

The Ring of Valor: Bullying fundamentals

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Fact Sheet #1

Definition

Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberately hostile (but not criminal) activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression, and create terror. (adapted from Coloroso, *The bully, the bullied, and the bystander*, Harper, 2003).

Not all conflict between children is bullying. All children face peer challenges that test their resolve as they grow up. The purpose of these peer challenges is to influence the child's behavior to be *more* acceptable (for example, to not cry when losing). True bullying is predatory and destructive in nature. Its purpose is to humiliate and degrade another especially in front of peers.

The goal of preschool aggression is personal gain not the destruction of the other person's self-respect. Preschool children are incapable of the required predatory intent that is the basis of bullying. They do not dominate and hurt to win the approval of onlookers. Grade-schoolers, however, are capable of bullying because they can see the world from the perspective of both the audience and the target.

True bullying has horrible consequences. It diminishes self-respect, increases isolation, truancy, and violence by targets. True bullying is not "kids being kids." Although we might (and probably should) give a target the opportunity to stand up for him or herself, we must remain aware and vigilant when normal peer challenges deteriorate into predatory bullying.



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If you have any questions or comments, you can contact the author at casmith@ksu.edu.

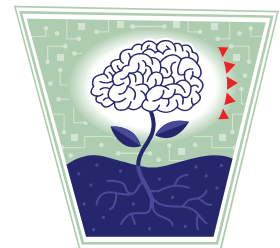
Solutions

Think of bullying as a three-legged stool propped up by the *bully*, the *victim*, and the *audience*. If any of the three legs is removed, the stool collapses. Our task as parents and teachers is threefold: to eliminate the bullying, to help targets from becoming victims, and to hold those who witness the bullying accountable for intervening when the target is unable to defend against the personal assault.

Bullies are often victims of bullies at home or in their neighborhoods. They cause misery because of their own emotional stew of rage and pain. We should avoid labeling any child as a "bully" because such labels make us blind to painful causes underlying the bullying and cynical about the opportunities for change. Once we become something, for example, how can we do anything different?

Targets are often selected by the bully because they stand out in some way. They might be new kids at school, have families unlike the families of other children, or have noticeable physical features that make them different. Although children may be unable to avoid becoming a target, they can take action to avoid becoming victims.

The spectators to bullying have a choice too. Will their passivity be interpreted as approval by the bully? Or worse, will they encourage the bullying? Spectators should become witnesses who will stand by the victim when necessary.



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