

Bullying

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Definition

Deliberate psychological, emotional and/or physical harassment of one person by another, or a group, occurring at school or in transit between school and home. Includes exclusion from peer group, intimidation, extortion and violence.

Bullying was identified as one of the major issues facing children and young people, parents, educators and the community at large in the 1990's (Tattum, 1992). Whilst bullying has always occurred, it seems that this behaviour has been underestimated in both its extent and severity. Rigby (1997) estimates that one in 6 Australian children are bullied weekly.

During 2002, Kids Help Line (KHL) received almost 6,000 calls about bullying from young people in Australia. Accounting for 7.8% of all counselling calls, bullying is the fourth most common reason young people seek help from the service. The young people that call KHL regarding bullying identify a variety of reasons for their victimisation. These reasons include:

- ethnicity (the rate of bullying calls from indigenous and non-English speaking callers is higher than for other callers)
- resistance to pressure to behave in a certain way
- physical differences
- high achievement
- being new
- sexual orientation
- socio-economic background

Individuals who have low self-esteem or personal power can also be targeted.

Bullying is ranked as the 3rd most common reason kids younger than 15 phone KHL. In general, males make about a quarter of all calls to KHL. In the case of bullying however, males make almost 40% of calls. This difference is not surprising given that boys are reported as being bullied more often than girls (Rigby, 1997).

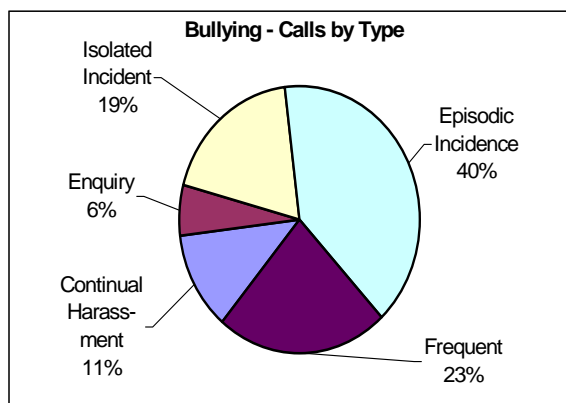
The nature and extent of bullying can vary from direct to indirect harassment, from minor irritants to assaults, to contravention of legislation (sexual harassment, racial abuse, deprivation of human rights). It can include physical, verbal and gesture bullying, extortion and exclusion. The most common form of bullying is verbal harassment. The main differences experienced by males and females is that females are more likely to receive indirect bullying (eg. exclusion) while males are more often threatened and bullied physically ([Tulloch 1995, Owens 1996, Rigby 1996] cited in Rigby, 1997). Lately, there has been a decline in reports of physical bullying due to the fact that it is so overt and therefore more likely to be addressed. Children and young people are bullying in more covert ways.

The table (above right) shows the age of callers who phone about bullying.

5-9 yrs	15%
10-14 yrs	76%
15-18 yrs	9%

Three out of every four calls about bullying are made by 10-14 year olds. These figures suggest that most bullying occurs in late primary school or in the first years of secondary school. This has major implications for parents and educators of children aged between 10 and 14 years.

The graph below shows the frequency of bullying experienced by the children who call KHL. Ninety-four percent of callers have been bullied at least once. More than 10% of callers report experiencing continual harassment while at school.



Analysis of this data shows that 15-18 year olds are more likely to report continual harassment (18%) compared to younger children (11%).

It is dangerous to make generalisations to populations other than the sample from which the results were drawn. However, it seems that bullying is widespread and in many cases, severe.

Why Do People Bully?

There are lots of different reasons people bully. Some reasons identified by young people include:

- They might get power and strength from bullying others.
- As a way to be popular and get known at school.
- Because they are scared, so they try to scare others to hide their feelings.
- Because they are unhappy and take it out on others.
- Because they are being bullied themselves.
- Using bullying as a way to try and be happier.
- As a way to try and fit in.

Children who engage in bullying behaviours also have a right to be treated with respect. Research has found that children who bully may have higher levels of anxiety, stress, depression and self harm.

What Being Bullied Feels Like

Everyone feels lots of things if they are being bullied, see bullying or bully others. **Some** ways people say they feel when they are bullied are:

- * scared * depressed * sad * lonely * stuck
- * confused * worried * embarrassed * sick
- * stupid * not wanting to go out or to school * alone
- * angry * mad * fed up * tired * not safe

How Kids Help Line Can Help

Through the medium of an anonymous, confidential telephone counselling service, KHL aims to empower the children who are being bullied to identify their strengths and competencies in a climate where they are believed, supported and validated. KHL is available to offer support and assistance in any situation.

To address the issue of bullying, change must occur at a variety of levels. The following section includes suggestions for individuals, parents and schools.

What Can I Do If I Am Being Bullied?

Some ideas young people have tried:

- ⊛ avoiding the children who bully
- ⊛ don't see the children who bully alone – it feels safer with others around
- ⊛ calmly walk away from them
- ⊛ don't 'fight' back – it only makes things worse
- ⊛ don't keep it a secret – get support from someone you trust, eg. friend, teacher, school official
- ⊛ calmly talk to the children or young people who bully about what is happening and how you feel
- ⊛ forget about it by doing something you enjoy.

Helping Others Who Are Being Bullied

- ⊙ support someone who is being bullied by making a group or individual decision to respond in a way that clearly communicates, to the children or young people who bully, that bullying is not acceptable
- ⊙ listen to someone who is being bullied and let them talk about how it feels
- ⊙ support someone who is being bullied in the actions they take eg. informing a teacher, school official, etc.

It is important to remember that **doing nothing condones the behaviour.**

Parents Whose Child Is Being Bullied

Based on information from (the "No Bully" website) and Parentline counsellors.

- Listen to your child and make it clear that it is not their fault.
- Talk to other parents, or a support group, about strategies that might help.
- Raise the issue of bullying with your child's school. Find out what the school intends to do and what the current bullying policy is. If not satisfied with the actions of this school, make this clear to the relevant authorities.
- Help your child develop strategies to deal with the bullying. These include communication skills and assertiveness. Encourage the implementation of these strategies. Help them to find ways to change things - help them to see what they can change. Become aware of your own reactions. Your child should not be expected to handle bullying on their own.

Schools

In the school setting, young people experience bullying as a frequent challenge. It is important to counter views that bullying is an inevitable part of school life. The wider community and particularly the adults within it, must take responsibility for making it clear that bullying is an act of violence and will not be tolerated in our society. Schools have an obligation to ensure they are a safe place for all students.

Any meaningful response to bullying must recognise that a whole of community approach is necessary. Such whole school approaches may involve:

- ❖ increasing staff knowledge and awareness of bullying issues
- ❖ gathering information about the current situation and other school's strategies
- ❖ developing a 'common understanding' of bullying within the school
- ❖ consultation with parents, community groups and students to develop an anti-bullying program
- ❖ development of advice/information pamphlets and dissemination
- ❖ intervening in ways that do not model the actions that are unacceptable eg. punishment, blaming, excluding etc.

Australia has laws that protect people over the age of 16 from harassment and discrimination. For children under this age schools are legally liable under the Act.

The bullying-related websites listed below provide information and examples of programs/strategies for young people, parents and schools.

Bullying Related Websites

Dr Rigby's Bullying Page – www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/

No Bully – www.nobully.org.nz

Child and Adolescent Psychological and Educational Resources – http://www.caper.com.au/home_new.htm

Bullying No Way – www.bullyingnoway.com.au

References

Rigby, K. (1997) What children tell us about bullying in schools. *Children Australia*, 22(2), 28-34 .

Tattum, D. (1992) Bullying-a positive response. Paper given at a seminar on school bullying at the Australian Catholic University, Mitchelton Campus, Brisbane.

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For more information

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