

## Article 5 – What are the Effects of Bullying?

The effects of bullying are far-reaching in the school and on the well being of young people. In schools where bullying occurs children tend to feel anxious and worried, even those who have not been directly victimized. There is a general school climate of tension and intimidation and, not surprisingly, reduced engagement in learning across the whole school.

If students do not feel safe at school, it is not surprising they find it difficult to focus on schoolwork. It is also more difficult for teachers who spend a great deal of their day focusing on behavior management problems rather than their 'real' work of teaching and learning.

**The victim, the teacher and the school all feel the effects of bullying.**

### The effects of bullying on victims

For the victims of bullying, effects can be severe. Large surveys of children and adults seem to all suggest a number of serious effects of bullying. These include:

**1. Bullying has a serious effect on school retention and further education.** Students who are bullied tend to leave school earlier, and many early school leavers mention bullying as the main reason they left. Almost half of the victims say that bullying affected their plans for further education.

**2. Bullying has serious emotional consequences.** In a large survey carried out in Australia, almost half of the young people surveyed said they had thought about committing suicide as a result of bullying, and 20 per cent have actually attempted suicide, some more than once. This compares with 0.07% of the non-bullied group who contemplated suicide, and 0.03% who attempted it. Students who are bullied are also three times more likely to be at risk of suffering depression.

**3. People who are bullied are likely to have lower levels of self-esteem.** Results of the survey mentioned above show that one of the major effects of bullying is lower self-esteem. Over 40 per cent of children who have been bullied reported low self-esteem, compared with only 0.06% in the non-bullied group. The large majority of both boys and girls said they felt worse about themselves after they had been bullied.

**4. People who are bullied appear to have more difficulty making friends.** One of the worst effects of bullying is that victims of bullying find it harder to make friends. This is possibly because they are 'different' and peer pressure stops other children standing up for them. Because it is so important for teenagers to feel they belong to a group they will not risk being isolated because they stand up for the victim.

**5. People who are bullied as children are more likely to experience continued bullying in adulthood.** One of the saddest effects of bullying as a child is that it quite often sets up a pattern for life. Almost 40 per cent of people bullied as a child report later bullying in further education or at work. On the other hand, almost two thirds of young people do **not** experience further bullying after they leave school.

**6. Increased levels of absenteeism.** Students who are bullied are more likely to stay away from school than those who feel safe. This has obvious effects on their educational achievement, on their ability to make friends, and on self-esteem.

**7. Decreased ability to devise coping strategies.** Both bullies and their victims have fewer ways to cope with conflict and to solve problems than those not involved in bullying. The effects of bullying may mean these young people never learn to cope as adults and they cannot form long-term relationships. In addition, bullies are much more likely to adopt aggressive solutions to resolve conflict.

**What are the effects of bullying on the bully?**

### **Bullies can suffer long-term effects of bullying if their behaviour is not addressed.**

Compelling research confirms that bullies are twice as likely as their peers to have criminal convictions and four times more likely to be multiple offenders.

### **Why do children bully others?**

There are a lot of reasons why children bully. Some children think it is a way they can make themselves popular; some bully to show off and gain attention. Others simply want to look tough. Or they feel jealous of the person they are bullying. The last reason might apply, in particular, to siblings where an older child has had its parents' complete attention for some time and then finds he or she has to share time with a younger sibling. There are also some children who enjoy the power they feel in making other people feel afraid of them.

Quite often bullies are actually being bullied themselves. It seems that rather than feeling empathy because they have been victims themselves, bullies repeat the behaviour they have experienced. These children may not even realize that what they are doing is wrong and how it makes their victims feel.

Some bullies are aggressive because of the experiences they have at home. They may be spanked or physically abused by their parents or other adults. Some have parents who are bullies. Bullies often copy the behavior they see or experience at home. Our experience and observation tells us more and more adults appear to be displaying bullying behavior – the parent who abuses their child's teacher, the driver who swears at someone who moves into their traffic lane, the parent who abuses the school coach or members of the opposing team, the shopper who yells at an assistant who does not move quickly enough. **Is it any wonder that some children see bullying behavior as 'normal'?**

One of the interesting things is that bullies generally do not suffer from low self-esteem. In fact, they are often confident and even quite popular. Research does show though that they are generally aggressive and view violence as an okay way to interact with other children.

Many bullies are impulsive and active. This may result in parents and teachers ignoring their behavior as they don't know what to do. Since they aren't disciplined, bullies learn it is okay to act aggressively towards others. If they are not pulled up for bad behavior young people will continue it.

Schools may support bullying behavior without realizing it. Teachers and administrators may recognize and reward only certain groups of students. Athletes or scholars may get special attention while students who are kind and care for others may not be recognized. These schools lack an atmosphere of inclusion and cooperation. Teachers may even be drawn into teasing some students by laughing at 'jokes' one student makes about another. Parents may also be guilty of talking negatively about other students, or even teachers, so that children think it is okay to put others 'down'. When this happens, the negative effects on a young child's academic progress can disadvantage them for life.

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