What is bullying? Bullying has two key components: repeated harmful acts and an imbalance of power. *According to No Laughing Matter*, researchers estimate that 20 to 30 percent of school-age children are involved in bullying incidents, as either perpetrators or victims. It involves repeated physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidation directed against a victim who cannot properly defend him- or herself because of size or strength, or because the victim is outnumbered or less psychologically resilient In the case of male bullies, they are usually considerably larger and stronger than the victim and are also usually older. Female bullying is different from male bullying, in that girls are more likely to use words alone to torment their chosen victims, rather than threatening physical injury as well as using verbal threats. Girls may bully other girls verbally with name-calling or by spreading vicious and untrue rumors about the female victims to others.

In many cases, bullying is a momentary and minor annoyance; in other cases, children are so traumatized that they develop a "learned helplessness," believing that they cannot do anything and even that they deserve to be bullied. This negative attitude may continue into adulthood if no intervention occurs in childhood or adolescence.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration booklet called Take Action against Bullying, bullying may include any number of aggressive behaviors such as hitting, name-calling, threatening, intimidating, kicking, spreading rumors, teasing, pushing, tripping and destroying another person's property. Bullies may also steal the victim's property, such as money, bicycles or other items of value to the victim.

Bullying causes interference with learning in school and may increase absenteeism and school dropout rates because the children try to avoid the situation because they feel helpless. There is new concern about school violence, and police have assumed greater responsibility for helping school officials ensure students' safety. As pressure increases to place officers in schools, police agencies must decide how best to contribute to student safety. Will police presence on campuses most enhance safety? If police cannot or should not be on every campus, can they make other contributions to student safety? What are good approaches and practices? More than any other school safety problem, bullying affects students' sense of security. The most effective ways to prevent or lessen bullying require school administrators' commitment and intensive effort; police interested in increasing school safety can use their influence to encourage schools to address the problem.

Bullying is so widespread and imaginably the most underreported safety problem on school campuses. Contrary to popular belief, bullying occurs more often at school than on the way to and from school. Once thought of as a rite of passage or relatively harmless behavior that helps build young people's character, bullying is now known to have long-lasting harmful effects, for both the victim and the bully. Bullying is often mistakenly viewed as a narrow range of antisocial behavior confined to elementary school yards. Awareness of the problem, according to New Solutions, is growing in the United States, especially with reports that in two-thirds of the recent school shootings, many have been previously bullied to that point the attacker could no longer handle. The attacker in the shooting was motivated by being bullied. Bullying is common at schools and occurs beyond elementary school; bullying occurs at all grade levels, although most frequently during elementary school. It occurs slightly less often in middle schools, and less so, but still frequently, in high schools, with school freshmen and those with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, according to FASP.

In general, bullies choose other children who are smaller in size than they are and appear unlikely to retaliate. The victims may have no or few friends and may be physically immature compared to others in the same age group. In general, bullied girls are more likely to become depressed than boys who are victimized.

Victims of bullies tend to have low self-esteem, and they are more cautious and withdrawn than their peers. They may seek to avoid school, where they would encounter the bully, and they may have suicidal thoughts. They may also experience anxiety and/or depression. They may complain of many headaches, stomachaches and other body pains that have a psychological basis rather than a physical one. The victims of bullies often become socially insecure and anxious, with decreased self-esteem and increased depression that may last into adulthood.

Those that bully tend to be from abusive homes themselves and they later become bullying adults to the children as child abuse or spousal abuse. Bullying may be linked to other delinquent behaviors or gang activities, such as vandalism, drug abuse and shoplifting. The longer the bullying lasts, the harder it is for the child bully to change this behavior.

Why is dealing with bullying such a problem? Many victims and witnesses fail to tell teachers or even parents. As a result, teachers may underestimate the extent of bullying in their school and may be able to identify only a portion of the actual bullies. Common reasons for not telling are fearing retaliation, feeling shame at not being able to stand up for themselves, fearing they would not be believed, and having no confidence that anything would change as a result.

There are at least 15 states have laws against bullying; for example, Colorado's law defines bullying as, "Any written or verbal expression, or physical act or gesture, or a pattern thereof, which is intended to cause distress upon one or more children." In Georgia, bullying is defined as, "Any willful attempt or threat to inflict injury on another person . . . or any intentional display of force such as would give the victim reason to fear or expect immediate bodily harm."

Most state laws require school boards to create a policy prohibiting bullying; for example, Louisiana law requires a policy banning the harassment, intimidation and bullying of one student by another student. In some states, such as Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Washington and West Virginia, state laws either require or urge that school bullying be reported to authorities.

The bullying of children who are disabled may be considered "disability harassment," which is illegal under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Schools should immediately investigate all allegations of the bullying of disabled children or children with special needs.

In addition, if bullying continues, parents should ask the school to convene a special meeting of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to discuss the harassment and ensure the school is taking (or will take) steps to stop harassment. If the school refuses to take appropriate actions to end the bullying or harassment, it may be in violation of federal, state or local laws. The parent may then wish to contact the superintendent of schools or the school board. If no action is taken subsequent to that contact, organizations such as the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights or the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs should be contacted.

More often than not, law enforcement is left out the equation and is only used as a last resort. The legal system is rarely involved in dealing with school bullying. There are very good reasons for this. Less serious bullying can and should be dealt with within the school. By working together, parents, teachers, pupils and other members of the wider school community develop effective reactive strategies which can be implemented quickly. It is most important that bullying is resolved as quickly as possible before any serious damage is done to the personal development or education of the young people involved. Also a disadvantages would be that the child would have a hearing and have to relive the emotional distress and could still lose the case because of lack of evidence in the matter—something you don’t want to put the child through twice. Schools and the police are trying to develop new ways of working together pro-actively to prevent bullying altogether through education.

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