

## Bullying: Looking at Prevention and Interventions

By

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## The Issue

Bullying is a serious problem nationwide. However, research shows that if it is addressed early using proven strategies, bullying can be prevented and/or stopped. Many adolescents have experienced bullying, whether they were bullied themselves, bullied someone else, or saw someone being bullied.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, approximately 28% of youth ages 12–18 reported having been bullied at school; 8% admitted to having bullied others; and 6% reported having been cyber-bullied (making fun of another person through texting, email, and/or social media).<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, bullying often occurs in school; however, it can also occur in neighborhoods, at home, and on the computer. This research brief synthesizes and shares the latest research on who is affected by bullying and what those effects are. It also provides information on best practices and additional resources practitioners can use in their work with youth.

## What is Bullying?

Although there are many definitions of bullying, they all involve severe, pervasive, or persistent acts (physical, electronic, or verbal) that are intended to do physical, social, behavioral, or psychological harm to those involved.<sup>3</sup>

### DC MAYOR'S YOUTH BULLYING PREVENTION TASK FORCE

Mayor Gray signed into law the Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012, legislation that challenges DC as a whole to address and work to prevent and eradicate bullying. The Act requires all agencies and/or organizations who provide services to youth on behalf of, or with funding from DC to adopt a bullying prevention policy. This policy was due to the Mayor by September 14, 2013 via email to: [bullyingprevention@dc.gov](mailto:bullyingprevention@dc.gov).

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Health and Human Resources. (2011). Teens. Washington, DC: Stopbullying.gov.

<sup>2</sup> Robers, S., Zhang, J., Truman, J., & Snyder, T. (2012). Indicators of School Crime and Safety. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>3</sup> Srabstein, J. (2011). The prevention of bullying: A whole school and community model.

## WHO IS EFFECTED BY BULLYING?

- > African American and Asian adolescents are, respectively, 25 percent and 30 percent less likely than white adolescents to engage in bullying.<sup>4</sup>
- > LGBT youth are three times more likely than non-LGBT youth to feel unsafe at school and also report more verbal and physical harassment.<sup>5</sup>
- > Youth with disabilities (both visible and non-visible) experience a higher prevalence of bullying than their non-disabled peers.<sup>6</sup>
- > Youth who have been bullied are more likely to bully others.<sup>7</sup>
- > Adolescents who bully others are more likely to have been physically hurt by a family member and/or to have witnessed violence.<sup>8</sup>

## THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT<sup>9</sup>

Being a victim or perpetrator of bullying can have lasting negative effects on a youth's academic, social, and emotional life. Specifically, youth who are bullied are often more likely to:

- > Experience negative physical and mental health issues.
- > Demonstrate decreased academic achievement.
- > Be late to school, chronically absent, or drop out.
- > Participate in violent and other risky behaviors into adulthood.
- > Abuse alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults.
- > Engage in early sexual activity.
- > Be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses, or children as adults.

4 Barboza, G., Schiamberg, L., Oehmke, J., Korzeniewski, S., Post, L., & Heraux, C. (2009). Individual Characteristics and the Multiple Contexts of Adolescent Bullying: An Ecological Perspective. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38, 101–121.

5 Markow, D., & Fein, J. (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America a Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

6 Carter, B. & Spencer, V. (2006). The Fear Factor: Bullying and Students with Disabilities. *International Journal of Special Education*, 21(1), 11–23.

7 Barboza, G., Schiamberg, L., Oehmke, J., Korzeniewski, S., Post, L., & Heraux, C. (2009). Individual Characteristics and the Multiple Contexts of Adolescent Bullying: An Ecological Perspective. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38, 101–121.

8 US Department of Health and Human Resources. (2011). *Teens*. Washington, DC: Stopbullying.gov.

9 US Department of Health and Human Resources. (2011). *Teens*. Washington, DC: Stopbullying.gov.

“I feel like I am being pushed over. I see all these kids doing drugs, not going to school and stuff, having issues, and I have to deal with it. I have to deal with bullying around, people calling me names.

It's hurtful.”

– 17 year old, female

## Best Practices

Programs that utilize a strength-based approach with multiple components are most effective in preventing bullying. These components involve providing nurturing relationships; creating opportunities for youth to develop and re-hearse social/cognitive skills; fostering the participation of committed staff who are knowledgeable about the issue; and ensuring the availability of adequate and consistent resources.

## Additional Resources

- > CDC's Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere Initiative  
<http://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/stryve/>
- > DC's Youth Bullying Prevention Task Force Model Bullying Prevention Policy  
<http://ohr.dc.gov/bullyingprevention/taskforce>
- > Department of Health and Human Services StopBullying.gov  
<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>
- > The Office of Adolescent Health  
<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah>

## What you can do:

### PRACTICE

- > Create positive atmosphere where youth feel comfortable and safe.
- > Have a referral procedure put in place to direct youth to the appropriate services they may need.
- > In areas where bullying is more likely to occur, such as playgrounds, buses, and locker rooms, reduce youth traffic by altering schedules or activities.
- > Provide services designed to correct the thinking patterns, behaviors, and skill deficiencies that might lead to bullying.
- > Implement interventions including anger management, moral reasoning and social perspective-taking and enable youth to practice the approaches.
- > Provide trained peer counselors or other caring adults for youth needing to talk about their feelings or problems.

### POLICY

- > Emphasize a collaborative approach to prevention, targeting bullying at the individual, classroom, school, and community levels.
- > Keep schools and communities abreast of the anti-bullying initiatives that are in place and the new resources being developed.
- > Provide educational services to community and school representatives and parents/guardians.
- > Provide training and professional development activities to increase the knowledge, skills and resources needed to prevent bullying, support youth at risk of bullying or being bullied and respond productively to incidents of bullying by turning them into teachable moments.
- > Develop curriculum to teach youth about communication, problem-solving, and emotional management.

### RESEARCH

- > Define bullying broadly to include non-physical forms of bullying.
- > Collect and analyze data to measure the prevalence of bullying and the success of prevention and intervention efforts.
- > Collaborate with youth, programs and agencies to identify the barriers to successful implementation of bullying prevention.
- > Collect administrative information about an incident of bullying to guide prevention efforts and inform prevention planning.
- > Provide organizations and agencies with the knowledge they need to either develop or refine their prevention and intervention efforts.