# What's Behind Bullying Behavior: Early Intervention

Bullying continues to be a widespread problem for schools in the United States. One in five students report being bullied, according to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics. Studies indicate that bullying peaks around ages 11 to 13 and decreases as children grow older. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like on the playground or the bus. It can also happen traveling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or on the internet (cyberbullying). When it comes to cyberbullying, there is often an offline component of harm that occurs alongside the online harm (Cyberbullying Research Center). As such, most youth who are targeted on social media or within online environments are also the ones being bullied at school.
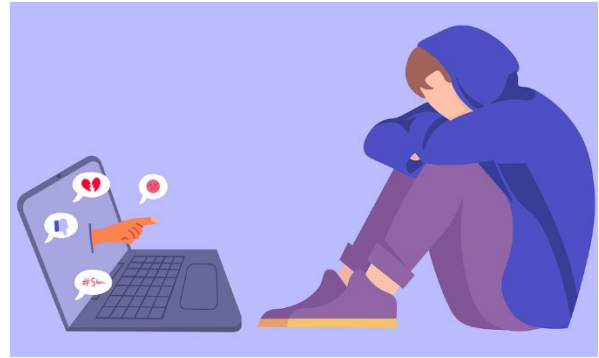
While many young people can be unkind to each other, especially during adolescence, there is a clear line between being mean or experiencing conflict with peers and bullying. Definitions vary from source to source, but most agree that bullying behavior includes three core elements:

- Intentional—unwanted, aggressive behavior intended to cause harm
- Repeated—the unwanted behavior is repeated multiple times or has the likelihood to be repeated many times
- Power imbalance—an observed or perceived imbalance of power between the student(s) doing the bullying and the student(s) being bullied

 Research shows that kids and teens bully for many different reasons. It is important to note that bullying may serve a function or be the root of a more underlying issue. For example, some students who bully may have an undiagnosed mental and/or emotional health issue that presents as antisocial behaviors. Understanding the function behind bullying behaviors can help guide the way the behavior is addressed and aid in intervention strategies to help prevent future problems. Below are a few contributing factors that can play a role in bullying behavior:

Peer Factors-
- The desire to attain or maintain social power or to elevate their status in their peer group
- Easily influenced by peer pressure (engage in bullying behavior to try to fit in)
- Envy or jealousy of other peers

Family Factors-
- Home life where bullying, aggression, or violence occurs
- Parents/caregivers who are too indulgent/lenient
- Home life where there is low parental involvement and little emotional support

Emotional Factors:
- Having been bullied in the past or currently

- Feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem (engage in bullying behaviors to make themselves feel more powerful)
- Lack of understanding of other's emotions
- Inability to manage emotions (don't know how to control their emotions, so they take out their feelings on other people)
- Lack of skills to handle social situations in healthy, positive ways.

According to experts at the Childmind Institute, intervention with a student who is engaging in bullying behavior should not only involve discipline but also strategies to equip the youth with the skills they need to interact with others in a positive way. Young people who bully need to learn how to get their needs met without hurting others, the impact their actions are having on another person, and that bullying will lead to consequences.

Parents, educators, and other caring adults all play a role in preventing and stopping bullying. Here are some important things to keep in mind.

- Implement programs that emphasize prevention and early identification of students with behavioral concerns and provide social and emotional skills instruction.
- Do not label a student as a "bully". Bullying is a behavior, not an identity, and labeling a student can limit their ability to change the behavior.
- Use consequences that teach. Strategies that focus on holding students accountable for their behavior but also empower them to change that behavior are more effective than punishments and peer mediation in bullying situations.
- Create opportunities to do good- the more a child can behave in caring and helpful ways toward others, the less likely they will be to want to treat others with disregard.
- Nurture empathy- kids who bully tend to see incidents only from their own point of view and be concerned with their own feelings. It may take time and effort to uncover or restore empathy through activities that enhance social and emotional skill-building.
- Build confidence in youth- encourage kids to spend time with friends who have a positive influence. Participation in clubs, sports, or other organized activities can help build strength and friendships.
- Consider that some students may need additional support such as mental health services to help address issues related to bullying behavior.

To learn more about bullying prevention and intervention, visit https://www.stopbullying.gov/.

References: American Psychological Association; Cyberbullying Research Center; National Association of School Psychologists; National Bullying Prevention Center; National Center for Educational Statistics; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; Stopbullying.gov

RESILIENCE…

Most of us have a sense of what resilience is and we have heard and used the term more times than we can recall. Even so, revisiting the concept of resilience and what it is remains important.

So, what exactly is resilience? Resilience is the mental, emotional, and behavioral ability to endure hardship and bounce back and grow/succeed by adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, according to the [American Psychological Association (APA)](#).

Additionally, resilience can be developed and improved upon by anyone, including kids/students.

With that in mind, we can help kids learn, develop and build resilience through behaviors, thoughts and actions. However, we need to also recognize that it takes time, trial and error, as well as help from others to help cultivate resilience.

 It should be noted that being resilient does not mean you don't experience stress, emotional turmoil and pain. Quite frankly, a big part of being resilient is the actual ability and occurrence of working through emotional pain and suffering.

Dr. Ken Ginsburg, MD, who specializes in adolescent medicine at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, developed the "7 C's of Resilience Model", with the purpose of helping youth develop and build resilience.

Here are the **Seven C's of Resilience:**

Competence: A kid's ability that allows them to successfully handle situations. Parents, teachers and others working with youth can help youth grow and develop skills that help increase and improve their competence by trying new things. By allowing youth to try new things, you help increase their competence when they succeed.

Confidence: A kid's belief in their abilities. Youth acquire and increase confidence when they demonstrate their competence in real life settings. Helping a youth identify ways that they have successfully handled hardships in the past gives them confidence and strength to handle future challenges. Parents, teachers and others working with youth can help foster confidence in youth by encouraging them to attempt something new and achievable, yet a little more difficult than something they have completed successfully before. Even when youth fail, they can then learn how to bounce back from failure which adds to their own confidence when attempting to try or work through new and more difficult things, knowing failing is not the worst thing that can happen to them.

Connection: Teach kids how to make friends, including the skill of empathy, or feeling another's pain. Encourage a child to be a friend in order to get friends. Being connected to others is one of the most powerful protective factors. When a youth is connected to others, they are more likely to express their thoughts and feelings (good and bad) and work through their problems knowing they have support from others around them. And having true connections outside of home, such as at school, church, youth groups, sports teams etc., often increases a youth's sense of belonging and well-being.

Character: Youth need a basic sense of what is right and what is wrong in order for them to appropriately act and respond to life happenings. As adults, we must model appropriate, acceptable behavior and teach kids how their actions impact others, good and bad alike. Remember, actions tend to "speak" louder than words.

Contribution: Youth develop a sense of purpose through volunteering, raising money and awareness. By contributing their time, energy and, even at times, money, youth can experience an up close and personal view of the positive and lasting impact their contributions have made in their communities as well as within themselves. Furthermore, youth who may feel helpless in their lives can find power and strength by helping others.

Coping: Youth that learn how to cope with stress in appropriate and effective ways are more likely to be prepared to handle life's challenges. Providing youth with the tools and practice needed to successfully and appropriately cope makes it easier for youth to avoid dangerous and destructive quick fixes, such as aggression, lying, substance use etc.

Control: When youth are given opportunities to make decisions, they then are able to see that their decisions, actions and reactions do directly affect their lives. More importantly, they also

learn that they do have some control in how they respond and how their response can impact the effects of difficult happenings.

For more information on resilience and how you can help foster it in youth, please visit the http://www.fosteringresilience.com/7cs.php for more information on reliance and the 7 C's of resilience.

https://optionb.org/advice/the-7-cs-of-resilience-in-kids

www.psychcentral.com/lib/10-tips-for-raising-**resilient-kids**

https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/resilience/

TikTok Self-Diagnosis & The Horoscope Effect

The Digital Age has made it far easier for those who might never have found a community of like-minded peers otherwise to attain a sense of belonging. Social media platforms such as Reddit and Tumblr, and now primarily TikTok, were solely designed for this kind of community building. A benefit of this is the increased mental health awareness due to these digital spaces. While it may be hard to find people near you who experience the same struggles as you, online it's far easier to discuss these problems with others who have a similar diagnosis. Gen Z, as a generation, is extremely in-tune with acknowledging and learning about mental health needs. However, there has also been an increasing number of youths that are engaging in self-diagnosing behaviors.

Self-diagnosing has been a growing concern for many years. In the past, people would casually mention how "OCD" they were for a number of reasons, or blame ADHD for getting a bit off topic in a conversation. However, in recent years, the number of youths who are self-diagnosing has increased dramatically, and for a number of conditions. On TikTok, conditions such as ADHD, Autism-Spectrum Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, and the extremely rare Dissociative Identity Disorder (formerly referred to as Multiple Personality Disorder), have found huge platforms.

For many reasons, some youths will identify with some of the symptoms of these disorders, and believe that they are experiencing them too. One reason may be the exploration of their own identity. Teenage years are a time of personal exploration and growth, and many of them may see the community around that condition and want to be further involved, leading to a kind of horoscope effect. This would entail someone seeing the videos on, and the symptoms of, these conditions and feeling so moved or involved in it that they feel they have it as well. Another possibility is that they are misinterpreting symptoms of another, more common, disorder, such as anxiety or depression. Finally, and most obviously, it may be that they actually do have this condition.

Regardless of the reason, if your child or student is self-diagnosing with a disorder, it's important to push them toward getting a proper diagnosis. If they're right, or if it was a different condition, that means that they've taken the first step in properly managing their condition. If not, then learning from a professional can help them manage the symptoms they were experiencing. For some, the symptoms they experience from their self-diagnosis can be as real as the usual disorder. For instance, a recent surge in self-diagnoses of Tourette's Syndrome led to a huge uptick in patients showing symptoms of a movement disorder. Their doctors found that rather than any type of Tourette's, it was actually due to stress, and in some cases, depression or anxiety. After a few weeks on an individualized treatment plan, and away from the Tourette's focused TikToks, these patients' tics disappeared.

In light of this, it's important to:

- **Consider mental health services.** While everyone's needs are different, therapy is not only for those with mental health concerns. For many, it's simply a way of handling the stress in their life. Additionally, if you or a loved one is worried about a possible condition, a therapist would be a great and reliable source for further information.
- **Discuss mental health with your child and listen for their concerns**. If they're worrying about their mental health, they may not immediately express those concerns without a conversation to start the ball rolling.
- **Pay attention to what kind of content they're watching.** It's important to keep in mind that many people online will provide mental health advice as if they were a licensed professional, regardless of their credentials. If something is truly worrying you, check with your primary care physician or a therapist to get a professional's opinion.
- **Take social media breaks.** While it can be hard to step away from one's phone, getting out of the echo chambers that TikTok can create is important. Research has shown that excessive social media use is tied to negative mental health outcomes, and that taking "vacations" from it can improve one's attitude.

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