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**Bullying and Harassment 101**

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**What is Bullying?**

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

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**Aggressive Behavior**

- **Verbal bullying** is saying or writing mean things.
  - Teasing
  - Name-calling
  - Inappropriate sexual comments
  - Taunting
  - Threatening to cause harm
- **Social bullying**, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships.
  - Leaving someone out on purpose
  - Telling other children not to be friends with someone
  - Spreading rumors about someone
  - Embarrassing someone in public
- **Physical bullying** involves hurting a person's body or possessions.
  - Hitting/kicking/pinching
  - Spitting
  - Tripping/pushing
  - Taking or breaking someone's things
  - Making mean or rude hand gestures

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### Forms of Power Imbalance

- Physical Strength or Prowess
- Popularity or Social Status
- Access to Information
- Being part of a majority group
- Having more supporters or friends

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### Repetition

- Bullying is typically behavior that repeats over time
- However, an event can be called bullying if there is a high likelihood that it will repeat if left unaddressed

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### Harassment

- In some cases, bullying overlaps with discriminatory harassment which is covered under federal civil rights laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). No matter what label is used (e.g., bullying, hazing, teasing), schools are obligated by these laws to address conduct that is:
  - Severe, pervasive or persistent
  - Creates a hostile environment at school. That is, it is sufficiently serious that it interferes with or limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school
  - Based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability

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### Ohio Bullying Definition

Harassment, intimidation, or bullying" means either of the following:

(1) Any intentional written, verbal, or physical act that a student has exhibited toward another particular student more than once and the behavior both:

- (a) Causes mental or physical harm to the other student;
- (b) Is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for the other student.

(2) Violence within a dating relationship.

Ohio Rev. Stat. Ann. §3313.666

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### Effects of Bullying:

Students being bullied tend to report:

- Feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Poor school performance
- Thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts

Students who bully tend to:

- Exhibit defiant and delinquent behavior
- Have poor school performance
- Be more likely to drop out of school
- Be more likely to bring weapons to school

Students who witness bullying tend to:

- Use more alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- Have increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety
- Avoid or miss school

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### Bullying and Suicide

- Although kids who are bullied are at risk of suicide, bullying alone is not the cause.
- Many issues contribute to suicide risk, including depression, problems at home, and trauma history.
- Additionally, specific groups have an increased risk of suicide, including American Indian and Alaskan Native, Asian American, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth.
- This risk can be increased further when these kids are not supported by parents, peers, and schools. Bullying can make an unsupportive situation worse.

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### Preventing and Responding to Bullying

- There is no one-size-fits all solution to bullying
- Creating a positive school climate that is respectful of differences is an important first step
  - Establish a culture of inclusion and respect that welcomes all students. Reward students when they show thoughtfulness and respect for peers, adults, and the school.
  - Make sure students interact safely. Monitor bullying "hot spots" in and around the building.
  - Enlist the help of all school staff. All staff can keep an eye out for bullying. They also help set the tone at school.
  - Set a tone of respect in the classroom. This means managing student behavior in the classroom well. Well-managed classrooms are the least likely to have bullying.

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### Misdirections in Bullying Prevention

- Conflict resolution and peer mediation don't work for bullying. Bullying is not a conflict between people of equal power who share equal blame. Facing those who have bullied may further upset kids who have been bullied.
- Zero tolerance or "three strikes, you're out" strategies don't work. Suspending or expelling students who bully does not reduce bullying behavior. Students and teachers may be less likely to report and address bullying if suspension or expulsion is the consequence.
- One-time short-term solutions. Efforts must be sustained and long-term to have an impact. While assemblies and other events are great at raising awareness, bullying prevention must be integrated into the culture of a school for it to have an impact.

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