

Bullying Hurts

by Katherine McKenny and Joanne Cummings

A young boy is being teased and mocked by several kids, while a crowd looks on. “Loser!”... “Freak!” they call him. No one sticks up for him and the boy is left feeling alone and helpless.

At some point, the majority of Canadian youth will become involved in bullying, either as the aggressor, the victim, or both. Whether temporary or long lasting, involvement in bullying hurts and often harms. Compared to children who don't bully, those who bully are more likely to develop problems within relationships, such as aggression, sexual harassment, and dating aggression; to abuse drugs and alcohol, and to become involved in delinquency and gangs. Children who are victimized are at risk for depression, anxiety, physical complaints (e.g., headaches and stomach aches), school dropout, and aggression. Children who repeatedly see bullying taking place may become less sensitive to the pain of others and/or may feel anxious that they might be the next target of bullying.

The results of a recent World Health Organization (WHO) study showed that approximately 36% of girls and 48% of boys reported bullying others, whereas 24% of girls and 38% of boys reported being victimized. How does Canada compare to other countries? Out of 35 countries, Canada had the 10th highest rank for bullying and the 9th highest rank for victimization (Craig & Harel, 2004). We clearly have a lot of work to do to ensure the safety of Canadian children and youth.

It's About Power and Respect

Bullying is a form of aggression based on unequal power — children who bully ** have more power than children who are victimized. This power can come from a physical advantage such as size and strength, but

also through a social advantage such as a dominant social role (e.g. team captain vs. team member), higher social status (e.g., a popular child vs. one with few friends), or strength in numbers (e.g., several children targeting a single child). The child who bullies may also have a power advantage by knowing what another child is sensitive about and using that knowledge to cause pain or humiliation.

We understand bullying as a *disrespectful relationship problem*. As bullying unfolds over time, the power imbalance between the child who bullies and the child who is being victimized gets stronger and stronger. The child who bullies is learning to use power and aggression to control and distress others; the child who is victimized becomes increasingly powerless and unable to escape from this abusive relationship.

How Do Leaders Know if a Child is Involved in Bullying?

Bullying is usually hidden from adults. Look for the following clues:

Signs of being bullied:

- ☛ Afraid to go to school or other activities
- ☛ Appear anxious or fearful
- ☛ Low self-esteem and make negative comments
- ☛ Complain of feeling unwell
- ☛ Lower interest in activities and performance
- ☛ Lose things, need money, report being hungry
- ☛ Injuries, bruising, damaged clothing or articles
- ☛ Appear unhappy, irritable
- ☛ Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- ☛ Threatens to hurt themselves or others
- ☛ May appear isolated from the peer group.

Signs of bullying others:

- ☛ Aggressive with parents, siblings, pets, and friends
- ☛ Low concern for others' feelings
- ☛ Bossy and manipulative behaviour

- ☛ Unexplained objects or money
- ☛ Secretive about possessions and activities
- ☛ Holds a positive view of aggression
- ☛ Easily frustrated and quick to anger
- ☛ Does not recognize impact of his/her behaviour
- ☛ Has friends who bully and are aggressive
- ☛ Child has trouble standing up to peer pressure.

Over the next year, PREVNet will contribute articles on how to prevent and intervene in bullying situations, information about specific forms of bullying, and strategies that leaders can employ to ensure that youth in every Scout group across Canada have safe and healthy relationships. Please visit www.prevnet.ca for more information about bullying and how you can help stop it. X

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PREVNet
Partnership

Launched in 2006, PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence) consists of Canadian researchers, child/youth focused national organizations (including Scouts Canada), and governments working together to promote safe and healthy relationships for all Canadian children and youth. Through our partnerships, we are developing a national strategy to address bullying in Canada.

** In writing and speaking about bullying problems, PREVNet tries to avoid using labels such as bully and victim. Through research, we have come to recognize that bullying unfolds within the context of relationships, in part, as a function of group dynamics, rather than arising solely from an individual's personal characteristics or stable traits.