

# Bullying 101:

## Guide for Middle and High School Students

*A guide to the basics of bullying, what it is and isn't, the role of students, and tips on what you can do.*



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# What Is Bullying?

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A lot of teens describe bullying as, "When someone tries to make you feel less about who you are as a person, and you aren't able to make it stop."

Bullying is different from the typical disagreements or arguments between friends and classmates. What's the difference?

It's bullying if:

- The person is being hurt, harmed or humiliated with words or behavior.
- The behavior is repeated, though it can be a single incident.
- It is being done intentionally.
- The person being hurt has a hard time defending themselves from the behavior.
- The student(s) who are doing it have more power.\*

\* "Power" can include such things as being older, being physically bigger or stronger, having more social status, or when a group of students "gang up" on someone.

**Note:** Definitions vary greatly. This is not a legal definition. Find your state's law and definition at [StopBullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov)

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# How Is Someone Bullied?

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## How Is Someone Bullied?

Bullying can take many forms: face to face, whispered comments, notes passed, hurtful things written on bathroom walls, humiliation in front of a group, gossip and rumors, telling stories about someone when they're unable to defend themselves.

*All of these instances of bullying can take place in the classroom or hallway, on the bus or in the locker room, while at lunch or playing at recess.*

Bullying can also happen through social media, texts, and photos shared via phones, tablets, or computers. When technology is used to bully someone, it's called cyberbullying. Specific instances of cyberbullying include sending mean text messages, making fun of someone's post, sharing videos, stories, or photos that ridicule or humiliate someone, "trolling" someone to the point of harassment, posting personal information about someone else on the internet, and spreading rumors or gossip.

Cyberbullying can be verbal, sexual, or emotional in nature.



# “What Are the Types of Bullying?”

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## Physical

This form of bullying is usually visible, and therefore easy to recognize. Think about the stereotypical movie scenes when someone knocks someone else’s books out of their hands or pushes them up against a locker. Depending on the nature and severity of the contact, anyone who physically bullies usually faces consequences like detention, suspension, or expulsion. Examples of physical bullying include pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, biting, hair pulling, inappropriate touching, breaking objects, and taking or damaging another’s possessions.

## Verbal

Using words, either out loud or in writing, is a common type of bullying because it’s quick, often done impulsively to elicit a response (and getting a response is typically the goal of bullying). Verbal bullying is also easier to do without catching the attention of adults, making it harder to detect and more difficult to enforce. Examples include teasing, name calling, threats, intimidation, demeaning jokes, rumors, gossip, and slander –all of which can occur both in person or online.

# “What Are the Types of Bullying?”

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## **Sexual**

Not everyone thinks of unwanted sexual contact or comments (both in-person or online) as bullying. It's also often difficult to talk about as it can be very personal and confusing, especially if it's coming from someone whom you had a relationship with or thought you could trust. It can include using demeaning words about someone's gender or sexuality, spreading rumors of a sexual nature that harm a person's reputation, unwanted and inappropriate touching or physical contact, sharing personal information about relationships, or posting inappropriate photos online.

## **Emotional**

Emotional bullying can be subtle and difficult to detect. It's calculated and manipulative. It can be perpetuated by a single person, but is most often executed by a group. Emotional bullying can be extremely damaging and traumatic. It's targeted at a person's sense of self, causing them to question their self-worth and usually results in low or a complete lack of self-esteem. Emotional bullying, whether it's done in-person or online, could be excluding someone from a group or purposely leaving them out of activities, threatening to hurt or harm someone, telling lies in order to hurt another person's reputation, and humiliating someone publicly.

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# How Often?

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**Does bullying happen more often than adults know? YES!**

A few reasons include:

**1. Physical pain is often noticed, while emotional pain can be hidden**

Most bullying harms young people emotionally rather than physically, making it harder for adults and your peers to identify both the bullying itself and its impact.

Bullying through intimidation, manipulation, gossip, rumors, threatening to reveal secrets, or social exclusion usually can't be seen. To make it more complicated, students often guard their emotions and don't reveal what they are truly feeling.



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# How Often?

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## 2. Happens outside the view of adults

Bullying happens most often occurs with whispered words, through gossip or rumors told from person to person. It happens in dark corners of hallways, on the school bus, and places where no adults are present.

In addition to kids bullying outside the view of adults in the physical world, it's especially true online. Kids are hanging out in places that adults don't have access to, like group chats, gaming platforms, and social media sites designed for teens.

## 3. Youth don't tell

In addition to the fact that adults do not witness the bullying, the kids who are experiencing it often do not tell their parents or their teachers. Research shows that 57 percent of children who are bullied do not notify an adult at school.

Because adults often don't know about bullying, it's especially important to find a caring adult to confide in. When a parent or teacher knows what's going on, they are in a much better position to help change it for the better.

Often, bullying only stops when an adult gets involved.

# “ Who Is Involved? ”

There are three potential roles in a bullying situation:

1. Targets = The individual(s) to whom the behavior is directed
2. Those who bully = The individual(s) who are directing the behavior
3. Witnesses = The individual(s) who see or know of the behavior





# “ Who Is Involved? ”

## Who is targeted by bullying?

Bullying behavior could be directed at the shy, quiet student, or the class tough guy. Research shows that students who are perceived to be different in some way—whether it’s height or weight or the clothes they wear; it might also be because of their disability, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, or gender—are at an increased risk of being bullied.



It’s important to recognize that bullying can happen to ANYONE.

# “ Who Is Involved? ”

## Who does the bullying?

While there are stereotypes about those that bully—scary tough guys with short tempers and intimidating qualities—it’s not appearance that defines who bullies; it’s behavior. Bullying is an action, not a personality trait. Girls bully, boys bully, preschool kids bully, and high school kids bully. Students who bully can be any size, age, grade, or gender.

There is no single characteristic or personality trait that indicates who bullies others.



# “ Who Is Involved? ”

The next question is who witnesses bullying?

*Almost all kids see bullying happen at some point.*

They may not be getting bullied nor the ones doing the bullying, but witnesses are important because their reactions can have a direct impact on the bullying situation. When a group is watching a fight, there might be some who see what's happening and then walk away; others who continue watching, but say nothing; and then there might be those who cheer on the violence. Each response can affect the outcomes of a bullying situation.



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# Who Is Involved?

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## Can someone play more than one role?

*Yes! It's often the case that being bullied, doing the bullying, or witnessing bullying are not distinct categories!*

It's more common that kids play multiple roles throughout the day. Someone who was bullied on the bus in the morning might be the one who makes fun of a younger kid that afternoon. The kid who laughed while watching a fight yesterday might ask the new kid with no friends to sit with him at lunch today. The individual who was the target of a vicious rumor on social media might spread gossip about a former friend during lunch the next day. When thinking about who is involved in bullying, it's important to not strictly label individuals. Calling someone a bully doesn't factor everything that they may be experiencing. Because bullying is about behavior, roles can be complex and complicated; there often aren't clear-cut villains or heroes. But that also means we're all capable of altering that behavior and preventing bullying.



# “ Why Does It matter? ”

*In the United States, more than 20% of students report being bullied.*

That's more than one of every five students. They are often scared to go to school. That means those students lose the opportunity to learn. It is every student's right to feel safe – and be safe – in school. Students who are bullied may also have lower self-esteem, less self-confidence, increased fear and anxiety, depression, lower grades, and even suicidal thoughts.

It's not just the targets of bullying who are affected. Students who bully grow up to have a greater risk of getting in trouble with the law. By the age of 25, one in four who have bullied will have spent time in jail.

Those who witness bullying often express that they feel less safe at school. Their feelings about seeing the bullying range from anger to guilt to fear, and they often wish they could help but don't know how.

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# “What If I’m Being Bullied?”

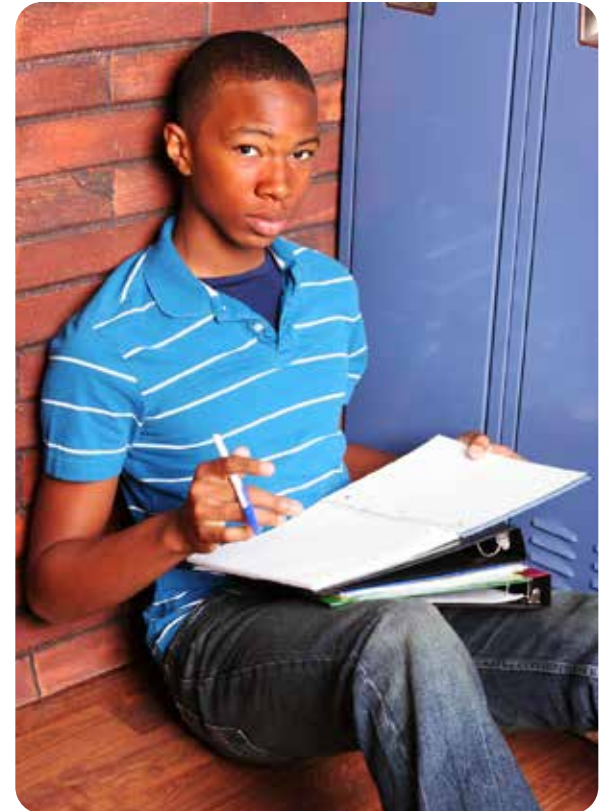
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## Be a Self-advocate

Being a “self-advocate” means speaking up for yourself, telling people what you need, and taking action. Bullying can be stopped, but you need a plan. First, think about what you can do to change your situation, and then make an action plan.

In the plan:

- Write down what is happening to you, when and where it takes place, and who is involved.
- List your role in this action plan, who else should be involved, and what they could do.
- Share this information with your parents and an adult you trust at school.



# “What If I’m Being Bullied?”

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## Assert Your Rights

Every student has the right to feel safe at school. If one adult isn’t able to help you, don’t give up! It is your right to talk with another adult, such as a parent. When you do speak to a teacher, an administrator, or a person you trust at school:

- Share all of the information in your action plan.
- Ask: “What can be done so I feel safe and other kids do, too?”
- Tell adults that there are laws outlining the school’s responsibility in handling bullying situations.

*There are federal, state and local laws – and school policy – which provide additional protections from bullying.*



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# What If I Am Bullying?

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What's so great about hurting someone? Teasing, tripping, punching, kicking, texting, excluding, ignoring, hazing – it really says more about you than them. Think about it:

**Think no one cares if you bully someone?**

Think again. Parents, teachers, classmates and friends all care, but mostly the person being bullied cares. The bigger question is why don't you care?

**Think you'll feel better about yourself if you bully someone?**

Jealous, huh? Not as good, smart, attractive or popular as someone? Join the club. Why not try working with or learning from someone as opposed to bullying them and make a friend in the process?

**Think you won't be part of the 'in-crowd' if you don't bully?**

So, you're okay with being bullied into being accepted? Bully or be bullied? Either way you lose. Stand up for yourself and if people don't like you for who you are, then you really don't want them as friends anyway.





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# What If I Am Bullying?

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## **Think its okay to bully someone if you have been bullied?**

How does taking out your frustration on someone else make anything better? Talking with a trusted friend or adult would be much more productive than seeking the approval from the person who bullied you.

## **Think you'll get attention if you bully?**

Think detention! If you bully, you're likely to get caught sooner or later. Who's attention would you rather draw: the detention officer or your skating buddies, your angry parents or your shopping sistas? Why not spend your time with someone you like rather than demanding attention from someone you don't?

## **Think you're in control?**

Think about why you are bullying: to be liked, to get back at someone, to feel better about yourself? Whatever it is, find someone you trust and start talking.



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# What If I Am Bullying?

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*“It’s none of my business—I should just ignore it and walk away—right?”*

## **Wrong!**

Put yourself in the target’s place. If you were being pushed around, laughed at, gossiped about, made fun of or, ignored on purpose, you’d probably want someone to help you out.

And it doesn’t even take that much to make a difference. The very least you could do is to **NOT** join in. Your non-support of someone bullying sends a clear message that you don’t agree with what’s happening. If you see someone being laughed at, instead of turning your back, help the target to turn his or her back to the bullying by walking to class with him or her or, telling them that they don’t deserve what’s happening to them. Show your support. Kids who are bullied often feel like no one cares—help them feel like they’re not alone.



# “What If I Witness Bullying?”

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## What else can you do?

If you read cyberbullying, write something nice on the target’s wall or let the person bullying know it’s not cool to make fun of people online, or you can even report it anonymously and many service providers will remove the post.

But if it’s a fight you witness, don’t try to step in the middle. Instead, tell an adult or other authority figure what’s going on so that they can intervene.

You can always let your teachers and parents know so they can help out—bullying is not just about physical fights; words have the power to injure too, both online in and person. Teachers are there to help you out, not just give you homework, and parents care about what happens to you.

## What can make an even bigger difference?

Get your friends to help out, too! This is an issue that affects a lot of people and most of them want it to stop too, so get together and start a bullying prevention program at school.



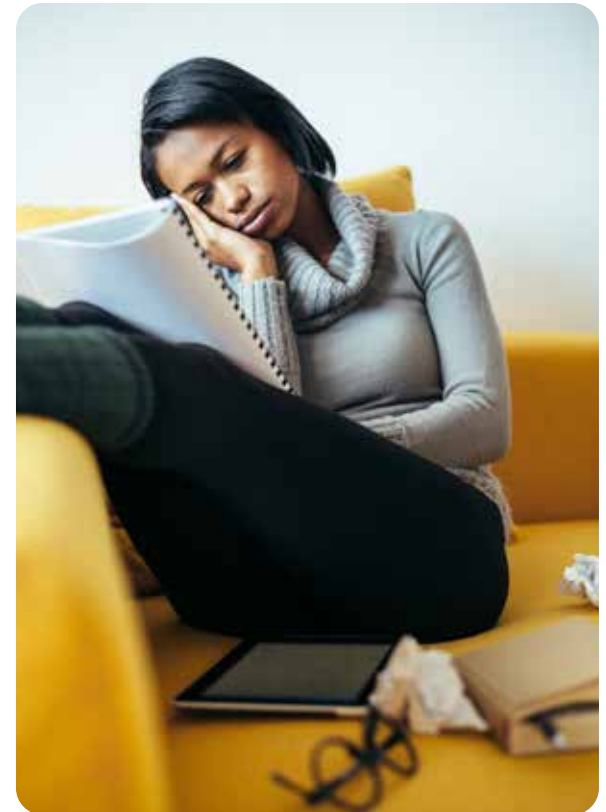
# “You’re Not Alone”

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## No One Deserves to Be Bullied

Think about what it means to feel all alone, to believe that no one cares, to think that there is no way to change what is happening.

- That’s a lonely place to be.
- When everyone around you looks the other way, ignores you, and maybe even sides with the person hurting you, it’s hard to believe in yourself.
- It’s hard to think that life will ever be any different.



# “ We’re Here For You ”

Imagine how all that can be different. Imagine during those times when you feel broken, that someone is there for you.

- They talk to you, they tell you that it will be okay, that you matter.
- They say that you deserve to be treated with respect and kindness.
- They tell you that they will be there for you.
- Imagine how different that feels.
- It doesn’t take away all the hurt, but hope is a powerful medicine for pain.

Consider how simple it is to tell someone that you care, that they matter, that they are not alone. The support is meaningful. It can take someone from feeling hopeless to feeling valued and respected.

