



Kim A. Drury RN, MSN

## ***Bullying: What to Look For and What You Can Do***

While Bullying is not a new occurrence, it has increased to a level that has been noticed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) looking at injury prevention and control. The CDC issued a brief for educators, caregivers and parents (CDC Issue Brief for Educators and Caregivers US: [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/electronic\\_agression\\_brief\\_for\\_parents.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/electronic_agression_brief_for_parents.pdf)). They also encouraged schools to work with federal and state departments of education, their communities and parents (see information on CDC Podcast later in this article). Bullying can result in very serious consequences and in some cases has resulted in suicide or violence toward others. Legislators have also been more open and instrumental in helping, for example Megan's Law, was created after the tragic death of a teenager related to cyberbullying.

According to the Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc. (CPI), an organization that provides training in crisis prevention and intervention to educators and other human service professionals including hospital staff, "It is estimated that 160,000 children in the United States skip school each day due to their fear of bullies" (2002, Parents Series Pamphlet). Other countries report concerns about bullying including England, Japan and Australia.

### **Bullying May be Defined as:**

- "...repeated negative actions of one or more students towards a victim...usually entails systematic abuse of power involving repetition, harm, and unequal power" (Keltner, et al., 2011, 463).
- Both victims and perpetrators have significantly higher rates of emotional problems.
- Both victims and perpetrators are at higher risk for committing violent acts in their communities.
- Can occur in many forms such as (<http://stompoutbullying.org>):
  - Physical (beating)
  - Verbal (threatening, teasing)
  - Emotional (social exclusion, intimidation by gestures)
  - Racist
  - Hazing
  - Sexual
  - Cyber (impersonation; also see CDC information)



**According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), “Electronic Aggression” or “Cyberbullying” includes:**

- “Internet Harassment”
- Text messages
- Believed in most cases to be an extension of bullying started at school or face-to-face contact



### **Who Are Bullies?**

According to the Crisis Prevention Institute, Inc. (CPI), 2002, Bullies:

- May be male or female.
- Engage in a pattern of behavior with the purpose of embarrassing, frightening or hurting others.
- Bullying may start earlier, but “peaks in the middle school years” and in high school may be sexual harassment.
- 60% of children in grades six through nine acting as Bullies “had at least one criminal conviction by the times they were 24 years old.”

### **Areas More Likely For Bullying To Occur:**

Usually areas where there is less adult supervision such as:

- Locker rooms.
- Cafeterias.
- Hallways.
- Restrooms.
- School grounds/play grounds.
- School buses/bus stops.

### **Signs Your Child/Teen May Be a Target:**



According to LCSW, Rudlin, 2016,

“... warning signs refers to behaviors that strongly suggest a teen is experiencing significant challenges in their growth and development.... are struggling with problems they can't handle on their own”

<http://parentingteens.about.com/od/parentingtroubledteens/a/warning-signs-teen-mental-health-terms.htm>).

*Warning signs for teens that can be applied to being bullied as well as other problems include:*

- Change in school performance
- Changes in mood
- Lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Change in behavior (ex. Socially isolating themselves, secretive about actions, wanting to stay home from school when only vague symptoms when asked if they are sick; not eating, fighting more with siblings)
- Extreme defiance
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Engaging in other self-harm or risky behaviors (ex. Cutting themselves or other ways to inflict pain, attempting suicide, running away)

### **Warning Signs to Look For “Tip Sheet”:**

[\(http://www.stompoutbullying.org/index.php/information-and-resources/parents-page/tip-sheet-signs-your-child-being-bullied/\)](http://www.stompoutbullying.org/index.php/information-and-resources/parents-page/tip-sheet-signs-your-child-being-bullied/)

- Your child comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings.
- Has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches.
- Has few, if any friends, with whom he or she spends time.
- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, riding the school bus, or taking part in organized activities with peers.
- Finds or makes up excuses as to why they can't go to school.
- Takes a long out of the way route when walking to or from school.
- Has lost interest in school work or suddenly begins to do poorly in school.
- Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home.
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches or other physical ailments.
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams.
- Experiences a loss of appetite.
- Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem.

Note: Children with disabilities may be at a higher risk of being bullied than other children.

### **What to do if You Suspect Your Child is a Victim of Bullying:**

The above signs are signs of bullying but are also signs of other abuse as well. If your child displays any of these signs talk with them and talk with the school staff to learn more about what's going on.

*When talking with your child, don't just ask if they're being bullied.*

### **A Better Way to Approach the Topic of Bullying is to Ask Questions like These:**

- “I’ve heard a lot about bullying in the news. Is that going on at your school?”
- “I’m worried about you. Are there any kids at school who may be picking on you or bullying you?”
- “Are there any kids at school who tease you in a mean way?”
- “Are there any kids at school who leave you out or exclude you on purpose?”

**Some Subtle Questions:**

- “Do you have any special friends at school this year? Who are they? Who do you hang out with?”
- “Who do you sit with at lunch and on the bus?”
- “Are there any kids at school who you really don’t like? Why don’t you like them? Do they ever pick on you or leave you out of things?”

If your kids or teens are being bullied do not over-react. Assure them that you love them that this is not your fault and you will help them. Let them know they can talk to you about anything.

Talk with your kid’s/teen’s school. Call or set up an appointment to talk with their teacher. Teachers are likely in the best position to understand the relationships between your child and other peers in their school.

Share your concerns about your child and ask the teacher such questions as:

- “How does my child get along with other students in his or her class?”
- “With whom does he or she spend free time?”
- “Have you noticed or have you ever suspected that my child is being bullied by other students?” Offer some examples of some ways that kids and teens are bullied so the teacher fully understands that you’re not focused on one form of bullying.
- Ask the teacher to talk with other faculty and staff who interact with your child at school to see whether they have observed your child being bullied by his or her peers.
- If you are not comfortable talking with your child’s teacher, or not satisfied with the conversation, make an appointment to meet with your child’s guidance counselor or principal to discuss these concerns.
- If you believe your child is being bullied take quick action as bullying can have serious effects on kids and teens.

*If, after talking with your child and his or her school and you don’t feel that your child is being bullied, stay alert to other possible problems that your child may be experiencing serious problems that could cause depression, social isolation, and loss of interest in school and share your concerns with a school counselor or psychologist.*

### **Potential Effect of Cyberbullying on Youth:**

- Victims more likely to use alcohol & drugs, skip school, receive detention, experience face-to-face victimization, change schools, become depressed and at the extreme commit suicide or murder.
- More research is needed to confirm the effects.

### **Worthen, 2007, Policy Implications Internet Bullying:**

- The federal role is limited to a proportionally small amount of funding for states and schools, to raising public awareness, and to providing research and data.
- States can set priorities, make requirements, and direct funding.
- More can be done at state and local levels.
- Educators should be aware of and concerned about the effect that violence, bullying, and harassment can have on children's well-being, including behavior and academic achievement.
- Media literacy programs may mitigate the negative effects of electronic media on youth by giving youth the knowledge and skills to make smart decisions about Internet use and to be critical of the violence they see in the media.
- Refer to the CDC for guidelines in developing a comprehensive approach to school health and safety, unintentional injuries, violence, and suicide.

### **CDC Electronic Harassment Recommendations:**

- Prevention: One method not enough
- Blocking calls/messages needs to be combined with a coordinated school health program, collaborate with parents similar to crisis response and preparedness already in place
- Get owners of technology businesses and political leaders involved in prevention
- Many parents do not impose rules regarding internet use; take same approach as when leave home (Who will they be with? Where are they going?)
- Parents need to explore the internet more themselves
- Talk to their children just as we talk to them about drugs and alcohol topic
- Talk to their children's school
- Talk to other parents whose children have been affected
- Parents remain a large influence in their children's lives even though there is a large peer/school influence

### **Educators Play a Crucial Role:**

- CDC Podcast (2012): *Bullying prevention for educators*: <http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=8622472>
- This **podcast** discusses the crucial role educators' play in **bullying** prevention. Created: 1/29/2012 by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control a division of the CDC.
- See other online website resources in "References" and "Additional Websites/Web Resources".

### **HRSA Department of Education: Stop Bullying:**

Focus on school environment: When the issue is ignored, it sends an unspoken "message" that it is "okay".

- Address the issue and send a message that is "Uncool" to bully
  - Identify "hot spots" or areas where bullying occurs (kids know better than the adults) by using anonymous questionnaires; assign extra adults to those areas
  - Get support from everyone including the cafeteria and maintenance workers
  - Develop a team to coordinate efforts and track incidences
  - Intervene consistently and appropriately when spot bullying occurring; hold sensitive follow-up meetings (i.e. debriefing)
  - Focus a specified amount of class time on bullying prevention
  - Establish specific policies/rules related to bullying and enforce them consistently (i.e. zero tolerance)
- Izzy Kalman, MS NCSP, a school psychologist and psychotherapist (2011, 2016):
    - Bullies 2 Buddies- programs and website.

### **Reasons Why Adolescents May Engage in Bullying Behavior:**

- Anger or revenge
- Frustration
- Feeling of power
- Out of boredom
- For entertainment
- Perceive bullying in general is condoned or morally accepted
- Think bystanders' won't interfere
- Negative peer relationships/support
- Less likely to engage in cyberbullying if perceive friends their age are trustworthy, caring, and helpful

### **Preventive Interventions That Target School Bullying by:**

- Changing norms about bullying
- Changing school context may also impact Internet bullying, given the shared predictors

## **References:**

- Bell, C. C. (June, 2007). Bullying and school violence. *Clinical Psychiatry News*, 35(6), 36.
- Bullies2Buddies: A Psychological Solution to Bullying: <http://www.bullies2buddies.com/>  
(Information and resources for kids, teens, parents, educators, principals, mental health professionals; even includes work place bullying. Can also preview a YouTube video on violence (cliques) Role Play at this site: Izzy Kalman MS NCSP, a school psychologist and psychotherapist).
- CDC Child Maltreatment: Additional Resources. Retrieved November 4, 2011 from <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/childmaltreatment/resources.html>.
- CDC Issue Brief for Educators and Caregivers US. Retrieved April 9, 2009 from: [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/electronic\\_agression\\_brief\\_for\\_parents.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/electronic_agression_brief_for_parents.pdf).
- CDC Podcast (2012): *Bullying prevention for educators*: [www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=8622472](http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=8622472).
- This **podcast** discusses the crucial role educators' play in **bullying** prevention. Created: 1/29/2012 by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control a division of the CDC.
- CyberbullyNOT: Student Guide to Cyberbullying: <http://new.csriu.org/cyberbully/docs/cbstudentguide.pdf>.
- Kalman, I. (2016). Bullies2Buddies: A Psychological Solution to Bullying: <http://www.bullies2buddies.com/>. Originally retrieved November 4, 2011; updated website 2016 contains free resources including manuals and videos.
- NetFamily News.org: Kid-Tech News For Parents: <http://www.netfamilynews.org/2009/07/play-part-2-violence-in-videogames.html>.
- Rudlin, K. (2016). Warning signs defined: Mental health terms used in treating troubled teens. Retrieved February 21, 2016 from: <http://parentingteens.about.com/od/parentingtroubledteens/a/warning-signs-teen-mental-health-terms.htm>.
- Stomp Out Bullying (2016). [www.STOMPOutBullying.org](http://www.STOMPOutBullying.org) : Tip Sheets for Parents and children.
- Townsend, M. C. (2011). *Essentials of psychiatric mental health nursing*, (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), 646-668. Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis Co.
- Varcarolis, E.M.; Carson, V.B. & Halter, M. J. (2010). *Foundations of psychiatric mental health nursing: A clinical approach* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.), 584-623. St. Louis, MO: Saunders/Elsevier.

## **Additional Websites/Web Resources:**

- AT-RISK.ORG: <http://www.at-risk.org/teen-violence.html>. and AT-RISK.ORG Resource for Parents and the General Public and [HelpForTroubledTeens.net](http://www.HelpForTroubledTeens.net).
- Coping Skills for Kids: Brain Works Project: [www.copingskills4kids.net/](http://www.copingskills4kids.net/).
- Crisis prevention institute, inc. (2002). Bullying and harassment at school: What Can Parents Do? Also email: [Parents@crisisprevention.com](mailto:Parents@crisisprevention.com).
- Megan's Law in Pennsylvania (2016). Megan's Law Website. Commonwealth of PA, Pennsylvania State Police: <http://www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us> ; 1-866-771-3170.
- NetFamily News.org: Kid-Tech News For Parents: <http://www.netfamilynews.org/?s=Bullying>.
- Parent Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats: <http://www.csriu.org/>; click on "Cyberbullying".  
*The same website under "Cyberbullying" contains: Threats Online: Student Guide to Cyberthreats: The Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use and Brief Parent Guide: CyberbullyNOT.*