



RECOGNIZING THE VICTIM

Every day thousands of children fall prey to aggressive behavior by peers. Name-calling is the most prevalent, but teasing, ridiculing, vandalizing property and being physically violent are also included. The effects of such victimization are far reaching into adulthood, severely traumatizing both boys and girls. School shooting incidents have been tied to victims seeking retaliation. The victims are often the “forgotten group.” The bully is the one who catches our attention.

Victims—These are children who are exposed, often repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more bullies; they are teased, intimidated, threatened, degraded, dominated, hit and kicked.

Effects of Victimization:

- Change in school performance
- Absenteeism
- Truancy
- Drop-out
- Peer rejection
- Fear and avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of alienation
- Low morale
- Chronic Illness
- Running away
- Depression
- Suicide

Recognizing Victims

Characteristics of Victims (Targets)—Targets of bullying exhibit the following characteristics:

- Lack the social skills required for peer interaction
- React negatively to conflicts or losing
- Seek comfort from adults in times of conflict
- Manifest behavior patterns of crying and anxiety
- Possess mannerisms that mark them as vulnerable
- Low levels of popularity and have few friends
- Cautious, sensitive, quiet, anxious, and insecure

Each child has a right to his or her individuality, and all children deserve respect and to be treated with dignity. Yet, the very characteristics that cause us to notice children who are different may be the same characteristics that result in their being bullied and victimized. There is a difficult balance here. There are ways these children can change in order to deflect bullying and manage the reactions of others.

Secondary Signs of Victimization:

- An unusually quiet child becomes increasingly withdrawn
- A child who is normally restrained becomes aggressive
- A student's school performance deteriorates without apparent reasons
- A child becomes ill prior to group-related events
- A child avoids recess or extracurricular group activities
- The child is absent without a convincing explanation
- Child's property is damaged or missing on a regular basis
- Child skips lunch or eats somewhere other than the cafeteria

Types of Victims

Passive Victims (Submissive victims)—Their behavior indicates that they are weak and incapable of retaliation when attacked or insulted.

They have these characteristics:

- Most frequently targeted
- Abandoned and isolated at school
- More anxious and insecure than peers
- Cautious, sensitive and quiet
- Possess low self-esteem
- Does not have a solid friendship
- Demonstrate a close, overprotective relationship with parents, especially mothers

Passive victims may be difficult to recognize because they will not ask for help. However, their scars of torture and humiliation last a lifetime.

Provocative Victims (Reactive Bullies)—This category of victims seems to “ask” for their abuse. These victims are aggressive and tend to instigate trouble to provoke others, accepting the outcome over being ignored. Bullies tend to “educate” these victims on the group's values and ways.

They have these characteristics:

- Less common than passive victims
- More active, assertive and confident than passive victims
- More of management problem in class
- Higher risk for negative developmental outcome (suicide)
- Unpopular with peers, but does not suffer low self-esteem
- Associates with bullies for social status
- Bullies provide positive reinforcement
- Use aggressive strategies by imitating bullies on less dominant peers

Provocative victims are the most rejected members of their peer group. These victims are often bullied in their homes and neighborhoods. These victims lack anger management skills.

Stages of Anger:

- Stage 1 - Slightly bothered
- Stage 2 - Becoming more aware of the problem
- Stage 3 - Wish the problem would stop
- Stage 4 - Think of ways to get out of the situation
- Stage 5 - “Flight or flight” reaction—facial flushing, etc.
- Stage 6 - Seeks to reduce provocation
- Stage 7 - Speaks loudly and moves toward a defensive stance
- Stage 8 - Prepares to gain superiority in the interaction
- Stage 9 - Gives full commitment to situation
- Stage 10 - Full rage in emotional and physical response

The provocative victim is often impulsive in rapid escalation of anger. The release of anger may be extreme with weapons. Because of the extreme fright on the part of these victims, they lose all semblance of control over their feelings and behavior.

Bystander Victims—These youth may observe bullying on a continual basis. These are forever impacted by the abuse, although they are not bullied directly. They often feel as though they are “cowards” or “weak” because they do not intervene. They develop “learned helplessness” and feel powerless to have an impact in their own or others’ lives.

Bystanders may not intervene because:

- Insensitivity to distress the bullying causes
- Fear that they could be the next target
- Adult’s inability or unwillingness to help
- Blame the victim for the problem

Bystander victims are often presented with a “no-win situation.”

Male and Female Victims—Victims of aggression appear to be subjected to different types of bullying behavior on the basis of their gender.

Generally, boys experience more physically aggressive, violent behavior than girls. Girls verbally and socially bully each other and even the boys.

Conclusion

Mottoes such as, “Stand up for yourself!” and, “Don’t be a tattletale!” are messages that often prevent children from seeking help when victimized. There can be a drop box where students can leave notes describing bullying incidents they witness. There are ways for creative solutions to overcome this bullying problem.

Source: *Bully Busters*