



Cruel Intentions

FINDINGS ON BULLYING

From the March 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Arlington Virginia

The choices that young people make today have a big impact on their health and well-being, now and in the future.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest link to their health.

This brochure looks at the results on bullying and other forms of victimization from Arlington's March 2007 survey of middle and high school students. It suggests ways to get help if your child is a victim of bullying or a bully.

BULLYING IS NOT A CONFLICT, BUT AN ABUSE

Being bullied means being *repeatedly* exposed to verbal, physical, and/or psychological attacks, characterized by an imbalance of power.

Characteristics of a typical victim:

- Unlikely to retaliate;
- Shy, quiet, and physically weak or different;
- Lacking social support from peers.

Characteristics of a typical bully:

- Aggressive and has a strong need for power and dominance;
- Has a positive view towards the use of violence;
- Has little or no empathy for his/her victims.

WHY WORRY?

Bullying creates problems for both the victim and the bully. Victims of bullying are reported to have immediate and long term damaging effects. Studies show that victims are more likely to have low self-esteem, feel depressed or anxious, and miss more school. Bullying contributes to social isolation of the youths as well as decreasing their level of self-worth.

Being a bully also puts a young person at risk. Studies have shown that bullies are more likely to drop out of school and have criminal records when they become adults.

Every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in school as in society at large.

Dan Olweus,
Bullying at School

HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2500 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington's public secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their child. Less than two percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled out a questionnaire. Most of those who did not were absent from school.

Bullying often indicates that the bully is at risk for serious violence in the future. In a 2002 U.S. Secret Service investigation, it was found that among 41 school shooters (1974-2000), 71% had been victims of bullying.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Here are some key findings for bullying in Arlington:

- ✓ 23 percent of young people were victims of bullying in the past 12 months
- ✓ 65 percent believe that adults will help if they are told about cases of bullying but a third do not.
- ✓ 7 percent missed school due to safety concerns.
- ✓ In 2007, only 23 percent of 6th grade students reported being victims of a bully compared to 33 percent in 2004.
- ✓ Boys and girls are equally likely to be victims of bullying (20%) but girls are more likely to believe adults will help.

WHO'S AT RISK?

Bullying increases and then peaks in early adolescence, occurring frequently from 6th to 8th grade. During the transition from elementary to middle school, students begin to form peer groups for social support. Students feel pressured by peers to attain acceptance and popularity. They also want to establish autonomy from their parents by demonstrating characteristics that they believe reflect independence, such as aggression and disobedience. Thus bullying is a way of demonstrating superiority over other students in a new environment.

This behavior significantly decreases during the high school years. In 6th grade, 23 percent of students report bullying. By 12th grade, reports of bullying decrease to 12 percent.

BOY AND GIRL BULLIES

Boys are more likely to be bullies than girls; they engage in different types of bullying.

Boys are less subtle in their methods of bullying. They tend to use physical strength to bully others, and they verbally assault their victims with threats.

Girls usually bully through indirect forms of aggression. They are likely to use psychological means such as spreading vicious rumors and/or excluding a girl from social groups. Girls are also using Cyber-bullying, sending hurtful messages through emails, instant messaging, and camera phones.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE VICTIM

1. Tell your child that bullying is wrong, not his/her fault and you are glad he/she had the courage to tell you about it.
2. Suggest your child walk away from the bully/ bullies, rather than fight back.
3. Encourage your child to ask for help from a responsible adult or teacher.
4. Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. Often this makes it worse.
5. Work with the school administration to spread anti-bullying messages.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY

1. Make clear that bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.
2. Confer with your child's teacher and ask the teacher to monitor his/ her activities and actions closely
3. Help your child imagine that he/she is walking in the victim's shoes. Teach empathy.
4. Monitor your own behavior and aggression. Be a role model who conveys an attitude of respect for others.

TO LEARN MORE

Teenage Bullying and Violence: Is There a Cure? (Institute for Youth Development)

www.youthdevelopment.org/download/YouthConnectionBullying.pdf

Social Life in Middle and High School: Dealing with Cliques and Bullies (New York University Child Study Center) at

www.aboutourkids.org/files/articles/sept_oct.pdf

Cyberbullying (National Crime Prevention Council) www.ncpc.org/topics/by-audience/parents/bullying/cyberbullying/

For questions about the data or survey process, contact Amy Graham, Data Coordinator, at (703) 228-1668 or agraha@arlingtonva.us.

This brochure was originally prepared by Xiaoxiao Wu, a Yorktown High School student, during the 2005 Senior Experience internship program.

Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families
3033 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600A
Arlington, VA 22201
Phone (703) 228-1667
www.arlingtonpartnershipforyouth.org