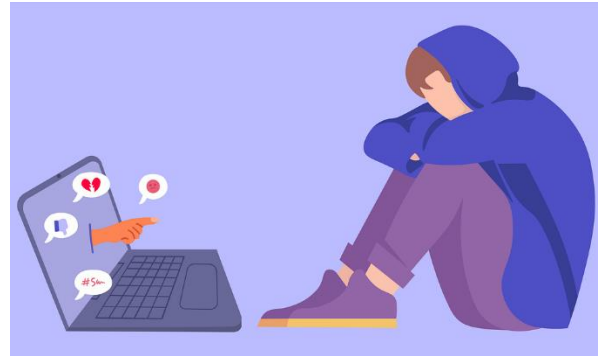


## What's Behind Bullying Behavior: Early Intervention

Bullying continues to be a widespread problem for schools in the United States. One in five students report being bullied, according to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics. Studies indicate that bullying peaks around ages 11 to 13 and decreases as children grow older. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like on the playground or the bus. It can also happen traveling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or on the internet (cyberbullying). When it comes to cyberbullying, there is often an offline component of harm that occurs alongside the online harm (Cyberbullying Research Center). As such, most youth who are targeted on social media or within online environments are also the ones being bullied at school.



While many young people can be unkind to each other, especially during adolescence, there is a clear line between being mean or experiencing conflict with peers and bullying. Definitions vary from source to source, but most agree that bullying behavior includes three core elements:

- Intentional—unwanted, aggressive behavior intended to cause harm
- Repeated—the unwanted behavior is repeated multiple times or has the likelihood to be repeated many times
- Power imbalance—an observed or perceived imbalance of power between the student(s) doing the bullying and the student(s) being bullied

Research shows that kids and teens bully for many different reasons. It is important to note that bullying may serve a function or be the root of a more underlying issue. For example, some students who bully may have an undiagnosed mental and/or emotional health issue that presents as antisocial behaviors. Understanding the function behind bullying behaviors can help guide the way the behavior is addressed and aid in intervention strategies to help prevent future problems. Below are a few contributing factors that can play a role in bullying behavior:

### Peer Factors-

- The desire to attain or maintain social power or to elevate their status in their peer group
- Easily influenced by peer pressure (engage in bullying behavior to try to fit in)
- Envy or jealousy of other peers

### Family Factors-

- Home life where bullying, aggression, or violence occurs
- Parents/caregivers who are too indulgent/lenient
- Home life where there is low parental involvement and little emotional support

### Emotional Factors:

- Having been bullied in the past or currently
- Feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem (engage in bullying behaviors to make themselves feel more powerful)
- Lack of understanding of other's emotions
- Inability to manage emotions (don't know how to control their emotions, so they take out their feelings on other people)

- Lack of skills to handle social situations in healthy, positive ways.

According to experts at the Childmind Institute, intervention with a student who is engaging in bullying behavior should not only involve discipline but also strategies to equip the youth with the skills they need to interact with others in a positive way. Young people who bully need to learn how to get their needs met without hurting others, the impact their actions are having on another person, and that bullying will lead to consequences.

Parents, educators, and other caring adults all play a role in preventing and stopping bullying. Here are some important things to keep in mind.

- Implement programs that emphasize prevention and early identification of students with behavioral concerns and provide social and emotional skills instruction.
- Do not label a student as a “bully”. Bullying is a behavior, not an identity, and labeling a student can limit their ability to change the behavior.
- Use consequences that teach. Strategies that focus on holding students accountable for their behavior but also empower them to change that behavior are more effective than punishments and peer mediation in bullying situations.
- Create opportunities to do good- the more a child can behave in caring and helpful ways toward others, the less likely they will be to want to treat others with disregard.
- Nurture empathy- kids who bully tend to see incidents only from their own point of view and be concerned with their own feelings. It may take time and effort to uncover or restore empathy through activities that enhance social and emotional skill-building.
- Build confidence in youth- encourage kids to spend time with friends who have a positive influence. Participation in clubs, sports, or other organized activities can help build strength and friendships.
- Consider that some students may need additional support such as mental health services to help address issues related to bullying behavior.

To learn more about bullying prevention and intervention, visit <https://www.stopbullying.gov/>.

References: American Psychological Association; Cyberbullying Research Center; National Association of School Psychologists; National Bullying Prevention Center; National Center for Educational Statistics; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Stopbullying.gov