

## **Preventing Bullying by Systemic Changes and Reframing**

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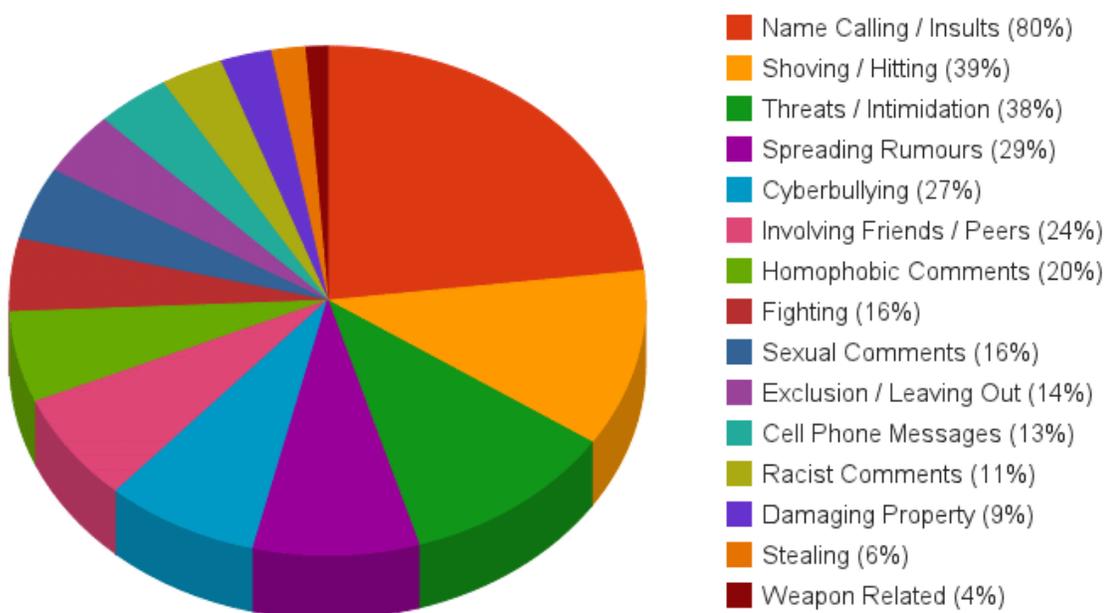
**(From my book *Core Concepts in Psychology 8th ed.* , 2017)**

**Bullying** in school and in the workplace is primarily about some students and workers making life miserable for others by extreme teasing, threatening, physically abusing, and damaging personal reputations through lies and gossip. Most other students and coworkers are neither bullies nor victims, but bystanders aware of the problem -- yet they usually ignore it or passively accept it (Coloroso, 2008). The traditional method for dealing with bullies is to identify the culprits and punish them in various ways, moving them to other classes, schools, or jobs. This is likely to move the abusers and their abuse to different venues but not change them; often it makes them even angrier and vengeful. Bullying is defined as systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt and/or psychological distress on one or more others, whether they are students in school or workers in the workplace.



## TYPES OF BULLYING REPORTED

(StopABully School Reports from Sept 2011 - April 2012)



\*Multiple bullying types are allowed to be selected.

In the 1990s, statistics on the prevalence of bullying revealed it was relatively low in Sweden, with an estimated 15 percent of all Swedish schoolchildren being bullied or admitting to being bullies themselves (Olweus, 1993). However, a more recent survey documented a dramatically higher prevalence in Britain with 73 percent of a British sample reporting being bullied, being the bully perpetrator, or having witnessed bullying directly (McLeod, 2008). This large-scale study included nearly 2,000 students, aged 12 through 19, across 14 schools. In a 2010 survey of 43,000 high school students in the United States, half said they've bullied someone in the past year, and nearly half said they'd been physically abused, teased, or taunted in a way that seriously upset them (Dalton, 2010). Among the negative fallout of bullying is shown in the estimated 160,000 students who have refused to go to school because of the possible physical and verbal aggression of their peers (as reported at [www.nobully.com](http://www.nobully.com)).

**What Does Bullying Look Like Today?** Below are the most frequently experienced types:

- **Physical bullying:** Direct physical force is used to hurt someone else by hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking, pinching, or holding them down. Physical bullying also includes taking or breaking someone's belongings or stealing or extorting money.
- **Verbal bullying:** Use of words to hurt someone. This includes threatening, taunting, intimidating, insulting, sarcasm, name-calling, teasing, slurs, graffiti, put-downs, and ridicule. It also includes hostile gestures such as making faces, staring, giving the evil eye, eye rolling, and spitting.
- **Relational bullying:** Leaving someone out of a group or purposely excluding them, gossiping, teasing, whispering, and spreading rumors. It includes turning your back on someone else, giving them the silent treatment, ostracizing, or scapegoating.
- **Cyberbullying:** Use of cell-phones, text messages, e-mails, instant messages, web blogs, and postings to bully another student in any of the ways described above. Examples of cyberbullying are sending threatening or insulting messages by phone and e-mail and spreading destructive rumors that ruin the reputation of a fellow student or worker.
- **Harassment:** Offensive and possibly threatening behavior including the use of extreme verbal language, offensive questions or statements, stalking, physical force, or unwanted sexual advances. Sexual harassment is persistent and unwanted sexual advances, where the consequences of refusing could be harmful to the victim. Usually harassment is a repeated set of actions, but not always.
- **Parents public shaming kids:** Some parents are using social media images and voice messages to shame their children over what they consider shameful behavior. Images are of tweens or teens with long hair cut off by parents, or in streets holding signs, saying, "I am a liar and a thief"; "I am on the road to failure," and more. (see *Time*, *The View*, July 6-13, 2015, pp.27-28)

Bullying can occur just about everywhere: in any kind of school—poor or wealthy, public or private, single-sex or co-educational, conservative or progressive. It happens in or outside the classroom, in the workplace, and online. Boys and girls are equal targets of bullying. In most cases, boys bully other boys, and girls bully other girls. As Evelyn Field (2007), author of *Bully Blocking: Six Secrets to Help Children Deal with Teasing and Bullying*, explained:

Bullying is a game where some children systematically abuse their power. Bullies can go on a shopping spree at the beginning of every year looking for suitable targets . . . Boys often use bullying tactics to make a reputation and girls do so to protect their reputation. Boys tend to be hunters who belong to large, hierarchical tribes. They typically bully openly and prefer physical bullying. They focus upon individual achievement and action, supported by their physical prowess. They are less interested in teasing, exclusion and indirect bullying [tactics favored by girls] (pp. 7, 8).

Some argue that bullying is no worse than it used to be and kids today should just “suck it up,” while others are convinced bullies are going too far. Recently bullying has become an international concern due to escalated violence and a number of teen suicides traced to cyberbullying. Though “technology is not radically changing what’s happening, it’s simply making what’s happening far more visible,” says social media researcher Danah Boyd (Leach, 2010); it is difficult to deny the impact the Internet has had on the bullying landscape. Because of the permeability and reach of the Net as well as anonymity of users, **dehumanization** has not only become easier, the impact has become greater and even lethal.

Interestingly, the earliest instance of cyberbullying was the anonymous abuse heaped upon Monica Lewinsky, before the Internet was developed, after she was exposed to having had sex with her boss, The President of the United States, Bill Clinton, in the Oval Office. In a recent TED talk (2015) Lewinski describes in eloquent detail her shame and the harm she experienced from those secret attackers. You can view her TED talk using the link we’ve provided at the

end of this chapter.

**Effectively Preventing Bullying** Prevention of bullying requires switching from the usual punishment model of bullies to a system-wide set of practices that give zero tolerance for bullying. The impetus for change must come top-down from school superintendents and principals, involving teachers and parents, and then enabling students themselves as agents of change (Kalman, 2008). Researcher Dan Olweus (1993) has used such a system change model in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries with considerable success. In the United States, students who seem “different,” are more shy, have physical handicaps, and are LGBT are bullied. “Actual or perceived sexual orientation is one of the most common reasons that students are harassed by their peers, second only to physical appearance,” according to psychologist Peter Goldbaum (Novotney, 2008). At the core of new programs to combat and prevent bullying is developing curricula and practices from elementary school throughout all grades that promote respect for the dignity of individuals and for acceptance and tolerance of human diversity.

For bullying issues that revolve around the target’s image, your authors advocate changing the self-image and sense of helplessness of those individuals. They can learn to stop communicating through body language that they are vulnerable targets. They can be taught how to cultivate positive self-esteem, new body language, and effective social communication skills as well as ways to get more social support from their peers. In their book, *Stick Up For Yourself: Every Kid’s Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem*, Gershen Kaufman and his colleagues (1999) explain:

Positive self-esteem is the single most important psychological skill we can develop in order to thrive in society. Having self-esteem means being proud of ourselves and experiencing that pride from within. Without self-esteem, kids doubt themselves, cave in to peer pressure, feel worthless or inferior . . . With self-esteem, kids feel secure inside themselves, are more willing to take positive risks, are more likely to take responsibility for their

actions, can cope with life's changes and challenges, and are resilient in the face of rejection, disappointment, failure, and defeat (p. ii).

Note: Self-esteem should not be confused with arrogance, contempt, or a big ego.

People who have positive self-esteem don't depend on what other people think of them because they are confident of their worth and happy in their own skins.

Historically, bullies were viewed as having various mental health deficiencies, but new research reveals a very different social dynamic is operating. Many people bully others as a means to climb the social hierarchy among their peers. Most bullying is occurring among students who are in the middle to upper ranges of social status in their schools. It is not happening at the highest or lowest status levels. A research team of sociologists followed approximately 3,700 U.S. students in grades 8 to 10 for one school year, identifying acts of social aggression and relating them to indices of social status (Faris & Felmlee, 2011). Each student was asked to list five students who had been mean to them or picked on them, with aggression defined as activities intending to cause harm or pain, physically or emotionally. Status was established as how central a student was in friendship networks where each student nominated his or her five best friends. Those with highest status have no need to bully anyone, and those with lowest status don't have the social power to pull off being aggressive. For more on bullying, see <http://www.nobully.com>.