



## Who Gets Bullied?

Groups commonly target people outside their circle of friends. There are times, though, when they turn on their own members. So even if you are part of the group, you may live with the uneasy feeling that

### Why pick on me?

Groups that bully usually pick on anyone whom they define as different. They may focus on such physical features such as a person's size or weight. Teens have been bullied because they are shorter or taller than average, because of their hair color, clothes, or because they wear glasses. Someone might be bullied because they have a scar, acne, or a speech problem. The opposite can also be true, sometimes people are bullied because they are considered good-looking or find it easy to get good grades.

Sometimes, however, a person can become a target of a group even if he or she is a member of that group. The target may be threatened that she will not longer be a part of the group if she refuses to do something the group wants, perhaps. This type of bullying within the group is particularly common among pre-adolescent girls.

When bullies target people they consider "different," people of others religions are sometimes bullied.

### Choosing to see difference

Bullying groups also target people whom they define as different concerning more meaningful traits. People may be bullied because of their race, religion, or culture; because they have special needs; or because they define themselves as gay. If a group is into bullying, however, they may not choose someone because of a meaningful trait. They often focus on any tiny difference as an excuse, singling out people who are shy, quiet, new in school, or who have few friends to protect them. Bullies will pick on anyone they think they can get away with bullying.

## BULLIED FOR BEING GAY



Ben was 13 years old when he came out to a friend about his sexual preference. He confided to a friend that he was gay; but that friend told his closest buddy, and word got around the whole school. Soon after, text messages were sent linking Ben's name with a teacher and implying they were involved sexually. Links to pornography sites appeared on Ben's Facebook page. Then the violence started. The group of bullies giving Ben a problem began beating him at school. In the end, Ben had to tell his dad, who spoke to the principal. After the school launched a campaign to combat bullies targeting gay students, things slowly improved. In high school, Ben felt alone and defenseless, especially when he was bullied. When he graduated from high school and entered college, however, he found a large group of supportive friends.



## Effects of Group Bullying

Being bullied by a group can be a very damaging experience. If you are a confident person, you may be able to shrug it off and not let it get to you. However, for many young people who are less confident and more vulnerable, the effects can last for years.



Some teens who are bullied develop eating disorders.

### Effects on self-image

Almost all teens who have been bullied experience a drop in self-confidence. Being bullied can easily alter a person's self-image and self-esteem. You may start to feel you are weak and worthless. It can be hard not to let the bullies' comments about you affect how you see yourself.

### Eating disorders and self-harm

Some teens who are bullied may skip meals, and some may develop eating disorders. Sometimes teens who are bullied also harm themselves, for example, by cutting themselves. A few consider suicide as the only way to stop the bullying. Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people. Experts cannot track exactly how many suicides result from bullying. A study by Yale University, however, showed that children who were bullied were between two to nine times more likely to consider suicide.

You may start to blame yourself for the bullying, but that is exactly what the bullies want. Try to be kind to yourself. Do things you enjoy, eat regular meals, and get enough sleep—all of these things will help you feel better about yourself. Finding a person you trust—preferably an adult—with whom you can share your feelings and thoughts will also be of great help. No one deserves to be bullied or should have to put up with it.



### STARTING OVER

Olivia was 14 when a group of girls started picking on her and saying she was fat. Olivia took the bullying to heart. She looked in the mirror and hated what she saw. She began to skip meals and lost a lot of weight, but the bullying went on. She secretly began to cut her arms, legs, and stomach with a razor. This went on for two years. Then one day she caught sight of her poor, abused body in a mirror. She realized she had to stop self-harming. Olivia talked to a guidance counselor at her school, even though it was really hard for her to admit to the problems she was having. The counselor helped her to find a therapist who specialized in the types of problems Olivia was having. It was hard work, but the therapy helped. Olivia changed schools and made new friends who supported her and helped her to like herself again.



Be kind to yourself—find something you really enjoy doing.