

What Can We Do About Bullying?

CE Digest presents distillations of full-text articles from the award-winning journal *Childhood Education*. "Bullying and Violence in Schools: What Teachers Should Know and Do" by Debra Piotrowski and James Hoot can be found in *Childhood Education*, Vol. 84, No. 6, pp. 357-363.

Bullying is a serious concern for educators and families. Recently announced as a finalist for an EdPress award, "Bullying and Violence in Schools: What Teachers Should Know and Do," by Debra Piotrowski and James Hoot, offers help in recognizing bullying behaviors, understanding its causes, and taking deliberate steps to confront bullying and violence in our classrooms.

The first step to mitigating classroom violence is to recognize specific characteristics of bullies. The act of bullying can be defined as a specific type of aggressive behavior that causes distress or harm, demonstrates an imbalance of power, and is repeated over time. Such aggression brings intense satisfaction to the bully, which perpetuates the bullying cycle. It is also important to recognize the fluid nature of the bully-victim relationship: bullies and victims exchange roles. For example, a child bullying others on the playground may himself be bullied by his victim, who excels more academically.

The three major forms of bullying are physical, emotional, and verbal.

- **Physical bullying** includes physical contact that causes discomfort to another individual. An example might be a student who removes the metal edge of a ruler and uses it to jab others.
- **Emotional bullying** is aggression without words, as in exclusion and ignoring behaviors.
- **Verbal bullying**, also referred to as psychological bullying or relational aggression, may be seen when a girl reports that another girl is not talking to her and she is encouraging everyone else to do the same.

The emotional and verbal bullying can be further defined, as follows:

- **Practiced Liar Bullies** can produce a convincing account at any moment to hide their violent acts.
- **Jekyll and Hyde Bullies** are ruthless and vindictive in private, but are innocent and helpful in front of witnesses, even displaying excessive charm in front of those in authority.
- **Shallow, Superficial Bullies** have exceptional verbal abilities, but no substance to support their often illogical arguments, which are designed to hurt others. They cannot be trusted or relied upon and tend to create conflict to undermine and destroy anyone perceived to be an adversary.
- **Highly Critical Bullies** often use covert tactics to humiliate, embarrass, degrade, or put down others. They use mimicry, taunting, teasing, and embarrassing questions.
- **Lobbying Bullies** use persuasive powers to convince others to accept their views and perceptions. They are arrogant and display a sense of entitlement, employing rumor and innuendo with great skill to destroy others' reputations.
- **Evasive Bullies** seldom give a straight answer and flit from topic to topic to avoid accountability for their transgressions against others. They are quick to discredit anyone who may have incriminating information about them.
- **Bully Saboteurs** believe they are not receiving their fair share of praise or rewards, and they display highly manipulative tendencies. They often demonstrate prejudice and contempt for others and gain gratification from denying other people their due.

Some bullies have persistent feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and insecurity, which results in self-loathing. These children often choose to become bullies to mitigate their feelings of frustration and failure. Others appear to have high self-esteem and use bullying behaviors to solidify their feelings of self-worth. Still other bullies report disliking themselves for behaving like a bully, but they don't have the skills to change their behavior. The bully's typically immature emotional stature often results in an inability to empathize with others. The bully may view anyone attempting to be empathic as vulnerable and, consequently, a potential target. Bullies often

are consumed by fear and jealousy. They often fear facing themselves, losing followers, and losing power

over others. Bullies may be jealous of others, because their personal belief system suggests that they are regularly being shortchanged in every aspect of their life.

Anti-bullying programs have been developed in schools around the world. Australia, Canada, England, Italy, Japan, and Norway launched national bully prevention programs long before the killings at Columbine High School in Colorado sparked serious concern over bullying in the United States. Most anti-bullying programs begin with preschool children. Some programs canvass communities to identify preschool-age children who exhibit bullying behaviors. Through guided interviews, parents are led to identify their children's potential bullying behaviors. Then, appropriate intervention activities to reduce

bullying behaviors are provided. The successful programs also require adults associated with the school (e.g., parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff) to receive specialized training in preventing violence and bullying in schools.

Changing Bullying Behavior

First, establish clear rules on behaviors and consequences. When bullies do not follow such rules, most programs suggest that infractions be addressed in private, since privacy deprives bullies of the audience they often seek. In approaching bullies in private, adults must confidently, unwaveringly, and consistently employ the appropriate well-established consequences for the bullying behaviors. The bully needs to be counseled separately, both during and after the incident. Additionally, the bully needs to be provided with better choices for behavior and instructed on how to improve his or her social interactions. Further, the bully needs to be given concrete words and actions as substitutes for the bullying behavior.

Bullying should not be considered a "normal" stage of child development. It can be a precursor for more serious violent behaviors that necessitate immediate and appropriate intervention by a caring adult. If we are to make societies safer places for all, schools need to provide leadership by instituting anti-bullying programs that include early intervention, adult training, and school-wide anti-bullying interventions for students.

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Practical Suggestions for Responding to Bullying

What To Do:

Ignore the bully's behavior whenever possible.

Use social skills, such as being assertive, negotiating, sharing, taking turns, inviting others to participate, assisting others, and asking for permission.

Leave the situation.

Rebuff in a firm manner.

Protect yourself emotionally and physically (without using retaliation).

Request that the bully stop, and then walk away; if this does not work, then tell the teacher.

Use humor.

Own it (the criticism) by pretending to agree with the bully (this takes the power away from the bully).

Spend time in groups.

Practice what to say in front of a mirror or with friends.

What Not To Do:

Cry or act hurt in front of the bully.

Lose your temper.

Escalate the situation.

Return the aggression.

Get others to gang up on the bully.

Tease in retaliation.

Call the bully names.

Bring weapons to school.