

Raising Courageous Kids Bullying facts

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Courage is fire, and bullying is smoke.

Benjamin Disraeli

Introduction



From the moment we are born, we are challenged by fear. When we started school, we had to learn to cope outside of the shelter of our parents, a scary period for many of us (and sometimes our parents). All children inevitably face the test of peer aggression by those with little sense of personal power and less self-respect who strive for recognition and status at the expense of their weaker peers. At that moment, the simple and common admonition of adults to “find a grownup” is almost always ineffective. The predator may have picked a time and place when adults are absent or are too distracted to notice. Running away may not be an option. Children need our help to navigate these stresses and to respond intelligently to the needs of those who would be victimized. This publication provides and overview for those who are viewing *What's a Parent to Do? Helping families deal with bullying and with kids who are out of control* national parenting satellite teleconference broadcast from Iowa State University. The second session by Charles A. Smith, titled *Finding a Mighty Heart: Acquiring the Courage to Stand Up for Oneself and Others*, will be broadcast on December 7, 2004.

Definition

Bullying is a conscious, willful, and deliberate hostile activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression, and create terror (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 13).

1. **Imbalance of power.** The bully can be older, bigger, stronger, more verbally adept, higher up on the social ladder, of a different race, or of the opposite sex.
2. **Intent to harm.** The bully means to inflict emotional and/or physical pain, expects the action to hurt, and takes pleasure in witnessing the hurt.
3. **Threat of further aggression:** Both the bully and the bullied know that the bullying can and probably will occur again.
4. **Terror:** Bullying is systematic violence used to intimidate and maintain dominance. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 13-14)

Bullying does not include normal childhood behaviors such as sibling rivalry or one-on-one fighting of siblings or peers with competing claims. Nor does it include acts of impulsive aggression—in other words, aggression that is spontaneous, indiscriminate striking out, with no intended target. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 39)

School: General issues

The common thread in all of these accounts (of violent children in school) is that these children were bullied relentlessly and, in most cases, the bullying went on without substantial objections, indignation, adequate intervention, or outrage. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, xxi)

According to a National Association of School Psychologists report, 160,000 children in the United States miss school every day for fear of being bullied. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 50)

Elementary-Middle school

In a study conducted in 2001 by the Kaiser Foundation, a U.S. health care philanthropy organization, in conjunction with the Nickelodeon TV network and *Children Now*, a youth advocacy group, almost three-quarters of preteens interviewed said bullying is a regular occurrence at school and that it becomes even more pervasive as kids start high school; 86 percent of children between the ages of twelve and fifteen said that they get teased or bullied at school—making bullying more prevalent than smoking, alcohol, drugs, or sex among the same age group. More than half of children between the ages of eight and eleven said that bullying is a “big problem” at school. “It’s a big concern on kids’ minds. It’s something they’re dealing with every day,” reported Lauren Asher of the Kaiser Foundation. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 12)

Dr. Debra J. Pepler and her colleagues at the La Marsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University conducted a descriptive study on bullying at the request of the Toronto Board of Education. Drawing on answers given by the 211 students in fourteen classes from grades four through eight, their teachers, and their parents, two other researchers, S. Zeigler and M. Rosenstein-Manner (1991), compiled the following statistics:

- 35 percent of the kids were directly involved in bullying incidents.
- Bullying peaked in the eleven-to twelve-year old age group.
- 38 percent of students identified as special education students were bullied, compared with 18 percent of other students.
- 24 percent reported that race-related bullying occurred now and then or often.
- 23 percent of the students bullied and 71 percent of the teachers reported that teachers intervened often or almost always. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 12)

According to the 1993 “Hostile Hallways” study conducted by the American Association of University Women Education Foundation, questionnaire responses of 1,632 students from grades eight to eleven offered some startling information:

- 82 percent of girls and 76 percent of boys reported having experienced sexual harassment.
- 65 percent of girls reported being touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way.

- 13 percent of girls and 9 percent of boys reported being forced to do something sexual other than kissing.
- 25 percent of girls stayed home from school or cut classes to avoid sexual harassment.
- 86 percent of girls targeted reported being sexually harassed by their peers.
- 25 percent of girls targeted reported being sexually harassed by school staff.
- One-third of the kids surveyed reported experiencing sexual bullying in sixth grade or earlier. Boys and girls reported experiencing sexual harassment in the hallway (73 percent), in the classroom (65 percent), on the school grounds (48 percent), and in the cafeteria (34 percent). (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 34-35)

Oweus (1987) and Eron (1987) have shown that bullies identified by age eight are six times more likely than non-bullies to end up with serious criminal records by the age of thirty. Further, aggressive behavior is learned early and becomes resistant to change if it persists beyond eight years of age (Walker 1993). (cited in Hoover and Oliver, 1996, 3)

High School

An April 2000 study by Alfred University concerning the “risk of initiations that include being humiliated or forced to engage in illegal or dangerous activities: when high school kids join sports teams; music, art, and theater groups; scholastic or intellectual clubs; and church groups. Of the 1, 541 high school students who responded to the random survey, 48 percent said they were subjected to hazing. The statistics are disturbing; 43 percent reported being subjected to humiliating activities, 23 percent were involved in substance abuse, and 29 percent told of performing potentially illegal acts. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 25)

At least sixteen children every year in the United Kingdom choose death over being battered by their peers. In 1999, roughly one out of every thirteen U.S. high school students reported making a suicide attempt in the previous twelve months—a rate that has tripled over the last twenty years. In the year 2000, more than two thousand kids succeeded. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 54)

As many as twenty teens in an American high school of eight hundred students might be considered “high risk” for shooting others at school, according to a Harris poll underwritten by New York’s Alfred University. Two thousand and seventeen students in grades seven through twelve were asked about school violence, including whether they had ever thought about shooting someone at school. Eight percent of the teens said they had thought about it, and another 10 percent said they had thought about carrying out a shooting at school. Alfred University researchers then asked about access to guns. Twenty students in every eight hundred had considered a school shooting *and* had access to a gun. Those students are most likely to be boys, in eleventh and twelfth grade, *who don’t feel valued at home or at school* and who have a *perceived low quality of life*, based on their responses to the questions asked by the surveyors. (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 55)

A recent (March 8, 2001) ABC News/*Good Morning America* poll of five hundred high school students across the nation found that when students identify a potentially violent classmate, it is generally a boy and one *who has been bullied*, rather than a bully. Seven in ten say the potential attacker they can think of is a boy; 29 percent think of both girls and boys. Just 2 percent have only a girl in mind. Three-quarters say it is more likely to be a person who is picked on than one who picks on others. Research confirms what these teenagers are saying. In a 2000 study done by the U.S. Secret Service, in over two-thirds of the thirty-seven

school shootings since 1974, the children who did the shooting all had been “persecuted, threatened, or injured.” (cited in Coloroso, 2003, 55-56)

In our research, we often were struck by the degree to which young people saw bullying as part of the natural order of things. A lack of concern about bullying has also been noted among teachers in English secondary schools (Arora and Thompson, 1987). American high school students felt that teachers knew of their plight but were unwilling to intervene (Hazler, Hoover, and Oliver, 1991; 1992), perhaps another sign of the seemingly normative nature of bullying. (cited in Hoover and Oliver, 1996, 3)

Solutions

Many of the books below describe strategies for responding to and preventing bullying. In the second session of the satellite teleconference, insights from *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* will be applied to strengthening the capacity of *potential victims* to resist and the responsibility of *witnesses* to intervene when necessary. The primary skills are *willpower, caring, vigilance, composure, compassion, integrity, honor, and valor*.

For further reading

Alan Beane, *The Bully-free Classroom* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1999).

‡ Barbara Coloroso, *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

Suellen Fried and Paula Fried, *Bullies and Victims* (New York: M. Evans and Co., 1996).

Robert A. Geffner, Marti Loring, and Cornna Young (Eds.), *Bullying Behavior* (New York: Haworth Press., 2001).

John H. Hoover and Ronald Oliver, *The Bullying Prevention Handbook* (Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service, 1996).

Jaana Juvonen and Sandra Graham (Eds.), *Peer Harassment in School* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001).

Rollo May, *Power and Innocence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972).

Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993).

Ken Rigby, *New Perspectives on Bullying* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley., 2002).

‡ Dorothea M. Ross, *Childhood Bullying and Teasing* (Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 1996).

Charles A. Smith, *Raising Courageous Kids: Eight Steps to Practical Heroism* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2004).

Charles A. Smith, *The Peaceful Classroom: 162 Easy Activities to Teach Preschoolers Compassion and Cooperation* (Mt. Rainier, MD: Gryphon House, 1993).

P. K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, and P. Slee (Eds.), *The Nature of School Bullying* (New York: Routledge, 1999).