

What is Bullying?

Dan Olweus, creator of the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*, provides us with this commonly accepted definition for bullying in his book, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do*:

"A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself."

This definition includes three important components:

1. Bullying is aggressive behavior that involves unwanted, negative actions.
2. Bullying involves a pattern of behavior repeated over time.
3. Bullying involves an imbalance of power or strength.

Types of Bullying

Bullying can take on many forms. As part of the *Olweus Bullying Questionnaire*, students are asked if they have been bullied in any of these nine ways:

1. Verbal bullying including derogatory comments and bad names
2. Bullying through social exclusion or isolation
3. Physical bullying such as hitting, kicking, shoving, and spitting
4. Bullying through lies and false rumors
5. Having money or other things taken or damaged by students who bully
6. Being threatened or being forced to do things by students who bully
7. Racial bullying
8. Sexual bullying
9. Cyber bullying (via cell phone or Internet) [Learn more](#)

Why Students Bully

Information about bullying suggests that there are three interrelated reasons why students bully.

1. Students who bully have strong needs for power and (negative) dominance.
2. Students who bully find satisfaction in causing injury and suffering to other students.
3. Students who bully are often rewarded in some way for their behavior with material or psychological rewards.

Impact of Bullying

A single student who bullies can have a wide-ranging impact on the students they bully, students who observe bullying, and the overall climate of the school and community.

Students Who are Bullied - Students deserve to feel safe at school. But when they experience bullying, these types of effects can last long into their future:

- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Health problems
- Poor grades
- Suicidal thoughts

Students Who Bully Others - Students who intentionally bully others should be held accountable for their actions. Those who bully their peers are also more likely than those students who do not bully others to*:

- Get into frequent fights
- Steal and vandalize property
- Drink alcohol and smoke
 - Report poor grades
- Perceive a negative climate at school
 - Carry a weapon

* Not all students who bully others have obvious behavior problems or are engaged in rule-breaking activities, however. Some of them are highly skilled socially and good at ingratiating themselves with their teacher and other adults. This is true of some boys who bully but is perhaps even more common among bullying girls. For this reason it is often difficult for adults to discover or even imagine that these students engage in bullying behavior.

Observers of Bullying - Students who see bullying happen also may feel that they are in an unsafe environment. Effects may include feeling:

- Fearful
- Powerless to act
- Guilty for not acting
- Tempted to participate

Schools with Bullying Issues - When bullying continues and a school does not take action, the entire school climate can be affected in the following ways:

- The school develops an environment of fear and disrespect
 - Students have difficulty learning
 - Students feel insecure
 - Students dislike school
- Students perceive that teachers and staff have little control and don't care about them

Find out how the *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program* addresses the issues surrounding bullying and provides [Benefits for Schools](#) and [Benefits for Other Institutions](#).

Bullying is a Serious Issue

Bullying may vary greatly between schools and school districts, but it is very prevalent:

- Statistics show that 23 percent of students in grades 4-6 had been bullied "several times" or more; 20 percent had bullied others (1998 study of 6,500 students in rural South Carolina)
- Statistics show that 17 percent of students in grades 6-10 reported having been bullied "sometimes" or more, with 8 percent being bullied once a week. 19 percent said they had been a bully to others "sometimes" or more. (2001 study of 15,000 U.S. students)

The Bullying Circle

Nearly one in five students in an average classroom is experiencing bullying in some way. The rest of the students, called bystanders, are also affected by the bullying.¹

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program describes students involved or witnessing a bullying situation as having roles in the Bullying Circle²:

A. Students Who Bully.

These students want to bully, start the bullying, and play a leader role.

B. Followers or Henchmen

These students are positive toward the bullying and take an active part, but don't usually initiate it and do not play a lead role.

C. Supporters or Passive Bullies

These students actively and openly support the bullying, for example, through laughter or calling attention to the situation, but they don't join in.

D. Passive Supporters or Possible Bullies

These students like the bullying but do not show outward signs of support.

E. Disengaged Onlookers

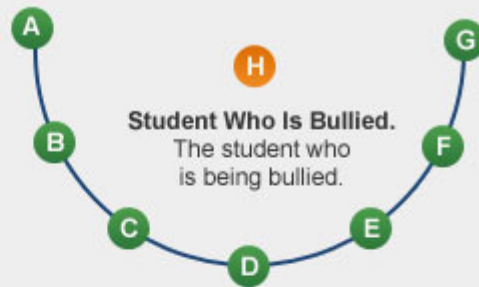
These students do not get involved and do not take a stand, nor do they participate actively in either direction. (They might think or say: "It's none of my business," or "Let's watch and see what happens.")

F. Possible Defenders

These students dislike the bullying and think they should help the student who is being bullied but do nothing.

G. Defenders

They dislike the bullying and help or try to help the student who is being bullied.



¹C. Salmivalli, K. Lagerspetz, K. Björkqvist, K. Osterman, and A. Kaukiainen, "Bullying as a Group Process: Participant Roles and Their Relations to Social Status within the Group," *Aggressive Behavior* 22 (1996): 1-15.

²Dan Olweus, "Peer Harassment: A Critical Analysis and Some Important Issues," in *Peer Harassment in School*, ed. J. Juvonen and S. Graham (New York: Guilford Publications, 2001): 3-20.