What is Bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, deliberately hurtful behavior that is repeated over a period of time. Bullying is often about an imbalance of power—bullies may use their physical strength, popularity, or something they know about another person to harm or control others.

Forms of bullying

Bullying can take many forms, including verbal, physical, social, and cyberbullying (a form of bullying on digital devices).

- Verbal bullying includes name-calling, teasing, inappropriate comments, threats, and abusive comments
- Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, spitting, tripping, and stealing or damaging possessions
- Social bullying includes deliberately excluding someone from social events, spreading rumors about a person, and embarrassing or humiliating someone
- Cyberbullying includes harassment and abuse via a cell phone, on social media sites, or online

What bullying is not

Bullying is not:

- single occurrences of rejection, nastiness, or spite
- random acts of aggression
- one-time arguments or disagreements

All of these events can cause unhappiness. While falling out with friends or dealing with occasional disagreements may not be pleasant, they are a normal part of the process of learning and growing up. These occasional "dramas" in everyday life are very different from bullying, which is deliberate and repeated aggressive behavior that is intended to cause harm and unhappiness.

Exclusion is one form of bullying.

ABOUT THESE BOOKS

This series of books—*Anti-Bullying Basics*—examines six different aspects of bullying: bullying by groups, bullying by boys, bullying by girls, bullying in cyberspace, bullying by friends, and bullying to "fit in." Each book examines the causes and effects of a particular type of bullying and provides support and practical advice for dealing with bullies. Bullying happens everywhere in society: It often goes unchecked because of the fear it creates, and because people don't take it seriously. But with help, it is always possible to stand up to bullies and to break the cycle of bullying.

Why it's serious

Bullying is serious because it can have a damaging effect on the person being bullied, on the person doing the bullying, and even on the bystanders who witness incidents of bullying. Bullying creates a climate of fear, and bystanders may be anxious that they will be next on the bully's list of targets. The targets, the people who are being bullied, are more likely to lack self-confidence, have low self-esteem, have difficulty concentrating, and suffer from depression and anxiety. People who bully are at greater risk than others of becoming involved in violence and crime. Bullies also have a higher risk of struggling or failing at their school studies. Young people who are both bullies and bullied are at the highest risk of mental health problems later in life. And, both bullies and their targets may have a more difficult time forming healthy relationships as adults.

Getting Pulled In

It can be easy to join in bullying behavior without meaning to. Do you laugh when your friends make fun of someone? Do you forward mean messages or re-post cruel pictures? Take a look at the things you've done that might make another person

Stereotypes

There's no such thing as a typical bully. Many people bully at one time or other but stop when it's pointed out to them that they are doing harm. There's always a danger of being swept along with bullying behavior. Take a look at your own situation and ask if you are acting out of character to keep in with your friends. It's easy to fall into bad, bullying habits without admitting that's what you're doing.

My friend the bully

Hanging out with bullies won't necessarily make you a bad person, but there is a danger that it will change you. Seeing bullying behavior too often can make you become less sensitive to cruel behavior, and you start to view it as normal. Watching others in action, or joining in on the sidelines, can lead you to imitate their behavior even if they're not there. Don't fool yourself that it is harmless—it's just the opposite.

Step in the right direction

If you're concerned that this is happening to you, you're already one step closer to sorting out the problem. The next step is to make sure you don't do it anymore. Apologize to the person you've hurt and promise that you won't do it again. Explain that you weren't intentionally being cruel, but you can see now what damage you did. The biggest step is to take action against the bullies. Tell them that their bullying is not acceptable, that it ruins other people's lives, and that it doesn't make them look cool or clever.

BULLYING Q & A

Is this acceptable?

Q. My friend Carl picks on people all the time, but that's just what he's like. What can I do?

A. First of all, stop thinking that it's acceptable because it's "just the way he is." Every child has the right to go about his or her daily life without being frightened of what Carl might say or do. Once you recognize this, you're in a position to make Carl stop, by trying to reason with him or by getting adults involved in the situation.

Take time to step back and think about your own behavior.