



**National Resource Center for
Permanency and Family Connections**
Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College



*A Service of the Children's Bureau
& A Member of the T/TA Network*

NRCPFC INFORMATION PACKET

Bullying and Children in the Child Welfare System

Revised: February 2013*

**A Service of the Children's Bureau & A Member of the T/TA Network
2180 Third Avenue, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10035
Fax: 212-396-7640
www.nrpfpc.org**

This publication was updated and edited by Lyn Ariyakulkan, MSW, NRCPFC Information Services Coordinator and Tracy Serdjenian, MSW, NRCPFC Director of Information Services. The NRCPFC would also like to thank Tiyanna McFarlane for her contribution in research assistance.

**Originally authored by Susan Dougherty in April 2007; updated by Erica Wolff in March 2011.*

Bullying and Children in the Child Welfare System

Bullies are present in every school and community, and all children must deal with bullying and teasing from some perspective – if not as the bully, the victim, or both, then as the bystander who witnesses these acts – and they must choose whether and how to respond. For children involved in the child welfare system, bullying and teasing may be not only a more prevalent, constant, and serious problem, but they may have fewer supports available to help them deal with these issues.

What is Bullying?

Definitions of what constitutes bullying vary, but generally are in substantial agreement with one which appeared in the Journal of the American Medical Association (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001) and includes the following components:

- Bullying is behavior that is meant to harm or disturb;
- It occurs repeatedly; and
- It occurs between individuals who do not have equal power.

Bullying can be physical (hitting, shoving), verbal (threats, teasing, insults) or psychological (shunning, spreading rumors).

There has been some attention focused on gender and bullying, in particular the forms of bullying behavior more often used by girls. Girls may use relationships and social status as weapons, and may bully each other with lies, secrets, ostracism, sabotage and body language, rather than the physical violence or threats that are commonly associated with boys. Girls who are the targets of this "relational aggression" (Simmons, 2002) suffer just as much as children who are the targets of other forms of bullying.

There are three main types of bullying (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.):

1. Physical (e.g. hitting, kicking, tripping/pushing, spitting, taking/breaking belongings, making rude or mean hand gestures)
2. Verbal (e.g. name-calling, teasing, taunting, inappropriate sexual comments, threatening to cause harm)
3. Social/Relational (e.g. spreading rumors, embarrassing someone in public, purposeful exclusion, telling other not to be friends with someone)

Cyberbullying, repeated bullying via electronic technology including computers or cell phones, like in-person bullying, can have serious consequences for youth and is further complicated by online anonymity (Englander, 2008; Williams, 2010). The prevalence of cyberbullying has increased in the past few years, with social media websites, text messages, and voicemails serving as alternative venues for bullying to take place (Williams, 2010).

What are Some Statistics on Bullying?

- Bullying is a public health problem that is widespread in the U.S. (Center for Disease Control, 2011)
- Approximately 20% of high school students in a 2009 nationwide survey reported being bullied on school property in the 12 months prior to the survey. (CDC, 2011)

- During the 2007-2008 school year, 25% of public schools reported that daily or weekly bullying occurred among students. Compared to primary and high schools, a higher percentage of middle schools reported daily or weekly occurrences of bullying. (CDC, 2011)
- About 4% of 12- to 18-year-old students in 2007 reported having been cyber bullied during the school year. (CDC, 2011)
- In studies conducted at the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center, it was found that between 30-60% of teens have been cyberbullied online; however between 85-90% of these teens have not told their parents. (Englander, 2008)

Who are Bullies and Victims?

Based on a review of literature pertaining to bullying, Dake, Price, and Telljohann (2003) have prepared lists of common characteristics of bullies and victims, including the following information:

Bullies are likely to:	Victims are likely to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ suffer symptoms of depression ▪ experience suicidal ideation ▪ suffer from psychiatric problems ▪ suffer from eating disorders ▪ engage in substance abuse ▪ engage in fighting behaviors ▪ engage in criminal misconduct ▪ engage in academic misconduct ▪ have parents who use punitive forms of discipline ▪ have less-responsive and less-supportive parents ▪ come from harsh home environments ▪ have poor parent-child communication ▪ lack adult role models ▪ have suffered child abuse ▪ have lower school bonding ▪ have lower academic achievement ▪ have lower school adjustment ▪ have authoritarian parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ suffer symptoms of depression ▪ experience suicidal ideation ▪ suffer from psychiatric problems ▪ suffer from eating disorders ▪ suffer feelings of loneliness ▪ have low self-esteem ▪ suffer from anxiety ▪ be less popular than other children ▪ spend a lot of time alone ▪ have suffered child abuse ▪ have less-responsive and less-supportive parents ▪ come from harsh home environments ▪ have parents who allow few opportunities to control social circumstances ▪ have problems with school bonding ▪ have greater rates of absenteeism ▪ have problems with school adjustment ▪ experience physical health problems

It is difficult to distinguish characteristics that cause an individual to bully or be victimized from the residual effects of being a bully or a victim. Many of these characteristics are indicative of other problems; however, their presence can help signal if bullying may be an issue in a child's life.

Children develop bullying behavior in response to a variety of factors in their environment, which may include the following (Cohn & Canter, 2003):

- Home/Family: the amount of adult supervision received, exhibition of bullying behavior by parent and siblings, negative messages or physical punishment received at home
- School: school personnel often ignore bullying, which can reinforce intimidating behaviors

- Peer group: interaction in a peer group that promotes and supports bullying behavior; despite their discomfort, children may bully others as an attempt to “fit in”

Why is this Important in Child Welfare?

In an informal survey conducted by FosterClub of former foster youth, it was found that half the respondents reported being bullied because they were in foster care and foster youth who were victimized reported feeling afraid, angry, sad, or depressed, or a combination of these emotions (Child Welfare League of America, n.d.). While the reasons behind bullying of youth involved in the child welfare system may vary, the majority of these children enter care due to abuse or neglect, which is often associated with one or more of the parent-child difficulties that appear in the lists above. The lists provided in the previous section are similar to one another and echo many of the characteristics common among children in foster care, including depression, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, lower educational achievement, poor academic success, difficulties in school and impaired social relationships, among a host of emotional, behavioral, developmental, and health problems (Barbell and Freundlich, 2001).

Children with disabilities, including emotional, physical, intellectual, developmental, and sensory disabilities, as well as those with special health care needs, are often the targets of bullying (U.S. DHHS, n.d.b; Van Cleave & Davis, 2006). Van Cleave and Davis (2006) found:

a significant association between having a special health care need and being bullied by other children, bullying other children, and being both a bully and a victim. Being bullied was associated with each of the 5 categories of special health care needs...and this association persisted when adjusting for several socio-demographic variables and health-status variables. In contrast, bullying others was associated only with an emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem requiring treatment. Having an emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem and having a functional limitation was associated with being a bully/victim. (p. 1216)

Now consider how many children involved with the child welfare system are considered to have "special needs" due to mental, emotional, or physical disabilities. Studies suggest that at least one-third of youth in foster care have disabilities and that their exposure to various risk factors prior to coming into care severely impacts their development (Children’s Rights & United Cerebral Palsy, 2006). Given all of this information, it is quite possible that these children, whether they are living with their biological, foster, or adoptive parents, or kinship caregivers in either formal or informal relationships, may either bully, experience bullying, or both. The adults who care for and work with them must be attentive to the possibility that bullying affects the lives of these children, and learn how to recognize bullying and victimization behaviors, as well as how to respond effectively and appropriately.

LGBTQ Youth and Bullying

Recently, there has been a great deal of media attention focused on the bullying experienced by LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth. In the 2011 National School Climate Survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012) that looks at harassment experienced by LGBT youth in schools, key findings included the following:

- 81.9% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 38.3% reported being physically harassed, and 18.3% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- 63.9% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 27.1% reported being physically harassed and 12.4% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their gender expression.
- 6 in 10 LGBT students (63.5%) reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation; and 4 in 10 (43.9%) felt unsafe because of their gender expression.
- Transgender students experienced more hostile school climates than their non-transgender peers: 80% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression.
- Increased levels of victimization were related to increased levels of depression and decreased levels of self-esteem.
- 60.4% of LGBT students never reported an incident of harassment or assault to school personnel.

Best Practice Tips

There are a number of things that parents, caregivers, child welfare staff, and other professionals working with youth can do to prevent bullying and to intervene effectively when bullying is taking place.

Get Educated

The first step for all individuals who care for and work with children is to become educated on the topic of bullying.

Provide Help

Once you know more about bullying, use some of the resources provided in this information packet (on page 8) to learn how to help children who may be bullying others or being bullied themselves.

Take Substitute Care Factors into Account

Adults who care for or work with children and youth in out-of-home care need to take additional factors into consideration. Much of the advice given to young people who are being bullied involves making decisions based on their knowledge of the situation, such as:

- choosing a safe route to get to and from school;
- avoiding being alone by staying with friends;
- knowing which children to avoid in the lunch room or on the bus or playground; and
- knowing which adults to talk to about problems with bullies.

Children and youth who have changed communities and/or schools when placed in care, when moved from one placement to another, or when reunified with family who have moved, are at a disadvantage in employing strategies that depend on familiarity with the community, the school social structure, and peers and adults in their environment. Adults should be sensitive to this as a special issue and provide alternative strategies and supports. Here are some suggestions:

- Agency staff can connect children and youth in care with others in their community or school through support groups. Joining a group of peers both gives the child a place to "belong" and allows him or her to benefit from the knowledge of others who have been in the community longer and "know the ropes."
- Agencies and resource parents should advocate with schools to provide effective anti-bullying programs.
- Share your concerns with others who work with or care for the child. If you are a foster parent concerned that the child in your care is a bully at school, talk with the caseworker or supervisor about how the child's treatment plan might incorporate counseling or other interventions. If you think or know a child is being bullied, ask for help in school advocacy, providing assertiveness training, or dealing with the kinds of issues that often make children the target for bullying, such as poor hygiene, unstylish clothing, difficulty in "reading" social cues, or special education needs.
- Be attentive to cues such as an unwillingness to interact with certain other children in the neighborhood or family, reluctance to go to school or out to play in the community, or dropping out of activities that previously were enjoyed. A child who is avoiding situations in which bullying is occurring needs to replace them with other activities and the child in out-of-home care may need assistance in finding appropriate substitutes.

Advocate against Bullying

To combat bullying, harassment, and violence, experts encourage parents to become active advocates against bullying in their communities and schools. The following tips have been adapted from a presentation by Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, Executive Director of the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (Mallon, 2011).

- Be alert to signs of distress.
- Work with student councils to have programs on respect, school safety, and anti-bullying.
- Ask school personnel to have a discussion at an assembly or after school activity about prejudice and bullying.
- Discuss and review facts about social networking sites with children.
- Help start a Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network chapter at your local high school.
- Arrange for a group like GLSEN to present bullying prevention activities and programs at your school.
- Encourage anyone who is being bullied to tell his/her parents or guardians, a teacher, counselor, coach, or nurse.

Parents, caregivers, and agencies can work together to prevent cyberbullying by encouraging the following practices (Englander, 2008):

1. Discuss social networking sites with children.
2. Review the facts about these sites with children.
3. Review cell phone rules with children.
4. Discuss values and general principles with children regarding all electronic communications.

Model Programs

Much of the work done on bullying comes from Europe and Australia. In the U.S., efforts have been mainly in tailoring curricula developed in those areas for use in elementary and middle schools. There are several programs that are cited as having proven to be effective:

- *The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program*
Recognized as a Model Program by both the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
<http://www.clemson.edu/olweus/>
- *Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers (LIFT)* is an anti-aggression program that addresses antisocial behaviors by engaging both schools and families. For a description and contact information, see Blueprints for Violence Protection from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at: <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/promisingprograms/BPP09.html>
Information about research into its effectiveness, is included in *Preventing Mental Disorders in School-Age Children* at: <http://prevention.psu.edu/pubs/documents/MentalDisordersfullreport.pdf>
- *The Incredible Years* combines parent training, teacher training, and child social skills training to address problem behaviors in young children. It has been singled out as an "exemplary" best practice program by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention program and a model program by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP).
<http://www.incredibleyears.com/>

Resources for Parents, Caregivers, and Child Welfare Staff

The following list highlights resources, including online publications, media, and websites, that may be helpful to parents, caregivers, and child welfare staff.

Publications

- *When Kids Face Racism at School*
In an issue of *Adoptive Families*, an award-winning national adoption magazine, information and suggestions for parents and caregivers are provided regarding racial teasing experienced by interracial adoptees. (2012)
<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/articles/2340/helping-adopted-child-racist-bullying-in-schools>
- *Cyberbullying: A Guide for Parents*
This resource from the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center is designed to provide parents with an overview of what cyberbullying entails, how their child may avoid it, and provides suggestions on how to respond and help their children. (2008)
<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/marc%20cyberbullying.pdf>
- *What if Your Child IS the Bully?*
This resource from the Pacer Center provides information to help parents recognize traits and patterns that may indicate that their child is bullying his or her peers. It discusses how children who bully may suffer along with those who are victimized, and provides tips for parents to help their children stop bullying. (2005)
<http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c109.pdf>
- *Bullies and Victims: Information for Parents*
This resource from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) helps parents identify warning signs in their children of victimization and/or bullying behavior. Sassu, K.A., Elinoff, M.J., Bray, M.A., & Kehle, T.J. (2004)
<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/revisedPDFs/bulliesvictims.pdf>
- *Refugee Children in U.S. Schools: A Toolkit for Teachers and School Personnel*
“Immigrant bullying” is bullying that targets another’s immigrant status or family history of immigration in the form of taunts and slurs, derogatory references to the immigration process, physical aggression, social manipulation, or exclusion because of immigration status. This toolkit from BRYCS (Bridging Refugee Youth & Children’s Services) defines immigrant bullying, identifies the effects of bullying, and offers prevention tips.
<http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/bullying.pdf>

Additional Resources

- *Sticks and Stones Can Break Your Bones: The Bio-Psycho-Social Consequences of LGBT Bullying*
This PowerPoint Presentation by Dr. Gerald P. Mallon, DSW, Director of the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, provides information on bullying, focusing on bullying and LGBTQ youth and discussing the impact of bullying and harassment on the education and mental health of LGBTQ youth. It provides information on what we can do to help, as well as additional resources. (2011)

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/download/LGBT%20Bullying_NRCFPC%20PowerPoint.pdf

- *It Gets Better*
The “It Gets Better” Project helps young teens imagine a future for themselves as openly gay adults.
www.itgetsbetter.org

The following videos are “It Gets Better” messages from President Barack Obama and United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, to LGBT youth suffering from bullying and intolerance:

- President Obama (2010)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=geyAFbSDPVk#
- Kathleen Sebelius (2010)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXc-tc97XXA&feature=player_embedded

Websites

- *National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCFPC)*
A service of the Children’s Bureau and member of the Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Network, NRCFPC provides training and technical assistance to States, Territories, and Tribes to build capacity and achieve child welfare systems changes resulting in greater safety, permanency, and well-being for children, youth, and families. Visit our Bullying hot topic page for information and resources:
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/bullying.html
- *Stop Bullying Now!*
This campaign -- "Take A Stand. Lend A Hand. Stop Bullying Now!" -- is designed to stop bullying, including verbal or physical harassment that occurs repeatedly over time, that is intended to cause harm, and that involves an imbalance of power between the child who bullies and the child who is bullied. The website is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Health Resources and Services Administration, and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau.
<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>
- *Anti-Defamation League: Bullying Resource Center*
ADL is a leader in developing anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying trainings, curricula, and resources for teens, school educators, youth providers, and adult family members.
www.adl.org/combatbullying/
- *The Anti-Violence Project*
The New York City Anti-Violence Project is dedicated to eliminating hate violence, sexual assault, stalking, and domestic violence in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities through counseling, advocacy, organizing, and public education.
www.avp.org
- *Bullying.org*
Bullying.org is dedicated to increasing the awareness of bullying, as well as preventing, resolving, and eliminating bullying in society.
<http://www.bullying.org>

- *Cyberbullying Research Center*
The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents.
www.cyberbullying.us
- *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)*
GLSEN aims to assure that regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, each member of every school community is valued and respected. Their website contains a wealth of anti-bullying programs and resources for educators, and is helpful for parents as well.
<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/antibullying/index.html>
- *Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center*
The goal of MARC is to bring low- or no-cost services to K-12 education, law enforcement, and other professional caregivers for children in Massachusetts. Services include school programs, conferences, workshops, consultation, and research, in the area of bullying prevention, cyberbullying education and prevention, and violence prevention. Many of the resources for parents on the MARC website are available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole.
<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/>

Resources on the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center website include:

- *When Your Child Is Being Bullied...*
<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/marc%20bullying.pdf>
- *Texting Tips for Parents & Kids*
<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/Tips%20About%20Texting.pdf>
- *Bullying and GLBT Youth...How You Can Help Your Child*
<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/GLBT%20students%20and%20bullying.pdf>
- *Social Networking: A Guide for Parents*
<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/marc%20socialnetworking.pdf>
- *The Safety Zone*
This site is a clearinghouse for information and material related to school safety. It is a project of the Comprehensive Center, Region X of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The site provides educators with top-quality professional development, technical assistance, evaluation, and research services
http://www.safetyzone.org/bullying_harassment_conflict_resolution.html
- *Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)*
SPRC provides prevention support, training, and resources to assist organizations and individuals to develop suicide prevention programs, interventions, and policies, and to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, which was published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under the leadership of the Surgeon General, in 2001.
<http://www.sprc.org/index.asp>
- *The Trevor Project*
The Trevor Project is determined to end suicide among LGBTQ youth by providing life-saving and life-affirming resources, including their nationwide 24/7 crisis intervention lifeline.
<http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

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