

# Texas Children's Center for Telehealth Nursing and Allied Health Professionals Distance Education and CNE/CEU Offering

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# **Bullying: When The “Kick Me” Sign Isn’t Funny**

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# Learning Objectives

- To define bullying as a specific form of aggression.
- To recognize a range of bullying behaviors across a continuum from indirect to direct bullying.
- To identify traits frequently associated with perpetrators and victims of bullying.
- To apply knowledge of bullying to the role of clinic or school nurse.

# Broad Outline

- Bullying as a serious problem.
- Bullies as a serious problem.
- Bullied persons as a serious problem.
- Bullying solutions as a serious problem.

# Bullying as a Serious Problem

“Bullying is currently a serious and prevalent problem in our schools. It’s negative effects are not limited to individual children who bully or those who are victimized by peers. Bullying is a systemic social problem that impacts the entire school, and has far reaching implications for children’s social and emotional adjustment.”

*(Interventions for Academic and Behavior Problems, Snell et al., 351)*

# An International and National Problem

- 1993 National Education Goals Panel included school safety in top 8 list of needs and concerns.
- Follow-up report indicated very little progress made in this area (as of 1999).
- Most indicators suggested no improvement and some suggested decline

# An International and National Problem

- Despite increased public concern and media attention, research on bullying in the U.S. is behind other countries.
- Majority of research conducted in the northern European countries, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia.

# Why U.S. Lag? Possibilities?

- Bullying is a normal part of growing up.
- Children who bully will grow out of it.
- Children are always best left to resolve their own conflicts.
- Children's conflicts reflect play fighting and teasing will do no real harm.
- Sometimes victims provoke attacks.
- Adults should not encourage tattling.
- No way to stop it.

# Prevalence Information

- 7% of Norwegian students report regularly bullying others.
- 9% of Norwegian students report they were frequently bullied.
- 21-27% of British teens report being regularly targeted.
- 20% of Canadian teens report being regularly bullied.
- 10-18% of U.S. students are estimated to be regularly victimized.

# Prevalence Estimates

“It is unlikely that any school is completely free from all bullying behavior. The prevalence of bullying is staggering. Estimates of the prevalence of bullying have ranged from a reported 10% of children who were said to have been the victims of severe acts of bullying to 75% of children who reported being bullied at least once during the academic year. Researchers have concluded from these statistics that at least 25% of all children will be affected by bullying at some point during their school years, and many of these children miss significant numbers of school days each year owing to fear of being bullied.”

(National Association of School Psychology fact sheet)

## Other “Bad News” About Bullying

- Six out of ten teens witness bullying at least once a day.
- 66% of youth are teased at least once a month, and nearly one-third are bullied at least once a month.
- An estimated 160,000 students miss school every day due to fear of attack or intimidation by other students.

## Other “Bad News” About Bullying

- 4 out of 5 middle school students admit they act like bullies at least once a month.
- 7% of eighth-graders stay at home at least once a month because of bullies.
- 14% of 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders and 22% of 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders reported “bullying diminished their ability to learn in school.”
- 10% of students who drop out of school do so because of bullying.

# Gender in Bullying

- Boys and girls bully; research indicating more boys than girls bully may do so because of definition of bullying.
- Bullying by girls is often more subtle and harder to detect than bullying by boys.
- Boys tend to use physical aggression more than girls, but girls get physical at times as well.

# Gender in Bullying

- Girls tend to bully via teasing about clothes and boyfriends or via social exclusion, spreading rumors.
- Boys tend to bully both boys and girls, while girls are more likely to victimize other girls.
- Girls are more likely to bully in a group.

# Bullying as a Wide-Ranging Social Problem

- Chronic victims of bullying report a variety of physical and mental health problems.
- Bullying negatively impacts social climate at school- creates “hostile environment” and “climate of fear and anxiety.”

# Bullying as a Wide-Ranging Social Problem

- Affects bystanders as well, not just direct victims.
- Future of bullies a grim one as well, with reduced academic success/underachievement and increased likelihood of abusive and criminal activity.

# Bullying as a Wide-Ranging Social Problem

- Roughly two-thirds of school shooters had “felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others...a number of teenagers had suffered sustained, severe bullying and harassment.”

# Bullying as a Wide-Ranging Social Problem

- Bullying played a major role in two thirds of the 37 school shooting incidents reviewed.
- 75% of school shootings had some link to bullying or social cruelty.

# Features and Characteristics of Bullying

- Difficult to completely distinguish “bullying” from other forms of conflict:
  - Verbal and physical aggression frequently occurs among children /students of similar age, size, or status.

# Features and Characteristics of Bullying

- Distinguishing features and key elements of bullying aggressions:
  - Involves a power imbalance in which the child doing the bullying has more power owing to such factors as age, size, support of the peer group, or higher status.

# APA Monitor on Psychology:

Summary definition of bullying:

“Negative behavior that people feel unable to defend against or control.”

# Seven Components

- Verbal and nonverbal (including physical contact)
- Repetitive or patterned
- Unwelcome and unsolicited
- Violation of a standard of appropriate conduct

# Seven Components

- Harmful or cause psychological or physical injury
- Intended to harm
- Exploiting actor's position of power over target

*APA Monitor on Psychology, July/August, 2006, p. 69*

# Characteristics of Bullying

- Bullying includes verbal aggression, physical aggression, and relationship-damaging behaviors.
- Bullying may have sexual content, especially in the later elementary and middle school years.
- Bullying is often categorized as direct or indirect to differentiate behaviors that are expressed overtly from those that are expressed covertly.

# Direct Bullying

- Open attacks on targeted child, including, physical and verbal aggression.
- Here, the child being bullied--and often others in the environment--knew the identity of the person(s) doing the bullying.

# Direct Bullying

- Easiest to recognize because the act is observable, effects of bullying are immediate, and delivered directly to child.
- Examples include taunts, name calling, racial slurs, insults, threats and physical pushing or assaultive behavior.

# Indirect Bullying

- Involves covert, harmful behaviors directed to victim.
- More difficult to recognize and respond to because person being bullied may not be present when bullying occurs.

# Indirect Bullying

- May not know identity of bully.
- May be delay between occurrence of bullying and impact on targeted child.
- Examples--spreading rumors, writing graffiti about another child, encouraging others not to play with specific child.

# Primary Purpose of Both Direct and Indirect Bullying

- Social exclusion or embarrassment.
- Damaging child's reputation or status within peer group.

# Primary Purpose of Both Direct and Indirect Bullying

- Inflicting emotional, social or physical harm senselessly on another.

Note: Indirect bullying can lead to physical harm as when spreading a false rumor so one child will fight another child; attaching a “Kick me” sign to another child’s back.

# Bullies as a Serious Problem

- Criminal activity is a well documented long-term consequence of chronic bullying.
- 60% of boys with serious bullying problems (between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade) had at least one criminal conviction by age 24.
- 40% had three or more arrests.

# Bullies as a Serious Problem

- Only 10% who did not engage in bullying had criminal records as adults.
- Findings parallel studies of aggressive behavior that have identified childhood aggression as a significant factor in the development of criminal and other forms of antisocial behavior in adolescence and adulthood.

# Consequences on Interpersonal Functioning

- Research supports a relationship between externalizing behaviors (e.g. aggression, oppositionality and disruptiveness) and peer rejection in the elem. years.

# Consequences on Interpersonal Functioning

- Aggressive children may actually have leadership potential, but use of coercive control strategies prevent development of this potential in more prosocial ways.
- Over time, this narrows the peer group to include mostly other aggressive children (even gangs).

# Bullied Persons as a Serious Problem

- Peer victimization is associated with immediate and long-term negative effects on academic, social and emotional functioning.
- As early as kindergarten, children who are bullied develop negative attitudes about school.

# Bullied Persons as a Serious Problem

- These children tend to view their school environment as less supportive than other children.
- Academic problems include avoidance and dislike of school and greater risk of truancy and dropout later.

# Social Impact on Victims

- Being a frequent target of bullying is positively associated with peer rejection.
- Children tend to judge victimized children negatively; even blaming them for the bullying they endure.

# Social Impact on Victims

- Empathy for victimized children appears to diminish with increased age.
- Victimization leads to further peer rejection and an emotionally painful cycle in which the children who are most in need of support from peers are least likely to receive it.

# Social Development of Aggression

- Bullies may have learned angry and aggressive behaviors at home or via other bullies.
- Being the recipient of aggression can teach aggression.

# Social Development of Aggression

- Observational studies have concluded that children who are targeted for aggression often respond aggressively.
- Over time, this can create more longstanding use of aggressive responding (i.e. not just as response to aggression).

# The Emotional Toll

- Children who are bullied tend to have lower self-esteem than non-targeted children.
- Children who are bullied tend to feel more depressed, lonely, anxious, and insecure than non-bullied children.
- Feelings of loneliness often persist even after bullying stops.

# The Emotional Toll

- Children often blame themselves for bullying and may see themselves as social failures.
- These harmful emotional consequences (regarding self-esteem and depression) often extend into adulthood.

# The Emotional Toll

- Norway's national anti-bullying campaign was launched after the suicides of three young boys that were linked to bullying.
- Japan found fatal link between bullying and youth suicide.
- Study in Australia also found link between suicidal thoughts and bullying.

# Clinic Presentations Suggesting Bullying

- Observable injury that is verbally described as directly resulting from aggressive bullying (e.g. red mark from being hit or slapped, bloody nose, etc.)
- Observable injury that resulted indirectly from aggressive bullying (e.g. scrape to knee from falling after being chased).

# Clinic Presentations Suggesting Bullying

- Observable injury—of any of the above-sort—but not verbally acknowledged as resulting from bullying (i.e. too afraid or embarrassed to admit being bullied; think of evidence of child abuse as parallel).
- Non-observable but described physical injury; either verbally acknowledged as resulting from bullying or not (e.g. punch to stomach, being pushed into locker, etc.)

# Clinic Presentations Suggesting Bullying

- Non-observable physical complaint, such as headache, stomachache, etc., often accompanied by request or desire to avoid “hot spot” (e.g. place where bullying may occur).
- Emotional/psychological complaints, such as anxiety, sadness, tearfulness, fear, etc.

# Bullying Solutions as a Big Problem

- Systematic, systemic, and programmatic approach required (in other, simpler verbiage: “Big problem requires big solution”).

# Bullying Solutions as a Big Problem

- Norway's three-stage campaign (Dan Olweus):
  - ❖ Heightened awareness and motivation
  - ❖ Development of strategies to deal with bullying and victimization.
  - ❖ Improving the social climate in schools to reduce or prevent development of culture of bullying.

# Program Flow

- Educating all concerned about seriousness of problem, across community not just in school district/schools.

Within schools, parents, staff, and students learn about their respective roles.

- ❖ Parents learned to talk to children about bullying.
- ❖ Teachers train to identify and handle bullying.
- ❖ Students learn to empathize with victims of bullying as well as ways of dealing with and responding to bullying

# Second Phase

- Focus on in-school intervention involving students, teachers, and administration.
  - ❖ Class discussions on functional ways to prevent bullying and to connect with lonely or socially isolated children.
  - ❖ Teachers institute cooperative learning groups.
  - ❖ All staff adopt zero tolerance stance and respond quickly to early signs of bullying (e.g. name-calling).
  - ❖ Administration sees to close physical space monitoring.

# Third Phase

- Third tier, if needed, is used if prevention fails.
- Bullies and their families communicated with, even offered counseling if needed.
- Offending student may be placed in another class.
- Victims counseling and “tutored” (i.e. skill building) to help develop their social, emotional, and academic abilities.

# Summary of Nurse Role

- Identify injuries/complaints suggestive of emotional and physical bullying.
- Identify victims and aggressors.
- Identify causes, need and solutions relevant to both parties.

# Summary of Nurse Role

- Identify prevention and education opportunities, ideas and programs for small-scale (i.e. case by case) and school-wide use.
- Identify self as key player in peace-seeking campaign regarding this serious social problem.

**Thank You!**

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**Influenza:  
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**September 12, 2006 (Tuesday)**

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