

# Bullying

**Bullying is a common problem among school-age children. Gifted and twice-exceptional learners may be vulnerable to its effects. Parents and caregivers can recognize warning signs and provide support.**

According to Dr. Dan Olweus, a Norwegian psychologist who is often considered the pioneer of bullying research, bullying is *when a person 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*. Bullying implies an imbalance of power and can be characterized as direct or indirect. Types of bullying include:

- **Verbal:** derogatory comments, name calling, spreading false rumors, threatening
- **Non-verbal:** social isolation or exclusion
- **Physical:** hitting, damaging personal property, shoving, kicking, or spitting
- **Cyberbullying:** via cell phone, social media, or Internet
- **Harassment:** based on race, color, national origin, gender, disability, or religion

Typically, bullying peaks around the end of elementary and beginning of middle school and declines in high school. In a 2006 study that surveyed 432 gifted learners in 11 states, researchers Jean Sunde Peterson and Karen Ray found that by eighth grade, more than two-thirds of gifted students had been victims of bullying.

Common characteristics of the gifted may make gifted children vulnerable to victimization—with traits such as high self-expectations, asynchronous development, androgyny, intensity, sensitivity, strong sense of social justice, or isolation resulting from the disability of the twice-exceptional learner. These characteristics may also influence how gifted children react to bullying. On the other hand, some of these traits can lead to resilience and empower gifted students as bystanders.

## QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK

### ***What are signs that my child is being bullied?***

Is your child trying to avoid school or social situations? Are there unexplained injuries to self or personal property? Have eating habits, grades, sleeping patterns, or friendships changed? Is your child exhibiting feelings of helplessness?

### ***What can I do if I think my child is being bullied?***

- Ask questions. Listen and obtain as much information as possible.
- Validate the child's experiences; do not blame your child or minimize their feelings. Help them focus on their strengths.
- Encourage your child to speak out to an adult at school and at home when bullying occurs.
- Help children learn to moderate their reactions to the bullying behavior. (Bullies tend to seek those who will give them a strong response.)
- Practice safe exit strategies—learn to walk away or ignore the bully, and seek out a peer especially during less supervised times at school.
- Teach your child the difference between tattling and telling. Explain that *tattling* is done to get someone in trouble; *telling* is done to get someone out of trouble.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

» Bullying is preventable.

» Research shows that bullying behavior can stop over time when adults respond quickly and consistently—sending the message that bullying behavior is not acceptable.

» Parents, teachers, and students can work together using proven tactics to combat bullying. We can teach students how to identify bullying, build problem-solving skills, develop emotional awareness, and encourage others to take a stand.

» Show a commitment to make bullying stop. Bullying has the potential to reoccur, so it requires a commitment and persistence.

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## QUESTIONS PARENTS OFTEN ASK (continued)

### ***What are the consequences/impacts of bullying?***

Chronic bullying can lead to underachievement, depression, anxiety, school absences, negative self-perception and sense of self-worth, and feelings of helplessness. Parents and adults may notice changes in mood or withdrawal. For the bully, there are also consequences. Bullies and victims experience significant emotional problems.

### ***What are some signs that my child may be bullying others?***

In the 2006 study by Peterson and Ray, approximately 16% of gifted students surveyed admitted to being a bully at one point, mainly using verbal bullying behavior. Your child may be bullying others if he or she is getting into verbal or physical fights, being disciplined at school, showing an increase in aggression, has a new circle of friends who are also bullies, or doesn't accept responsibility for his or her actions.

Contrary to popular belief, bullies tend to have a heightened sense of self, and do not typically suffer from low self-esteem. They may even be quite popular. Bullies are often rewarded in some way for their behavior with material or psychological rewards and you may notice new possessions that they did not purchase. Students who bully have a strong need for power and dominance, and find satisfaction in causing others pain and suffering. Because the prognosis for bullies in general is not positive, early intervention is critical and important to their long-term health and well-being.

### ***How can educators and counselors help?***

Studies have shown that zero-tolerance policies are often not effective. Policies, programs, and actions that reward positive behavior, such as restorative justice, have more success. There are several organizations that guide schools as they create anti-bullying programs and school cultures.

### ***Isn't bullying just a part of growing up?***

Bullying is not the same thing as teasing and is not a rite of passage—it is peer aggression and abuse. The same behaviors that occur in bullying situations, such as extortion, sexual harassment, assault, and theft, are considered criminal offenses when they are carried out by adults or by young adults outside the school walls.

### ***When do I engage the help of other adults or escalate the situation?***

If your child is showing signs of stress or depression, it's important to notify the classroom teacher or counselor, and consider seeking professional help. It's important to develop a game plan and to ensure your child feels safe.

If you have not been able to resolve the situation, or you think someone may be in danger, there are ways to get help: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/get-help-now/index.html>



## FOR MORE INFO

### **Browse:**

*Stop Bullying*  
[stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov)

*Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center (For Kids & Teens)*  
[www.pacer.org/bullying](http://www.pacer.org/bullying)

*STOMP Out Bullying*  
[stompoutbullying.org](http://stompoutbullying.org)

### **Download:**

*Sit With Us*  
A free mobile app for IOS and Android that promotes kindness and inclusion in schools.

### **Read:**

More than 50 books for educators, parents, and students on bullying prevention  
[freespirit.com](http://freespirit.com)

### **Implement:**

National Education Association,  
*Alternatives to Zero Tolerance Policies*

*Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*



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