



# Victim Services of Waterloo Region

## Fact Sheet on Bullying

### What is Bullying?

Bullying is an interaction in which a dominant individual (the bully) repeatedly exhibits aggressive behaviour intended to cause distress to a less dominant individual (the victim).

Children who are involved in bullying and victimization are at risk for developing problems later in life. Criminality, school drop out, unemployment, depression, anxiety, and reduced attainment and competence in adulthood are just some of the problems that result from being bullied or victimized in childhood.

School-aged children in Canada are *either* bullies (14%) or victims (5%) - there is little overlap. There are a higher percentage of boys involved in bullying than girls, and more girls report being victimized than boys.

### Profile of a Bully

Bullying was associated with externalizing problems, but not internalizing problems. Children who bully are also displaying other antisocial behaviours:

- ❑ Physical aggression
- ❑ Indirect aggression
- ❑ Hyperactivity
- ❑ Engagement in property crimes.
- ❑ Aggressive toward their peers, teachers, parents, siblings, and others.
- ❑ Active and assertive
- ❑ Easily provoked
- ❑ Attracted to situations with aggressive content.
- ❑ Little or no empathy towards victim
- ❑ No remorse about bullying
- ❑ Disruptive behaviour
- ❑ Inattentive

*These behaviours become more stable with age.*

### Profile of a Bullying Victim

Children who are victimized exhibit some of these same externalizing behaviours but are better characterized by the internalizing problems they have, such as:

- ❑ Anxiety and/or depression
- ❑ Unhappiness
- ❑ Emotional difficulties
- ❑ Passive and weak personalities
- ❑ Lacking self confidence
- ❑ Low self esteem
- ❑ Unpopular with other children
- ❑ Withdrawn, not as sociable

Bullying behaviour has long term negative consequences for all those involved; bullies and victims alike.

### The Role of the Parents

According to *Bullying and Victimization Among Canadian School Children* (Craig, Peters and Konarski; 1998), bullying starts at home. "Parents, perhaps stressed because of poor finances, tend to have poor interactions with their children. These parents may be:

- ❑ Hostile
- ❑ Harsh
- ❑ Inconsistent in the enforcement of their rules

The lack of positive interactions between parent and child serves to perpetuate aggressive behaviour and bullying.

More surprisingly, victimization begins at home too. Children who are victimized come from families with a similar profile but these children react very differently. As in the case of bullying,

Cont'd on reverse...

children who are victimized come from homes where:

- ❑ There are few positive interactions
- ❑ Many hostile interactions
- ❑ Harsh and inconsistent punishment practices"

## The Role Peers Play

Eighty five percent of bullying episodes occur in the context of a peer group, and eighty three percent feel uncomfortable watching, however they often participate in the following behaviours: joining in, cheering, passively watching, and occasionally intervening.

*Peers who form the audience for bullying may be critical in starting and supporting it.*

Peers tend to give positive attention to the bully, rather than the victim. Their reinforcement of the bully may serve to maintain the bully's power over the victim and within the peer group.

- ❑ The bully may also affect the peers who are watching.
- ❑ Peers who watch bullying may become excited and more likely to join in.
- ❑ Boys are more likely to be drawn into bullying episodes and become actively involved in the bullying.
- ❑ Through intervening, peers may also stop and reduce bullying.
- ❑ In playground observations, peers intervene in significantly more episodes than adults.

## What Role does the School Play?

As a major means of child socialization, schools must strike a balance between clear, consistent discipline and warm, supportive relationships. Zero tolerance rules must be enforced fairly.

Bullying interventions must focus beyond the bully and the victim to include peers, school staff, parents, and the broader community. A comprehensive anti-bullying approach can reduce bullying. The central feature of the intervention is a clearly stated code of behaviour with consistent and supportive follow-through. It takes considerable time to bring about both attitudinal and behavioural changes among the staff, students, and parents in the school community.

**School Staff.** Motivation and support from the school staff are essential. All school staff should be educated on bullying and, together with parent and student representatives, should be responsible for updating the code of behaviour and its consequences. When teachers recognize the problem of bullying and their central role in reducing it, they supervise actively and intervene to stop bullying.

**Parents.** Meetings and newsletters should inform parents about the problems of bullying. Parents should talk to their children about bullying and be aware of signs of potential victimization. Communication between parents and the school is essential, as parents are often the first to know that their children are being victimized.

**Peers.** Peers play a critical role in bullying. Interventions must aim to change attitudes behaviours and norms around bullying for all children in a school. With teachers' support, they can develop strategies for intervening themselves or seeking adult assistance to stop bullying. Promote attitudes in the peer group which support empathy for the victim and condemn aggression will reduce bullying.

**Bullies and Victims.** Children involved as bullies and victims require individual attention. Talks with bullies should emphasize that bullying is not acceptable and point out the consequences established in the code of behaviour. If a group of children is involved in bullying, the bully and bystanders should be held accountable. Encourage victims to speak up, and confirm the school's intention to ensure that they are protected from further harassment. Talks with parents should inform them of their children's difficulties and enlist their cooperation in disciplining bullying behaviour and/or monitoring for further occurrences of bullying or victimization.



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