

# Helping Youth handle Bullying

**Christine Waanders, PhD**

Psychologist and Clinical Consultant on Aggression and Bullying

Center for Violence Prevention

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

# Goals for Today

- ▶ Review key information on bullying
- ▶ Review helpful steps and strategies adults can use
- ▶ Learn what can be expected of the schools
- ▶ Consider case examples

## Questions to consider...

What forms can bullying take?

Why do some kids get bullied, while others are never targeted?

Anything that sets a child apart can make them a target for bullying:



# Distinguishing between Aggression and Bullying

Aggression = mean, hurtful  
behavior

Bullying = mean, hurtful  
behavior done intentionally,  
repeatedly, and in the context  
of a power difference

# Types of Aggression and Bullying

- ▶ Physical
- ▶ Verbal
- ▶ Social/Relational
- ▶ Cyber

# Bullying in Schools

Directly affects 20-30% of students



Happens on the playground, in lunchroom, hallways and online



In schools where there is more bullying, the school climate is worse

# Developmental Patterns of Aggression

## Preschool Years

- Physical Aggression is most prevalent
- Relational/Social Aggression emerges, but overt

## Elementary Years

- Physical and Verbal Aggression are Prevalent
- In later elementary grades physical aggression declines and relational aggression rises, done covertly

## Middle and High School Years

- Relational Aggression is more prevalent than Physical Aggression
- Cyberbullying increases



# Gender and Aggression

Boys engage in more Physical Aggression than girls do

Boys engage in similar rates of Relational Aggression to girls

Girls engage in more Relational than Physical Aggression

The most severe Relational Aggression is done by girls

Girls and Boys engage in similar rates of Cyberbullying

Girls are 3x more likely to be the victims of Cyberbullying

# Special Populations at Risk for Bullying

- ▶ Youth with ADHD, ASD and other learning and developmental disorders are more frequent targets of bullying
- ▶ 44% of kids with Autism report (or their parents report) a bullying experience
  - ▶ Higher when there's comorbid ADHD
  - ▶ Hyperactivity and impulsivity are associated with higher rates of bullying and victimization

# Risks for LGBTQ students

Almost 60% of LGBTQ youth report feeling unsafe at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation

45% of LGBTQ youth felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

70% of LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed and 29% reported being physically harassed at school in the past year.

# Correlates and Negative Outcomes for Kids who Bully

Have trouble controlling emotions

Have problem-solving deficits

Have more academic problems

Have more relationship problems

Are at greater risk of engaging in more serious violence if they bully physically

Are at risk for anxiety/depression if they bully relationally

# Negative Outcomes for Kids who are Bullied

Sadness, Loneliness, Depression

Anxiety

Poor Self-Esteem

School Avoidance

Suicidality

## More about Cyberbullying

Intentionally mean behavior carried out via mobile phone, video game systems, social networking sites or apps (Instagram, Snapchat)

Examples - sending hurtful texts; posting embarrassing comments or pictures; excluding peers from group chat; verbal bullying during online game play.

# Unique aspects of Cyberbullying

Even one instance is harmful because it's hard to escape and the audience is large

It's difficult to delete aggressive posts, pictures, and videos

Cyberbullying is often under-reported to adults

Cyberbullying is not always limited to cyber-space

# Recognize the Signs that a child is being bullied

Headaches and stomachaches

Trouble sleeping

School avoidance

Declining grades

Complaints about peers

Complaints about lunch & recess

Unexplained bruises or injuries



# Address Bullying

Take time to ask about children's experiences with peer aggression and bullying, both as perpetrators and victims

Questions to ask:

- ▶ Is there a lot of aggression and bullying at your school? Has it happened to you?
- ▶ Are you ever mean or aggressive to other kids at school?
- ▶ How long has it been going on?
- ▶ How have you handled it so far?
- ▶ Do you know who you can talk to about it?

# Helping youth with bullying

## Talk

Talk with youth about upsetting experiences, hear what happened and offer support

## Validate

Validate their feelings and let them know that they deserve to be treated with respect/feel safe

## Involve

Involve the child in planning the response and setting up supports

## Consider

Consider the family's resources/ability to advocate

# Helping Youth who Bully

## Say

Say, “I can understand why you fight sometimes, but I’d like to help you find other ways of acting when you’re angry/frustrated.”

## Ask

Find out more about their reasons for being aggressive. “I heard you got in trouble for fighting. What happened? What led up to that decision?”

## Encourage

Encourage parents/guardians to show the child positive coping techniques, and to expand the child’s positive, supervised social activities.

## Connect

Connect the child with a therapist or school counselor to work on coping skills, emotional or behavioral regulation

# When it's Aggression and not Bullying

- ▶ Aggression can result from our misinterpretation of other people's intentions.
- ▶ Hostile Attribution Bias is when we see hostile intent in neutral or ambiguous situations
  - ▶ Cognitive Styles take time to change
  - ▶ Start the process by asking kids to try to Assume an Accident when they're not 100% sure someone was mean to them on purpose.
  - ▶ This leads to letting things go...so they can move on with their day—drama-free.

# Working on Next Steps

- ▶ Encourage youth/guardian to report bullying to the school
- ▶ Identify adults who can help ensure the child's safety
- ▶ Encourage them to reach out to the teacher, counselor and principal and ask for action
- ▶ Help family decide if the child would benefit from supportive counseling
- ▶ Encourage family to engage the child in positive activities and friendships outside of school

# What to ask of the school

- ▶ An investigation!
- ▶ A written safety plan, naming one or two adults the child can check in with each day
- ▶ Environmental changes/interventions that could stop the bullying
  - Add supervision at bathroom or recess
  - Move seats in the lunchroom
  - Switch classroom for victim or bully
  - Arrange early dismissal to minimize contact
- ▶ Avoid holding a meeting between the bully and target of bullying. This cannot be mediated.

# Guidance for Reporting Bullying

- ▶ Advise kids/guardians to gather evidence (e.g., photos, screenshots)
- ▶ Put concerns in writing as opposed to a phone call
- ▶ Log communication with school personnel (dates, content)
- ▶ If principal is not responsive, contact district's supervisor of Student Services or supervisor of Special Education Services, when relevant.
- ▶ If school is not taking action, call district phone numbers or state hotline
  - ▶ **Bullying Prevention Consultation Line 1-866-716-0424**
- ▶ Cyberbullying, Physical assaults, and Harassment based on disability, race, gender or sexual identity can be reported to the police

# For extreme cases, Guardians can write a “Gebser Letter” to threaten legal action

- ▶ Google “Gebser Letter” to see an example

- ▶ <https://adayinourshoes.com/wp-content/uploads/Sample-Gebser-Letter.pdf>

Dear x: {superintendent and each school board member, special ed director, etc. I am writing on behalf of my child, [insert name, dob] who is a {insert protected class here-race, disability, etc.} student attending (name of school) in the School District. S/he is being discriminated against and bullied repeatedly during her school days. {insert how the discrimination excluded your child from continued participation in school or denied your child the benefits to which other students in school have access, and be specific} This is prohibiting her from being able to access her education by/because {insert how it is interfering with her education}

(Your) school district receives federal funds for which it contracts to not discriminate. You have the authority to investigate and correct this discrimination. You have control over the site and personnel where the discrimination occurs. If you do not investigate and correct the problem, we may claim that you and the district are deliberately indifferent to the discrimination. If you do not correct unlawful discrimination, you may be liable personally for damages, and the school district may also be liable for damages.



[Follow-up on a tip](#) [Submit an anonymous tip online](#)



1-844-SAF2SAY  
723-2729



[WHAT IS  
SAFE2SAY  
SOMETHING?](#)

[FOR  
STUDENTS](#)

[FOR  
PARENTS &  
EDUCATORS](#)

[FREQUENTLY  
ASKED  
QUESTIONS](#)



# What is Safe2Say Something?

# Case Example 1

During a visit, your client groans, slouches, and says hopelessly: “A new school year, back to the bullying...” When you ask what she means, she says that she’s been bullied by several different kids over the past two years of middle school.

Discuss: What can you do or offer this child?

## Case Example 2

- ▶ Your 15-year-old client describes an upsetting incident that happened during remote learning: a classmate took an unflattering screenshot of her during class and posted it on Instagram for other kids at school to see. They called her names and made fun of her.
- ▶ Discuss: How would you approach this conversation? How could you support this girl?

## Case Example 3

- ▶ During an initial visit you ask whether your client has experienced any bullying. Her guardian reports that the girl came home upset one day, saying that two other girls followed her home from school, throwing things at her along the way.
- ▶ How could you help the family handle this?

Thank you!

- ▶ FOR FAMILY RESOURCES OR INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTER FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION, VISIT [www.chop.edu/violence](http://www.chop.edu/violence)