

Bullying-Who are the Victims and the Aggressors?

Bullying has become a very widespread problem in a number of countries and is usually not reported for fear of further reprisals for the victims. First, I think we should start with exactly what bullying is and where bullying typically occurs. Bullying, by definition is a repeated, harmful act and it involves an imbalance of power. Bullying involves either verbal, physical, or a psychological attack on a victim and usually involves an aggressor trying to intimidate someone that is perceived to be weaker than them and the victim usually does not fight back. Victims also tend to be either smaller, younger, or at some disadvantage when compared to their aggressor.

The act of bullying involves physical assault, attempts to intimidate the victim, spreading rumors about the victim throughout the school, demanding that the victim give money, or tripping them. There are a number of other acts of bullying, however these acts appear to be the most common. Those individuals that bully also tend to not only be aggressive in some way to the victim but also to his/her teacher, parents, and in most of their surroundings. In addition, most bullying will occur in the school setting and not to and from school, which is a common misconception.

A question that is often asked of me as a therapist is, “why would someone bully another person”, “what happened to him/her to make him act like that?” That is a question, for which there is no clear or easy answer. What research does show us is that children that bully others tend to be those children that have parents that use physical aggression or physical means in the home for discipline. The parents of the bully tend to be disconnected or “too busy” and are usually not an active participant in the child’s day to day life. The bully tends to what to be in complete control of others and feels happy and satisfied when they are able to belittle others and make those around them suffer. These are children that usually have parent’s that do not show them a lot of affectionate and modeling of appropriate social behaviors towards other children has not been taught to them. Bullies often have poor anger control and often are children that exhibit oppositional behaviors and are also often rude; disrespectful to adults and those that they perceive to be an authority figure. Unfortunately, these are children that have not been taught the proper tools at home in order to deal with their own anger, fears, and proper social mores and skills.

The victim, on the other hand, tends to be a child that is quiet; reserved and is an easy target. These are children that usually have poor social skills and have a difficult time “blending in” at a school setting. Other children usually perceive the victim as a child that is a “nerd” or that is very awkward and the victim rarely fights back or speaks up for themselves. The victim usually has parents that are very overprotective and as a result the victim has been isolated socially from their peers and does not know how to interact easily with others. These are children that are usually smaller and physically weaker than their aggressor and are anxious; very insecure children that tend to be very unsure of themselves on most levels. From a therapeutic standpoint, the victim is usually the individual that is seen in the treatment setting due to the significance of

the symptoms of depression, anxiety, etc.. that the victim suffers. Unfortunately, most victims are not seen in treatment as a result of their reluctance to report the bullying behaviors and this does not usually occur until they are adults.

Awareness of this particular widespread problem is growing and research has shown that this problem has long-term effects on the victims. Children that have been bullied tend to grow up to be anxious; insecure adults that also have unresolved feelings of anger as a result of being victimized in their youth. The victim often suffers from low self-esteem and feelings of depression that can occur long into their adult years. In addition, children that have been the aggressors often feel tremendous anxiety and guilt as adults due to their bullying behaviors as children. Most bullies also tend to continue their bullying behaviors into adulthood and their aggressive and oppositional behaviors seem to last into their adulthood. Most of society, does not want to associate with a “bully” and those individuals often have difficulty maintaining appropriate and lasting relationships.

Sadly, most bullying behaviors go unreported by the victim for a variety of reasons. Most children that are victims fear that the bully will retaliate and make their lives “even worse than it already is” (a child I saw recently in therapy told me that). In addition, the victim does not want to tell their parents because they are ashamed and do not want “to worry” their parents. Most victims have been bullied so long that they think that reporting it would not change the bullying behavior and often they do not feel that the teachers or the principal of their school would take care of the problem for them.

Kara T. Tamanini, M.S., LMHC
Author and Therapist
Founder of Kids Awareness Series
www.KidsAwarenessSeries.com

Kara T. Tamanini is a licensed therapist that works with children/adolescents with a variety of childhood mental disorders.