

Bullying

When a child bullies another child, the verbal, physical, and emotional abuse can cause lasting effects. Unfortunately, this type of abuse is often overlooked or trivialized because children or adolescents are the perpetrators. Bullying is a serious matter with serious psychological and social consequences for those who are being bullied and for those who are bullying. There can be lifelong effects, including depression, low self-esteem, and behavior problems.

An article in the April 25, 2001, issue of *JAMA* reports on a study that found relatively high percentages of bullying and being bullied for school-aged children in the United States. The study also found that bullying and being bullied were related to difficulty adjusting psychologically and socially. The authors concluded that bullying is a serious problem in the United States.



WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is characterized by

- An imbalance of power (with the person or group doing the bullying having more power than the person being bullied)
- An intention to harm or disturb
- Repeated occurrences

Types of bullying

- Psychological and emotional (such as spreading rumors or excluding the person from conversations and activities)
- Verbal (such as name-calling or threats)
- Physical (such as pushing or hitting)

SIGNS YOUR CHILD MAY BE HAVING TROUBLE

The following may be signs of being bullied

- Avoiding certain situations, people, or places, such as pretending to be sick so that he or she does not have to go to school
- Changes in behavior, such as being withdrawn and passive, being overly active and aggressive, or being self-destructive
- Frequent crying or feeling sad
- Signs of low self-esteem
- Being unwilling to speak or showing signs of fear when asked about certain situations, people, or places
- Signs of injuries
- Suddenly receiving lower grades or showing signs of learning problems
- Recurrent unexplained physical symptoms such as stomach pains and fatigue

If your child has any of the above signs, talk to him or her and to your doctor.

Sources: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institute of Mental Health, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Pediatrics, The AMA Complete Guide to Your Children's Health

Brian Pace, MA, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of JAMA. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, JAMA and the AMA suggest that you consult your physician. This page may be reproduced noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to AMA approval. To purchase bulk reprints, call 718/946-7424.

PROTECTING YOUR CHILDREN

Teach your child to report bullying to his or her teacher and to you, so that the proper authorities can be informed. Look for signs that your child is having a problem; talk to your child about what is bothering him or her. It may be bullying or some other problem at school or in the neighborhood.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
Public Information
3615 Wisconsin Ave NW
Washington, DC 20016
www.aacap.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com.

