everyone involved in bullying faces consequences. These negative effects can be so drastic that they can last a lifetime for the bully, victim, and the community.⁶

Impact on the Bully: The bully is engaging in practising a social behaviour that may affect them in the short and long-term. In school, bullies can be distracted from their studies. Bullies are likely to anger quickly, focus on preserving their self-image, easily misinterpret others' actions, and have difficulty empathizing with the victim. Feeling justified or entitled, bullies can view aggression as an appropriate means to solve problems. Bullies are at risk of continuing this behaviour into adulthood by running into the law more frequently, finding it difficult to keep a healthy dating or marital relationship, and applying their bullying behaviour in the workplace.

Impact on the Victim: While bullying can also cause physical and material damage, being bullied affects an individual's personal feelings and their sense of social belonging. Bullying can be isolating. It affects the victim's self esteem and causes stress which may be unsettling to their emotional and physical well being. Victims may suffer academically as they worry about the bullying and are dissuaded from focusing on their work.

School is no longer a safe or positive environment. The emotional impact from being bullied can be long standing by affecting future relationships and interactions.

Legal Consequences: A bully may be charged with offences against the Criminal Code of Canada (CCC), whereby youth sentencing options and criteria would apply. The youth may be dealt with under the extrajudicial measures program, or may receive an extrajudicial sanction and a record. If found guilty in court, a maximum two year sentence for a single offence could be ruled, or three years for several offences plus a court record. For repeated violent offences and aggravated sexual assault, the Crown may apply for a youth over 14 years of age to receive an adult sentence. Bullying behaviour may be the expression of other issues in the youth's life that needs to be addressed, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act provides some opportunities to intervene and address these issues. If left unchecked, these behaviours have continuing consequences.⁶

Bullying and Suicide: The Cyberbullying Research Centre found that suicide ideation increased when victims experienced bullying, and that victims of cyber bullying were twice as likely to attempt suicide than those who had not experienced cyber bullying.⁷

Bully Prevention Programs / Awareness Programs

www.stopabully.ca is Canadian website that allows students from across Canada to anonymously report incidences of bullying to school officials without fear of retaliation. This website is a good way to raise awareness of bullying in schools and to get schools involved in implementing anti-bullying programs and policies.

International STAND UP to Bullying Day is a global bi-annual event, in which pink pledge shirts are bought and signed by participants to take a stand against bullies, show support for victims of bullying, and raise consciousness of the effects of bullying. To date 2200 schools, organizations and workplaces have taken the pledge to stand up against bullying. The next International STAND UP to Bullying day is scheduled on **February 25, 2011**.⁸

The Alberta Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee plays a critical role in providing the Alberta Government with a young person's perspective and indentifying important issues related to youth bullying in Alberta. The Committee provides feedback and advice on proposed strategies, recommendations and findings around bullying prevention. The youth comment on current initiatives and campaigns and may suggest improvements or new ideas. Panel members represent a variety of backgrounds and experiences, including Aboriginal members and youth at risk. The group also represents both rural and urban perspectives. Alberta Children and Youth Services staff facilitates the panel.⁹ For more information call 1-888-456-2323.

NOTES

- 1 Seymour, T. (2010). *Bullying in Alberta: Suggestions for the Future*. Edmonton Social Planning Council.
- 2 Government of Alberta: Alberta Education (2005). *The Heart of the Matter*. <http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/616280/heartmatter.pdf>.
- 3 Anti-Bullying Network (2011). "Anti-Bullying Network: Workplace." <http://www.antibullying.net/workplace.htm>.
- 4 Cyberbullying (2011). "Cyberbullying Facts." <http://www.cyberbullying.ca/facts.html>.
- 5 Patchin, J.W. and S. Hinduja (2010). "Cyberbullying Research Center: Research." <http://www.cyberbullying.us/research.php>.
- 6 John Howard Society (2006). "Bullying: Information." <http://www.johnhoward.org/education/bullying/information.html>.
- 7 Hinduja S. and J.W. Patchin (2010). "Cyberbullying and Suicide." http://www.cyberbullying.us/cyberbullying_and_suicide_research_fact_sheet.pdf.
- 8 Bully Help Initiatives (2011). "International Stand Up To Bullying Day." http://www.standupday.com/08/participants/index.php?target=pages&page_id=intro.
- 9 Government of Alberta: Alberta Children and Youth Services (2011). "Alberta Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee." <http://www.b-free.ca>.



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