

Bullying

INTRODUCTION

Bullying – what is it?

Definition:

Bullying is the systematic violence (Psychological and/or Physical) by a child or a group of children towards one or more victims (usually classmates), who feel hurt and isolated and are not capable of defending themselves

Sometimes we think of bullying as someone hurting another person physically by hitting or punching when that person is smaller or less powerful than the bully. But bullying can also include

- threatening another person if they do not do what the bully has asked them to do – such as give up their lunch or pocket money
- calling a person names that are rude, insulting and hurtful
- taking another person's property without their permission in situations where the person is unable to respond
- teasing that is hurtful, rude and insulting – sometimes this might even be about the child's family and friends.

Types of Bullying

a) Verbal Bullying

Calling someone names, giving them nicknames or making nasty remarks such as: "Don't be such an idiot, loser!"

b) Social Bullying

Excluding someone by refusing to let him/her play along or work together in a group

c) Mental Bullying

Threaten someone or make them do things. This usually happens after school hours.

d) Physical Bullying

Hurting someone on purpose by kicking, hitting, scratching, pushing, pulling hair etc.

e) Material Bullying

Stealing, damaging or hiding someone's things

f) Digital/Cyber Bullying

The words.....

“Sticks and stones will hurt my bones but words will never hurt me!” are certainly untrue – physical wounds often heal, words one tend to carry with in one's memory. This is why cyber-bullying is a critical issue to address – both from the perspective of the victim and the bully.

Cyber – bullying – what is it?

- Cyber bullying occurs when others, including children, use their access to electronic media to hurt, harass, seduce, or harm another person, adult or child.
- This can take the form of word, sound or picture messaging

Many parents believe that their children could not be involved in this kind of activity. However children get “sucked” into this behaviour very easily. It may another child's phone/computer etc. – or the phone or computer may belong to the child who is bullying. Sometimes cyber-bullying is a group activity and children “egg” each other on to send harmful and hurtful messages.

The question is often asked – “But does it really hurt? Yes it does! Childline has counselled children who are deeply disturbed by being targeted with this form of bullying.

It may have long term consequences for both the bully and the bullied, especially children who already may have self-esteem and/or self-confidence issues.

Neither victims nor perpetrators may disclose when this is occurring – and it is often invisible to others as cell phones and computers enable confidential communication.

It is sometimes discovered by accident.

Do children always mean to hurt? Yes – and sometimes no:

- Sometimes it begins as a joke
- There may be a lack of insight into the impact on others

- Children – being children – do not usually anticipate consequences for themselves or for others.

Appropriate parental responses:

- Never give one's child access to electronic media without a clear understanding of, and agreement about what it may be used for
- Establish rules
- Write them down
- Both sign – make a contract
- Educate one's child on cyber bullying and teach empathy – for example asking them to imagine being in a victim role
- Teach your child to care for others
- Have a non-violence policy at home inclusive of physical, verbal and written violence
- Treat children with respect and request respect in return
- Help children learn non-violent ways of dealing with interpersonal conflicts
- Communicate with them – encourage mutual sharing about daily happenings and experiences and ensure that communication is a two way street.
- Never encourage children to retaliate.

3. Appropriate responses to the child who is the bully:

- Help the child acknowledge the behaviour
- Don't deny or over-protect
- Encourage logical and child friendly consequences
- Ensure that the child knows that the behaviour is unacceptable but that they are still loved

1. The responsibilities of schools include

- every school should have a “no-bullying” policy
- Children and parents should be made aware of it
- Both victims and bullies should be assisted
- Schools should teach and implement non-violent values
- Schools should also include in life skills education alternatives to the use of violence.
- Educators and parents should model non-violent and respectful behaviour
- Encourage reporting and don't dismiss it as tittle-telling.
- Teachers should be trained to recognise the signs of a child in distress

2. Useful resources include

Childline – both the toll free and the Mxit TradePost counselling services.

- Childline's website – www.childlinesa.org.za

Teasing VS Bullying

Pulling someone off their bike: that could be teasing, or bullying? It's teasing when children are on the same level, as sometimes one does something unpleasant, the next time the other child may do something. It's a game, not always fun, but never threatening. Through teasing each other children learn to deal with conflict. It is a part of their normal development. Bullying on the other hand is threatening. And it may not be just once, it may happen every day, sometimes for years. With bullying a victim gets picked for another or a group of others to have control over in a threatening way. The bully abuses their power; the victim gets hit, verbally abused and/or humiliated. Usually there is a group of followers joining in with the bully.

Besides these visual types of bullying, there are also invisible types. For instance when a child is always excluded, may not join in on anything or isn't invited to anything.

Causes of bullying

There are several theories about the causes of bullying. One theory describes how bullying is part of subconscious leadership; other theories propose that there is tension within a group resulting in a release on a scapegoat. Bullying is a complicated problem, especially since there is more than one person involved. However often bullies have been bullied and/or humiliated themselves and/or feel powerless in other situations. The bullying behaviour then becomes a means of re-claiming power and self-esteem.

Who has what role?

Bullying is usually related to a group. Everyone in the group has their own role. Even adults who are connected to the group, such as teachers and adults, have a role. Together, they are responsible for keeping the status quo of the bullying as well as for breaking out of the pattern.

Roles:

- The victim
- The bully (the Aggressor)
- The third parties (hangers on/reinforcers of the behaviour)

- The school/sports club, teachers/group leader
- The parents

The impact of bullying on children

Bullying can be very harmful to the child who is bullied, have long term consequences for their social adjustment and development and leave them

1. Self-confidence decreases
2. Doubting themselves and other, because they have received unjust treatment by their own surroundings
3. Motivation to learn can decrease because of anxiety about attending school or fear in the school environment.
4. Results at school get worse, as they may even be reluctant to go back to school
5. Social skills decrease because of uncertainty in social relations
6. Eventually this may lead (especially at a later stage) to depression
7. In the worst case, bullying may contribute to suicide, attempted suicide and/or suicidal figures.

Consequences for the perpetrators

1. Aggressive behaviour is rewarding on short term (more power, new “friends”, etc.) which can cause the behaviour to persist
2. A negative social attitude develops. The situation gets worse when others get agitated. The bully wants to keep the behavioural pattern but also the followers. He/She can do this by: more big talk, manipulation and violence
3. Results at school can decrease
4. Heightening chance at delinquency if the behaviour goes unpunished at school and at home

How can I tell if a child has been bullied?

Some of the signs include:

- the child comes home with torn clothing, sore, with injuries, with no adequate explanation or with the explanation that someone has hit him
- the child is reluctant to go to school or play with peers
- the child starts to do poorly at school
- the child appears to be reluctant to participate in activities at school
- the child becomes increasingly withdrawn and isolated.

How to help – some suggestions

- be there for your child and make it clear that you will listen to him or her
- make it clear that you are there to talk about any problem
- if your child talks about bullying take it seriously and NEVER encourage your child to hit back
- talk to your child about what s/he would like to do about the situation – sometimes children need support to apply their own effective solutions
- help your child recognize his strengths by praising and affirmation when appropriate
- always follow up with some intervention that helps the bully as well as the bullied. Bullies are children with problems and often children who bully are being bullied or hurt themselves, feel powerless and have poor self-esteem. Bullying is often a way of trying to feel in control. Bullying can become a pattern of behaviour that lasts a lifetime.