



## RECOGNIZING THE BULLY

### Introduction:

Close your eyes for a moment. Think about a fellow student that seems to enjoy being a bully. Picture that person. Each of us has a specific idea of what constitutes a bully. What is the stereotype of a bully?—Big, mean, impatient, aggressive and less intelligent than most other students.

### Goals:

- To understand theories of how bullying behavior develops.
- To recognize aggressive and passive forms of bullying.
- To identify differences between male and female bullying.
- To challenge the myths related to bullying.

### Development of Bullying Behavior:

Understanding how bullying behavior develops makes it possible for us to help the healing and rehabilitation of these individuals. There are temperament issues at birth.

- More active.
- Difficult for parents.
- Problems relating to others.

Social interactions are more powerful influences. Social learning theory asserts that children learn to behave as they do through their experiences in social settings. Young children are egocentric but learn to be more reciprocal in relationships (give and take). Biological tendencies are affected by the social environment.

Children learn nonaggressive ways to handle stress and conflict (cooperation and effective problem solving). The opposite of aggression and coercion show power as the solution. These children lack trust, have no respect or appreciation for others.

Bullying behavior is learned in a social situation and is influenced by interactions with others. Social-interactional theory is based on a triadic reciprocal causality. This individual creates/alters the environment, the environment shapes the behavior and the individual's cognitions are the mediators of behavior. (Bandura 1977, 1986)

*Direct learning* is learning experienced specifically by doing. *Vicarious learning* is receiving the consequences of another's action. This learning comes from real life, movies, television, song lyrics, etc.

A person's perceptions of the consequences (positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, or punishment) of a behavior determine whether or not the behavior is maintained.

Positive reinforcement is the bully getting their way. Negative reinforcement is ignoring the behavior. Punishment is the consequences a bully does not like. Do not promote the "tough-guy image."

## **Behavior:**

*Bullying behavior can be any of the following:*

- Verbal threats, harassment, intimidation
- Teasing, taunting, annoying
- Spreading rumors
- Striking, slapping
- Pushing, shoving
- Instigating fights

## **Cognitive Factors:**

One of the most difficult aspects of working with bullies is figuring out their cognitive processes—how they think. Most children develop an empathetic ability. Some think they have been wronged and behave as though it were true.

## **Environmental Factors:**

Family Environment—Often bullies come from families characterized by poverty, conflict, inconsistent parenting and harsh discipline. Children want consistency and predictability in their families; and they want to be treated fairly and with dignity. When these conditions are absent, aggression is frequently the outcome.

School Environment—Factors such as the following contribute to bullying behavior:

- School discipline (either too authoritarian or too lax)
- Reinforcement of bullying behavior (unintentional) by school personnel
- Peer groups with a norm of aggressive behavior
- Modeling by school staff/students of aggressive or coercive behaviors

Community Environment—Children reared in a culture marked by conflict and violent interactions will learn aggressive responses. “Stand up for yourself” or “Fight like a man.”

## **The Concentric Circle Model:**

The Child—The innermost circle encompasses the child’s personality traits, physical characteristics and behaviors.

The Family—The bully at school is often the victim at home and has caretakers who use physical means of discipline, provide little supervision, are hostile, rejecting, authoritarian, inconsistent in their parenting, lack effective problem-solving skills and teach their children to strike back when provoked.

The School—Aggression and bullying behavior are traditions in American schools.

The Community—The neighborhood in which one resides, the economic level of the community and the ethnic diversification of the community all influence the development of bully behavior.

The Culture—There is a general consensus that active and assertive behavior is a normal and desirable characteristic of American children.

## **The Bully—Development Model:**

Cultural Factors—The cultural norms impact the community in which people live. Culture is like an umbrella reaching over all aspects of life.

Family Factors—The functioning of the parents strongly influences children’s development. Being reared in a single-parent family is significant.

Family Bonding—The way a child is accepted into the family and feels supported, understood and valued determines the extent of which the child treats others.

Parent/Child Interactions—A child who experiences hostile interactions within the family may become coercive, aggressive and a bully.

Individual Child Characteristics—These are biologically based.

Acceptance / Rejection by Peers—A child from a supportive family develops appropriate social skills. Kids lacking social skills hang out with other rejected peers. It helps them feel superior.

*Source: Bully Busters*