

## What Is Bullying?

Most of us can recall a typical television sitcom bullying scene. The big burly kid is threatening the little nerdy kid with the oversize backpack and glasses for their milk money. You may have been amused or entertained by the situation.

But is real bullying funny? Is it just a part of growing up? What are the consequences – for the victim and for the bully? What are the legal implications?



In order to better understand and define what bullying is, let's look at a synthesis of its characteristics, compiled from bullying research.

- Bullying is about power, domination and control
- The behaviour is repeated and persistent
- Bullying episodes are
  - short in duration
  - frequently take place in unstructured periods of time
  - often occur out of sight of authority
- Bullying involves physical, verbal or social acts of abuse
- Bullying may take different forms:
  - A direct behaviour (hitting, swearing, put downs)
  - An indirect behaviour (damaging property, social exclusion, gossip).
- Bullying is isolating
- The effects of bullying can last a lifetime, for the victim and for the bully
- The problem of bullying extends beyond the bully and the victim to the school, the home, and the community

Let's take a closer look at each of these characteristics.

**Bullying is about the power, domination and control of an individual with less power.** The bully may be bigger or they may have other skills which make them stronger such as language skills. A bully will choose a victim that is not equal in power to her and capitalize on this differential.

**The bullying behaviour is repeated and persistent.** It is not a one-time event like an argument or disagreement between equals. The behaviour is oppressive and discomforting because it is focused, repeated and has harmful intent.

**Bullying episodes are short in duration,** from a few seconds (a comment, a nudge or a gesture) to a few minutes of taunting or gossip. The episodes frequently take place in unstructured periods of time

in the classroom, in the hallways and on the playground. Even a few moments between putting away math notebooks and the beginning of quiet reading offers a window of opportunity.

**Bullying often occurs out of sight of authority**, when the teacher's back is turned or out of her line of sight. But it can even take place right in front of the teacher as he delivers a lesson. What the teacher perceives as an isolated or minor event that doesn't merit interruption of the lesson may in fact be part of a bigger or more pervasive problem.

**Bullying may be a direct behaviour** (hitting, swearing, put downs) **or an indirect behaviour** (damaging property, social exclusion, gossip). Bullying can involve physical, verbal or emotional acts of abuse. A nudge, a push, a shove, a gesture, are easy to identify as physical abuse. Mischief and vandalism (such as hiding, damaging, or breaking someone's possessions) are also physical acts, but can be more difficult to identify as bullying.

Words can be used to bully as well: put downs, gossip, drawing attention to someone else, snide remarks, threats, swearing, writing notes, graffiti, and email all involve using language to intimidate, oppress or cause harm. Emotional abuse can come in the form of social exclusion, where a bully may involve others in excluding the victim from activities or through the spreading of rumours and gossip.

**Bullying is isolating.** It affects an individual's sense of belonging. When you are pushed, put down or have other negative attention directed toward you, you are being isolated and excluded. Bullies direct negative attention toward their victim. The victim is isolated because others do not want to be associated with the negative attention; they want to be seen in a positive light and don't want to be subject to that same negative attention themselves. The challenge for the victim is that his reactions and attempts to deflect this attention and save face, often become fodder for further negative attention from the bully.

## What are the consequences of bullying?

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The consequences of bullying can last a lifetime for the bully, the victim, and the community.

### *Impact on the Bully*

The bully is engaging in social behaviour that may affect them throughout her life. In school, bullies can suffer from their activities. They are often not focusing on their studies. Aspects of their home life, school life and life experiences may be contributing to their behaviour.

This behaviour is not a simple action; it meets a need. Perhaps they need to be in control, or exercise power over others. Maybe they are jealous, envious or resentful. Bullies are likely to be quick to anger, to be focused on preserving self-image, to easily misinterpret others actions, and to have difficulties

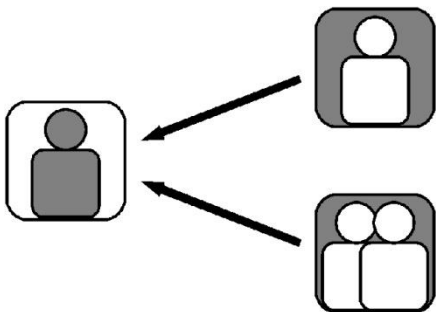
relating to their victim's emotional perspective. They may feel their behaviour is justified, and view violence or aggression as appropriate means to solve problems.

Bullies are at risk of continuing this behaviour into adulthood, and may find themselves in increased levels of involvement with the law. They may also experience difficulties in relationships, have marital difficulties, and carry their bullying behaviour over into the workplace. Bullying is both a short term and long term social and mental health issue.

### ***Impact on the Victim***

While bullying can also cause physical damage and material damage, being bullied affects an individual's personal feelings and her sense of social belonging. For the victim, bullying is isolating. It affects the victim's self-esteem and causes stress which may be disruptive to his emotional and physical wellbeing. Victims may suffer academically as they become focused on the bullying and are distracted from their work. School is not a safe or positive environment for them. The emotional impact of being bullied and isolated can affect future relationships and interactions. The emotional aspects of bullying may never be forgotten.

### ***Who else is involved?***



The bully may engage bystanders in the bullying behaviour, further emphasizing his ability to exert power and control, and further isolating the target. It is easier to play for the winning team than it is to back up the losers.

How can we challenge the bystanders to not accept this state of affairs? Most bystanders know what they see happening is wrong. But what is the risk of becoming involved? Any action would risk

being singled out and excluded for supporting the perceived weaknesses and negative characteristics projected on the victim. Is this a risk that a child or adolescent trying to find and establish her social status is willing to take?

Peers can be very successful at intervening in bullying situations; however, they intervene with a low level of frequency. One factor that contributes to this lack of response is uncertainty on how to intervene appropriately. It is therefore important that students understand the impact of intervening, and learn and practice the language for stopping and preventing bullying, in exercises such as role playing.

While teachers can intervene when they witness bullying behaviour, bullying often takes place out of sight. When teachers become aware of bullying behaviour, it may be necessary to minimize the

opportunity for the bully to engage in this type of activity. This can be accomplished with more structure, fewer individual or independent activities, engaging the student more frequently, and increasing levels of supervision and proximity. A more global approach to dealing with bullying will be discussed further in the Prevention section.

### ***Social Impact***

Bullying has a social impact as it affects relationships at school, work and at home. Bullying may be an indicator of family communication and behaviour patterns that cycle from one generation to the next and affect the whole community. Bullying can impact the relationship of the victim with their peers and within their family. Bullying affects the learning opportunities of the bully, the victim, and the bystanders as time, resources, and energy is devoted to dealing with the problems and issues that arise. As bullying behaviour continues into adult life, it affects workplace relationships, productivity, family relationships and community resources. The problem of bullying extends beyond the bully and the victim, throughout the school, into the home and into the community.

## **How can bullying be prevented?**

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Responses to bullying that are autocratic and disempowering may further contribute to the bullying problem. Responses need to be calm and deal with the conflict in a positive manner.

To help the bully, it is important to involve her family, teachers, peers and counselling professionals to help her deal with her issues, and to create a supportive and positive environment which enables her to change and become a positive contributor to her social environment. Secure confidence needs to be promoted, rather than insecure confidence.

Fostering an understanding of the victim's point of view is important for engaging the participation of bystanders in stopping the bully. This also means establishing a supportive and caring classroom, school and community culture through modelling appropriate behaviour and active participation. This includes teaching cooperation, building self-esteem, encouraging responsibility, and empowering students through democratic processes.

Efforts must focus on the bully, the victim, and the bystanders. It is a community issue and should be a long-term community effort. The solution should involve an atmosphere of social change rather than one of social control and restriction.

## **The Approach**

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A system wide approach is important in reducing bullying and effectively managing the problem.

## **Assess + Involve + Implement + Evaluate**

The school, teachers, parents, students and community must all work together to develop and implement a plan. Central support and initiative from the school administration is essential in driving a successful anti-bullying program.

One of the beginning steps is to identify and assess the prevalence and nature of bullying within a given environment. This is often done by using an initial survey measurement tool, which is later used during ongoing follow-up assessment to assess the success of the program.

One such tool is The Canadian Public Health Association's Assessment Toolkit for Bullying Harassment and Peer Relations at School (<http://www.cpha.ca/en/activities/safe-schools.aspx>). This is a comprehensive assessment program that can be an integral part of a new or existing school wide bullying program.

Systemic policy, rules, consequences and supports involving all of the stakeholders must be developed and agreed upon. Programming may involve school support staff, police school resource officers, counsellors and other outside supports. These support the teacher in the classroom who adapts and implements the initiative and responds to incidences. The program must be evaluated on an ongoing basis to assess the effectiveness. This evaluation should inform the ongoing implementation of the program.

## **Setting the Stage**

### **Teach → Model → Practice**

In addition to the principal and administration, which are vital to establishing a healthy school wide learning environment, the individual teacher can play a fundamental role in setting the tone of the classroom learning environment, by modelling appropriate behaviour and developing a culture of caring and respect. Students are supported and empowered to help each other and intervene in an appropriate manner. Individuals are empowered and have a network of support on which to rely.

Character building resources provided by Alberta Education's The Heart of the Matter: Character and Citizenship Education in Alberta Schools (<http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/CharacterEd/>) and by The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities (<http://www.sacsc.ca/>) can play a key role in supporting this process.

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## Identifying the Problem, Focusing on the Issues, Empowerment

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### **Define → Identify → Act**

In order to address bullying effectively, teachers and students must be able to recognize and identify bullying. Defining bullying is an important part of this process. Having a commonly understood and sound definition also enables individuals to identify bullying when they see it. If students are involved in creating this definition, the concept will be more internalized than if it is simply presented to them. They can apply their definition to a questionable situation and determine whether bullying is occurring. If they can be sure that it is bullying, they may be more empowered to act and stop the bullying. But recognizing bullying is only part of the equation.

### **Feeling = Understanding → Intervention**

Teachers and students must be made aware of the social and emotional damage that bullying causes. Many people don't realize the effect they have on others through bullying, labelling and gossip. Once they have a visceral understanding, it enables them to act and intervene appropriately to stop bullying. Empathy is an important part of getting bystanders to intervene and to rehabilitating a bully.

### **Knowledge + Practise → Action**

Many students don't realize they have the power to stop bullying by simply telling the bully to stop and by telling others. They recognize bullying. They can empathize with the victim. Many know they should do something, but they are not sure what to do or what to say. When students are provided with the appropriate language of intervention, and practice using this language, they are empowered to act appropriately in any situation.

## Intervention and Connection

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Once an incidence of bullying is identified, it must be tracked and followed up on. Because bullying is a repeated behaviour, steps need to be taken to support the bully in changing his behaviour, and the victim needs to be empowered and protected. Families and support professionals need to be involved. The bullying behaviour may stem from or be a symptom of other circumstances in the bully's life which may need to be identified and addressed. As a result, setting up a plan for changing the behaviour may require a team approach.

The Canadian Public Health Association's *Assessment Toolkit for Bullying Harassment and Peer Relations at School* outlines a cognitive behavioural approach combined with parent training which involves modelling, social problem solving, cognitive restructuring and self-management that may be used to

support this behavioural change (p.14). Your school and school district may have other programs and supports.

## **Bullying and the Law: Is Bullying a Crime?**

While bullying is not an offence under the Criminal Code of Canada (CCC), many of the behaviours that may be part of the bullying are. These patterns of behaviour that are rehearsed or normalized as a youth may have serious consequences, not only as a youth, but also when they are carried over into adulthood.

Here are a few examples of potential bullying related offences and the adult consequences, along with the section number of the CCC to which they refer. NOTE: The following are adaptations and interpretations of sections of the CCC. You may view the actual wording of these sections online at the Canadian Legal Information Institute's website.

<http://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/stat/rsc-1985-c-c-46/latest/>

(Youth consequences are covered at the end of this section.)

**Criminal Harassment (CCC 264)** - It is unlawful to make a person fear for their safety or the safety of another person by: repeatedly following them or watching their home or places they frequent; repeatedly communicating (directly or indirectly) with them; or directing threatening conduct toward them. *Punishment: summary conviction or indictable offence - up to ten years imprisonment.*

**Mischief (CCC 430)** - Damage or destruction of property, or interference with the use, operation or enjoyment of the property. *Punishment: Summary conviction or Indictable offence - imprisonment two years, to ten years up to life (depending upon monetary value and level of danger to life involved).*

**Theft (CCC 322)** - *Punishment: Summary conviction or Indictable offence - imprisonment two years, to ten years (depending upon monetary value involved).*

**Uttering threats (CCC 264.1)** - Includes threatening to harm or kill another person, threatening to burn, damage or destroy their belongings or property, and threats to harm one of their pets. *Punishment: summary conviction - imprisonment up to 18 months; indictable offence - imprisonment up to five years.*

**Assault (CCC 265, CCC 266)** - Intentionally applying force without consent, threatening to apply force (this includes gestures) or impeding another person while carrying visible weapon. *Punishment: Summary conviction or Indictable offence - imprisonment up to five years.*

**Assault with a Weapon or Causing Bodily Harm (CCC 267)** - Includes an assault where a weapon is not used but merely carried, or there is a threat to use the weapon or imitation of a weapon. *Punishment: summary conviction - imprisonment up to 18 months; indictable offence - imprisonment up to five years.*

**Aggravated Assault (CCC 268)** - Includes causing a wound, disfigurement or endangering a life. *Punishment: Indictable offence - imprisonment up to fourteen years.*

**Sexual Assault (CCC 271)** - Includes sexual harassment, unwanted sexual touching and dating violence. *Punishment: Summary conviction - imprisonment up to 18 months or Indictable offence - imprisonment up to ten years.*

**Sexual Assault with a Weapon; Threats to a third party or causing bodily harm (CCC 272)** - *Punishment: Indictable offence - imprisonment up to fourteen years.*

**Aggravated Sexual Assault (CCC 273)** - *Punishment: Indictable offence - imprisonment up to life.*

**Fraudulent concealment (CCC 341)** – Taking, removing or concealing something for fraudulent purposes. *Punishment: Indictable offence - imprisonment up to five years.*

**Unauthorized use of a computer (CCC 342.1)** - Fraudulently obtaining computer service; for example, using someone else's computer password and account without permission. *Punishment: Summary conviction or Indictable offence - imprisonment up to ten years.*

**Robbery (CCC 343)** - Theft for the purposes of extortion, or with the use of force or violence. *Punishment: Indictable offence - imprisonment up to life.*

**Extortion (CCC 346)** - Getting someone to do something or obtaining something from them without a justifiable reason or excuse by means of accusations, threats or violence. *Punishment: Indictable offence - imprisonment up to life.*

**Forgery (CCC 366)** - Making a false document with the intent that it will be considered to be genuine. *Punishment: Summary conviction to Indictable offence - imprisonment up to ten years.*

## **Youth Consequences**

The consequences described above are based on adult sentences. While a youth may be charged with the same offences, youth sentencing options and criteria would apply. Youth may be dealt with under the extrajudicial measures program, or they may receive an extrajudicial sanction and a record. If they have to go to court, they may receive up to a two year maximum sentence for a single offence or three years for several offences plus a court record. For repeated violent offences and aggravated sexual assault, the crown may apply for a youth over 14 years of age to receive an adult sentence.

While the consequences are not the same as adult consequences, they are very real. Because bullying behaviour may be the expression of issues in the youth's life that need to be addressed, the Youth Criminal Justice Act also provides opportunities to intervene and address these issues. If left unchecked, these behaviours may have serious adult consequences.

## **Bullying Bylaws**

A number of communities in Alberta have instituted bullying bylaws. Section 7(a,b,c) of the Alberta Municipal Government Act R.S.A 2000, c. M-26 (<http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/m26.pdf>) empowers municipalities to regulate issues relating to: health, welfare and safety; people and activities



in public places; and public nuisances. The following Alberta municipalities have considered this Act in addressing bullying.

### ***Edmonton***

In Edmonton, bullying is addressed in the Public Places Bylaw #14614, Part II, Article 8(1-2):  
[http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws\\_licences/C14614.doc](http://www.edmonton.ca/bylaws_licences/C14614.doc)

This bylaw relates to repeatedly communicating with minors in public places in a way that the minor may feel harassed. Offences carry a fine of \$250.

### ***Grande Prairie***

Article 10 of the City of Grande Prairie's Noise, Nuisance and Public Disturbances bylaw, #C-1103 (<http://www.cityofgp.com/citygov/dept/cityclerk/bylaws/bc1103.htm>) specifically mentions bullying. It expands the scope to include incidences of bullying in public places and on public property, as well as via written or electronic communication. The bylaw defines bullying as comments, conduct or displays towards a person that may cause physical or emotional distress. The fine for first offence is \$250, and for a second offence from \$500-2500, The person charged may be given a choice of paying the fine or having the charge withdrawn and attending an educational anti-bullying session.

### ***Rocky Mountain House***

Rocky Mountain House has a comprehensive bullying bylaw, 04/05V (<http://www.rockymtnhouse.com/Word-pdf/By-0405V-Bullying.pdf>) which applies not only to bullying but also to those who encourage a bully. The bylaw's definition of bullying includes real or threatened physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and extortion, be it in person, written or electronic.

The fine for a first offence is \$250 and for a second offence up to \$1000 (or six months imprisonment for non-payment). For bystanders the fine is \$100 and \$250 respectively.

### ***Calgary***

The City of Calgary does not have a bullying bylaw. This was a conscious and purposeful decision, based on consultation with various organizations within the community and informed by current research of bullying prevention. The City's intent is to actively support anti-bullying programs through other means and strategies, and to take a comprehensive approach to correcting behaviour, rather than punishment and zero tolerance policies. For more background on this decision, refer to the following document on Calgary's Alliance to End Violence website:

[http://www.endviolence.ca/pdf-download/55\\_alberta\\_roundtable\\_bullying\\_submission.pdf](http://www.endviolence.ca/pdf-download/55_alberta_roundtable_bullying_submission.pdf)

## Further Reading and Research

The following is a small selection of researchers associated with the study of bullying. Search your school's library databases to find their research and related work, or follow the links below.

### Wendy M. Craig

*Department of Psychology, Queens University*

Visit the Bullying Lab to view her extensive list of publications

<http://www.queensu.ca/psychology/People/Faculty/Wendy-Craig.html>

### Dan Olweus

*Research Centre for Health Promotion, University of Bergen, Norway*

Much of the body of work on bullying references the work of Dan Olweus, one of the early researchers in this area.

<http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/history.htm>

### Debra J. Pepler

*Department of Psychology, York University*

*Director of Lamarsh Centre For Research on Violence & Conflict Resolution*

<http://www.arts.yorku.ca/lamarsh/>

### Ken Rigby

*School of Education, University of South Australia*

"Bullying in Schools and What to Do About It" - an informative website which also links to a number of his publications

<http://www.kenrigby.net/>

## Additional Articles

Dake, J. A, Price, J. H., & Telljohann, S. K. (2003). The Nature and Extent of Bullying at School. *Journal of School Health*, (73)5, p.173-80.

Public Safety Canada (2005). Bullying Prevention in Schools. *Public Safety Canada: Crime Prevention Research Publications* website - <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/res/cp/res/bully-eng.aspx>

Smokowski, P.R., & Kopasz, K. H. (2005). Bullying in School: an overview of types, effects, family characteristics, and intervention strategies. *Children & Schools*. (27)2, p.101-109.



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