

# Psych Savvy

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Diane Poage  
Director

Joan Bohmann, Ph.D.  
Editor

## **Battling Bullying**

Adapted from *Bullying* by George M. Batsche, Ph.D. NCSP  
Crisis Prevention and Response: A Collection of NASP Resources  
by  
Chris Tower Zafren, NCSP, School Psychologist

**February 2001**

*Jason has just had his fifth write-up for name calling and making threats on the playground.  
Jennifer and Susan have been passing notes to the rest of the sixth grade which identify a fellow student as gay.  
Bob has just been arrested for beating up a student who had been harassing him.  
Jade has threatened to make her Government teacher sorry if she fails her in the class.*

What do these incidents have in common? All involve bullying. Bullying can be manifested as physical or verbal threats, racial or sexual harassment, name-calling or rude gestures, which aim to intimidate, extort or provoke fear in the victim. This harassment usually occurs repeatedly over a period of time and is unprovoked. Boys tend to be more physically aggressive than girls who use more ridicule and teasing in their bullying. Bullies are typically bigger or stronger than their victims. A 1984 study by the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that 25% of students surveyed were seriously concerned about bullies. Bullying is a common occurrence during the school years. Fifteen to 20% of all students will experience some form of bullying before they leave school. Students are not the only target of bullies. A study done in 1993 found that 28% of public school teachers were verbally abused, 15% threatened with injury and 3% were physically attacked during the 1991 school year.

### **Make-up of a Bully**

- May be victimized at home or at school.
- Often comes from a home where parents use physical means of discipline, inconsistent parenting approaches, authoritarian parenting style, condone striking back, and/or have poor social problem-solving skills.
- Is impulsive.
- Has a strong need to dominate others.
- Feels low empathy for victims.
- Has experienced positive attention, success and/or power after being aggressive.
- Tends to feel the victim provoked them.

- Gains social status through bullying.
- Insecure students use bullying to demonstrate power and significance.

### **Outcome for Bullies?**

Bullying is a risk factor for developing antisocial behavior patterns. Long term studies reviewed by Batsche (1999) have found that 25 to 60% of boys identified as bullies in school had at least one conviction by the age of 30 (Olweus 1991; Eron, Huesmann, Dubow, Romanoff and Yarnell (1987).

### **Who are the Victims?**

- Typically boys.
- Students with lower grades.
- Students attending “challenged” schools (low student achievement, vandalism).
- Students who are anxious, insecure, perceived as weak, lonely and unlikely to defend themselves.
- Hot-tempered, restless students who retaliate when provoked.

### **Outcome for Victims?**

Long term exposure to bullying creates a climate of fear and intimidation which makes school an unpleasant place for victims. Students experiencing chronic bullying may skip school, avoid places where the bully lurks, become school phobic or feel they must carry weapons at school.

### **What can Teachers and Parents do to stop bullying?**

- Send a strong message to students and staff that bullying is unacceptable.
- Support victims so that school can be a safe haven.
- Help victims and bullies change their status through counseling, conflict resolution, anger management and assertiveness/social skills training.
- Intervene with bullies when they are young, before the pattern becomes well established. Help them find ways to be important without being tough.
- Develop a student Code of Conduct, which is clearly communicated to students and enforced by staff.
- Involve parents in the intervention process.
- Provide peer group interventions to teach students to make objective evaluations of peer behavior, to stand up to peer pressure, and to increase acceptance of rejected students.
- Survey students and staff to ascertain how pervasive bullying is, how well the school handles bullying and what students believe should be done.
- Provide better playground and lunchroom supervision.
- Increase the number of positive interactions between you and the student.
- Use behavior contracts to reduce bullying behavior and to promote positive social behavior.
- Be alert to students who exhibit bruises, torn clothing, withdrawal, avoidance of recess, the bus or the bathroom, and/or lost possessions/lunch money. They may be victims of bullying.

### **Sources:**

Batsche, G. *Bullying. Crisis Prevention and Response: A Collection of NASP Resources.* 1999 National Association of School Psychologists

Sprick, R. *The Solution Book: a Guide to Classroom Discipline.* Science Research Associates, Inc. 1981