

# Issue Alert

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## When Push Turns to Shove: How to Help Bullies and Their Targets

“Bullying is just a natural part of growing up.” You’ve probably heard parents and adults say that, but most childhood memories of bullying are wrought with pain and helplessness. Which raises this question: “What’s so natural about feeling abused?”

While most children have confrontations with their peers, sometimes situations escalate. A child’s game can turn into a taunting session, or a walk home from school can lead to physical harm. Research shows that bullying – simple teasing paired with an imbalance of power – leads to negative physical, mental and academic outcomes for youth on both sides of the bullying equation.

And in Indiana, bullying is a growing problem. Since 2003 the percentage of students who have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property has increased significantly, from 6.7% in 2003 to 9.6% in 2007. Recent data shows that about one in every ten Indiana children comes face-to-face with a weapon at school every year.<sup>1</sup>

Given the alarming increase in bullying, and its potentially lifelong implications, it is critical for our children’s sake that parents, teachers, school staff and administrators all recognize and learn how to help solve the problem.

### Teasing to Taunting<sup>2</sup>

Understanding what’s normal – and what’s abusive – in children’s relationships means understanding the difference between taunting and teasing. This difference is crucial to understanding when a child’s behavior is acceptable or when it must be addressed.

#### Bullying Defined

**Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intended to cause harm or distress, occurs repeatedly over time, and occurs in a relationship in which there is an imbalance of power or strength.**

**Bullying can take many forms, including physical violence, taunting, intimidation, and social exclusion.**

Teasing	Taunting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allows the teaser and person being teased to swap roles</li><li>• Isn’t intended to hurt the other person</li><li>• Maintains the basic dignity of everyone involved</li><li>• Is meant to make both people laugh</li><li>• Is only a small part of the activities shared by those involved</li><li>• Is discontinued when the person being teased becomes upset or objects to the teasing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is based on an imbalance of power and is one-sided</li><li>• Is intended to harm</li><li>• Involves humiliating, cruel, demeaning, or bigoted comments</li><li>• Is meant to diminish the sense of self-worth of the target</li><li>• Includes fear of further taunting or can be a prelude to physical bullying</li><li>• Continues especially when the targeted kid becomes distressed or objects to the taunt</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (2007) Indiana State Fact Sheet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>. Definitions: threatened or attacked with weapon “like a gun, knife, or club.”

<sup>2</sup> Coloroso, B., (2004) *The bully, the bullied, and the bystander: From Preschool to High School – How parents and teachers can help break the cycle of violence*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

## Bullying's Most Likely Victims?

Approximately one-third of all 6th to 10th graders in the United States have been involved in bullying, either as the bully, the target of bullying, or both.<sup>3</sup> A study of middle school students found that, during the school week, 50 percent of children report being bullied in some way: being called names, having rumors spread about them, or even being threatened with physical aggression.<sup>4</sup> And research has found that some bullying starts as early as preschool.<sup>5</sup>

Though there are similarities, both boys and girls say bullies make fun of the way they look or talk. There are also gender differences in the way children typically engage in bullying. Males are more likely to be hit, slapped, or pushed and females are more likely to have rumors or sexual comment made about them.<sup>6</sup>

There are several risk factors that make children more likely to be bullied. Those students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and those who suffer from obesity are more likely than other children to be bullied.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, nearly 90 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth report being verbally harassed or threatened, and almost half are physically bullied because of their sexual orientation.<sup>8</sup> Also, a study of adults showed that 83 percent of respondents who stuttered or stammered as children were bullied.<sup>9</sup>

Research has also found that children are more likely to be involved in bullying in schools where there is a lack of adult supervision during breaks, where teachers and students are indifferent to or accept bullying behavior, and where rules against bullying are not consistently enforced.<sup>10</sup>

Breaking the Myths of Bullying	
Fiction	Fact
Bullying is physical violence.	Bullying may include physical violence, but also includes emotional abuse such as rumor spreading, name calling, and social exclusion.
Bullies are usually loners.	Many bullies aren't isolated, but instead are more socially connected and physically strong than those they bully.
Larger class sizes lead to more bullying.	Most research shows that there is no difference in bullying prevalence between small and large classes. However, one study found that students are bullied more often in smaller classes because the bullies have fewer targets to choose from.
Only boys bully.	Boys and girls bully their peers in different ways. While boys are more physically aggressive, emotional and social bullying is more prominent among girls and is found to be equally as harmful to youth development.
Bullying is a natural part of growing up.	"Bullying is a form of victimization or abuse. Children should be able to attend school and take part in community activities without fear of being harassed, assaulted, belittled, or excluded." <sup>11</sup>
The best way to handle a bully is to fight back.	Bullies are often physically stronger and more socially connected than their targets. This might lead to more negative outcomes for the child being bullied. See our tips on how to help a bullied child.

<sup>3</sup> Nansel, T. Overpeck, M. Pilla, R. Ruan, W., Simons-Morton, B. & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying Behaviors among US Youth: Prevalence and Association with Psychosocial Adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285, 2094-2100.

<sup>4</sup> Nishina, A. & Juvonen, J., (2005). Daily reports of witnessing and experiencing peer harassment in middle school. *Child Development*, 76, 345-450.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson, D. A., Robinson, C. C., & Hart, C. H. (2005). Relational and physical aggression of preschool-age children: Peer status linkages across informants. *Early Education and Development: Special Issue on Relational Aggression in Early Childhood*, 16, 115-139.

<sup>6</sup> Isernhagen, J., & Harris, S. (2003). A Comparison of 9th and 10th Grade Boys' and Girls' Bullying Behaviors in Two States. *Journal of School Violence*, 2(2), 67-80.

<sup>7</sup> Janssen, I., Craig, W.M., Boyce, W.F., Pickett W. (2004). Associations between overweight and obesity with bullying behaviors in school-aged children. *Pediatrics*, 113(5), 1187-94.; and Unnever, J.D., Cornell, D.G. (2003). Bullying, Self-Control, and Adhd. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18(2), 129-147.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009) Bullying Among Children and Youth on Perceptions and Differences in Sexual Orientation. [http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/HHS\\_PSA/pdfs/SBN\\_Facsheet\\_GLB\\_T.pdf](http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/HHS_PSA/pdfs/SBN_Facsheet_GLB_T.pdf) Accessed March, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh-Jones, S. & Smith, P. K. (1999). Self-reports of short and long term effects of bullying on children who stammer. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69, 141-158.

<sup>10</sup> Olweus, D., Limber, S., & Mihalic, S. (1999). Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Nine: Bullying Prevention Program. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009) <http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adult>

## Kids Are Afraid

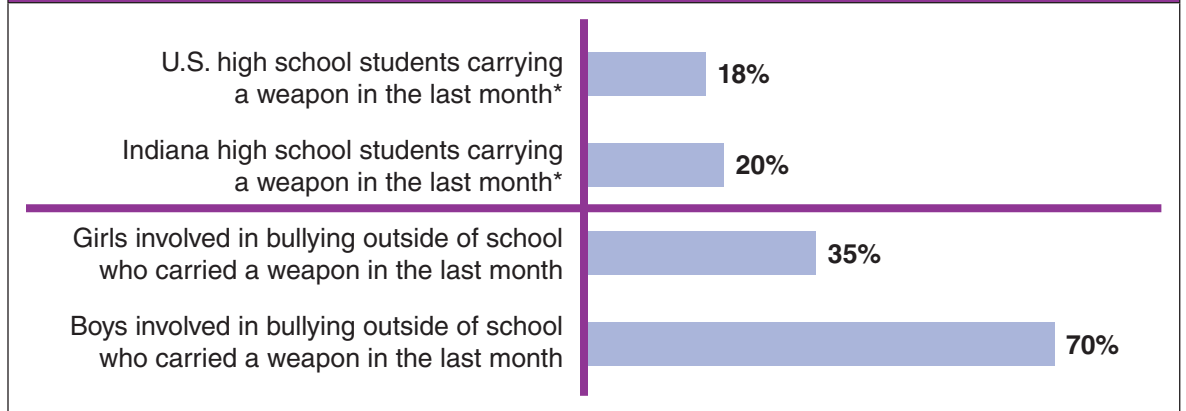
Children are worried about the impact of bullying in their everyday lives. Fifty-five percent between the ages of 8 and 11 – and 70 percent of youth ages 12 to 15 – say that bullying is a “big problem” at school.<sup>12</sup> And bullying topped the list of girls’ safety concerns in one 2003 study. When asked what they worried about the most, responses included being socially ostracized, taunted, or made fun of.<sup>13</sup>

Fear of bullying causes some children to skip school. One in 17 (six percent) Indiana high school students missed at least one day of school last month because they felt unsafe either at school, or on their way to or from school.<sup>14</sup>

Yet even though kids worry about bullying, few are likely to report it to an adult because they’re afraid it will make the situation worse. Over half (61 percent) of students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff because they believed that little or no action would be taken, or the situation could become worse if reported. In their reluctance to talk to an adult, students will often avoid reporting bullying by asking to see the school nurse for various ailments.<sup>15</sup>

There is a considerable disconnect between student reports of bullying intervention and what adults perceive about their interventions. One study showed that 70 percent of teachers believed they intervene “almost always” in bullying

## Prevalence of Youth Carrying a Weapon



Sources: \* Indiana Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007; Nansel et. al, 2003

situations, yet only 25 percent of students agreed with that assessment.<sup>16</sup> Among the small percentage of high school freshmen who said they had told an adult about witnessing or being the target of bullying, nearly two-thirds said “nothing changed” or “things got worse” as a result.<sup>17</sup>

## Links to Violence

Juveniles were far more likely to be victimized between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. on school days than in the same period on non-school days (140 percent more likely). And almost half of the victims of juvenile crime are other juveniles who are acquaintances of the offender.<sup>18</sup>

One of the most striking findings in bullying research is that *children involved in bullying are more likely to carry a weapon than their peers.*<sup>19</sup>

In Indiana, one in five high school students carried a weapon in the last month – a significantly higher rate than the national average.<sup>20</sup> And about one in 10 Indiana children are threatened or injured with a weapon every year.<sup>21</sup>

One national study showed that 70 percent of boys and 35 percent of girls who were involved in bullying outside of school on a weekly basis also carried a weapon.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001 <http://www.talkingwithkids.org/nickelodeon/summary.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Schoenberg, J., Riggins, T., & Salmond, K., (2003) *Feeling Safe: What Girls Say*. Girl Scouts of the USA. New York, N.Y.

<sup>14</sup> *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (2007) Indiana State Fact Sheet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Nishina, A. & Juvonen, J., (2005). Daily reports of witnessing and experiencing peer harassment in middle school. *Child Development*, 76, 345-450.

<sup>16</sup> Charach, A., Pepler, D., & Ziegler, S. (1995). Bullying at school--a Canadian perspective: A survey of problems and suggestions for intervention. *Education Canada*, 35 (1), 12-18. EJ 502 058.

<sup>17</sup> Harris, S., Petrie, G., & Willoughby, W. (2002, March). Bullying among 9th graders: An exploratory study. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 86(630).

<sup>18</sup> OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book. Available: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/victims> Released on March 27, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009) <http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adult>

<sup>20</sup> *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (2007) Indiana State Fact Sheet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>. A weapon is defined as “like a gun, knife, or club.”

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> Nansel, T.R.; Overpeck, M.D.; Haynie, D.L.; Ruan, W.J.; & Scheidt, P.C. (2003) Relationships between bullying and violence among US youth. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 157: 348-353.

Signs a Child May Be a Bully	Signs a Child is Being Bullied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is easily frustrated</li> <li>- Lacks empathy</li> <li>- Seeks status through violence</li> <li>- Makes threats</li> <li>- Has a history of tantrums or uncontrolled outbursts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comes home with torn, damaged, or missing pieces of clothing, books, or other belongings</li> <li>- Seems afraid of going to school, walking to and from school, riding the school bus, or taking part in organized activities with peers</li> <li>- Appears sad, moody, teary, depressed or anxious when he/she comes home</li> </ul>

## Consequences of Bullying

Research shows several long- and short-term consequences may occur when a child has been bullied. Bullied children have poorer physical and mental health than their peers not only as children, but also as they grow into adulthood. Students who are bullied are more likely to experience health problems such as headaches, sleeping problems, and stomach ailments than their un-bullied peers.<sup>23</sup> Academic work and school attendance also suffer when a child has been bullied. In addition, children who are bullied are likely to have lower self-esteem, and higher rates of depression, loneliness, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts than other children. Furthermore, adults who were bullied as children are more likely than their non-bullied peers to be depressed and have low self-esteem as adults.<sup>24</sup>

Even bullies themselves suffer negative outcomes. One researcher noted that bullying is a marker for more serious violent behaviors, including weapon carrying, frequent fighting, and fighting-related injury.<sup>25</sup> In fact, 60 percent of boys who were bullies in middle school had at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24.<sup>26</sup> However, the effects of bullying are not irreversible. Intentional adult intervention can truly make a difference in the lives of all children involved.

## How to Help the Bullied

- Be on the lookout - bullies often take advantage of situations where there is little supervision, so adults such as janitors or bus drivers may be in the best position to prevent bullying.
- Tell the child that you care and are concerned.
- Ask the child what happened and provide an opportunity for him/her to talk openly.
- Remind the child that it's not his/her fault. Assure children that telling you was the right thing to do.
- Gather a complete violence history.
- Encourage the child to share concerns with you and other adults as appropriate.

## How to Help the Bully

- Increase adult supervision in “hot-spots” at school like bathrooms and stairwells where there is little supervision.
- Discuss the seriousness of bullying behavior with the child.
- Ensure parents, teachers, and caregivers provide a consistent approach to the child’s bullying behavior.
- Teach empathy. The following CARE steps may help.<sup>27</sup>
  - o Call attention to uncaring behavior.
  - o Ask the child, “How would you feel?”
  - o Recognize the consequence of the action.
  - o Express and explain your disapproval of the behavior.

## When to Ask for Professional Help

It is important to recognize that sometimes children need more help dealing with bullies than you can provide. Here are a couple of situations when knowing to get extra help for a child may be critical.

- 1) If physical battery occurs, contact local police. In the case of cyber bullying, you should contact the police immediately if it involves acts such as: threats of violence, obscene or harassing phone calls or text messages, stalking, hate crimes, or child pornography.
- 2) Seek a counselor if a child’s day-to-day functioning has been negatively impacted by bullying (e.g., the child is crying, not sleeping, experiencing appetite difficulties, refusing to attend school, or has dropping grades).

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009) <http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adult>

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

<sup>25</sup> Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M. D., Haynie, D. L., Ruan, W. J., & Scheidt, P. C. (2003). Relationships between bullying and violence among U.S. youth. *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 157, 348-353.

<sup>26</sup> Olweus, D. (1993). Victimization by peers: Antecedents and long-term outcomes. In K. H. Rubin & J. B. Asendorf (Eds.), *Social withdrawal, inhibition, and shyness* (pp. 315-341). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. [stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov](http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov)

<sup>27</sup> Bolton, J. Sr., Graeve, S., (2005) No Room for Bullies: From the classroom to cyberspace teaching respect, stopping abuse, and rewarding kindness.

## School-Wide Approach

Since 2005 Indiana has required schools to prohibit bullying on- and off-school grounds, at school activities, traveling to or from school, and while using school provided property or equipment. If bullying is a systemic problem, it may be beneficial to become active with a child's teachers or in a school's PTA/O.

School-wide commitments to end bullying are often more effective than individual cases, though those should not be dismissed. This approach includes changing school and classroom climates by raising awareness about bullying, increasing teacher and parent involvement and supervision, forming clear rules and strong social norms against bullying, and providing support and protection for all students. To be successful, a school-wide approach must involve teachers, principals, students, and everyone associated with the school, including janitors, cafeteria workers, and crossing guards.

## Bullying Resources

- A comprehensive site to use with kids or adults:  
<http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/index.asp>
- Sample contracts you can use to cover ground rules of online use for kids:  
[www.haltabusektd.org](http://www.haltabusektd.org)
- Cyber911 tip line where you can send reports of cyber abuse:  
[www.wiredsafety.com](http://www.wiredsafety.com)
- A composite of information on cyber bullying: [www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)

## Cyberbullying

Internet sites are becoming the new "bathroom wall" of gossip and trash talk. This particular form of harassment has been coined "cyberbullying," and includes using electronic devices, such as email, instant messaging (IM), text messages, mobile phones, and websites, to send or post cruel or harmful messages or images about an individual or group.

Given the difficulties in monitoring online activity, the prevalence of cyberbullying may be vastly unrecognized. Seventeen percent of elementary aged children and 36 percent of middle and high school children report that someone has said threatening or embarrassing things about them through email, instant messages, web sites, chat rooms, or text messages. The Internet makes anonymity easy, so someone who would otherwise not be a bully may quickly become a virtual aggressor. One in five regular Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17 are involved in online aggression. Of them, 15 percent say they were aggressors, and only seven percent reported being a target.

## Tips for protecting children online

- Remind the child not to give out his/her full name or personal info online.
- Tell the child not to write anything online that he/she would not want to be seen on a giant billboard in front of the school the following day.
- Make sure the child knows that it's never okay to threaten anyone online, post embarrassing photos, impersonate others or sign people up for spam.
- Ask the child how they spend their time online. Inquire about blogs he/she visits, who they talk to, and whether he/she has a page on a social networking site.
- Remind the child to always talk to you if he/she experiences something uncomfortable online.

## Learn Abbreviations Kids Use

A3: Anywhere, anyplace, anytime  
ASL: Age/sex/location  
CD9: Code 9 - Parents are around  
DIKU: Do I know you?  
F2F: Face to face  
LMIRL: Let's meet in real life  
PCM: Please call me  
POS: Parent over shoulder  
PRW: Parents are watching

More at [www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)

<sup>28</sup> Olweus, D., Limber, S., & Mihalic, S. (1999). Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Nine: Bullying Prevention Program. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

<sup>29</sup> Fight Crime: Invest in kids. <http://www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/>

<sup>30</sup> Opinion Research Corporation (2006). Prepared for Fight Crime: Invest in Kids <http://www.fightcrime.org/cyberbullying/cyberbullyingpreteen.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Ybarra, M. and Mitchell, K. (2007). Prevalence & frequency of Internet harassment instigation: Implications for adolescent health. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41(2): 189-195. (CV157).

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## Indiana Youth Institute Resources

### **On-the-Road Training - Dealing with Destructive Behaviors: Recognizing, Intervening and Getting Youth the Help They Need**

Dennis Bumgarner, ACSW, LCSW

April 2009 in 8 Indiana cities, for more information, visit: <http://www.iyi.org/trainings>

### **Webinar Featuring Author of *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads***

Rosalind Wiseman

June 2009, for more information, visit: <http://www.iyi.org/trainings>

### **Virginia Beall Ball Library**

A free lending library of books on nonprofit management and youth development.

Need to know how to talk to different age groups of children about bullying?

- *Bully Proof Your Child for Life*, Joel Haber Ph.D.

Want action plans for administrators and teachers or a safe internet use contract?

- *No Room for Bullies*, Bolton & Graeve

For more resources, visit: [www.iyi.org/library](http://www.iyi.org/library)

### **Kids Count in Indiana Data Book and online database**

Find out about the well-being of children in your county.

[www.iyi.org/data](http://www.iyi.org/data)

### **Custom Data Research**

Looking for hard-to-find or location specific information about kids?

[www.iyi.org/datarequest](http://www.iyi.org/datarequest)

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