

Bullying & Suicide Prevention

Bullying can leave strong, lasting effects on anyone who experiences it. From schools to workplaces to online spaces, bullying can damage mental health, relationships, and a person's sense of safety. For many, these experiences contribute to anxiety, depression, and even thoughts of suicide. Understanding bullying, why it happens, how it affects people, and what can be done to prevent it is essential to creating stronger, safer communities.

What Bullying Looks Like

Bullying affects people of all ages in schools, workplaces, online, and in the community. It is intentional behavior meant to hurt, humiliate, or control. Bullying can be physical, verbal, social, or digital and can lead to mental health struggles, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts.¹

31%

Of U.S. adults report experiencing bullying²

28%

Middle schools report bullying at least once a week

15%

High schools report bullying at least once a week

10%

Elementary schools report bullying at least once a week

Increase of Cyberbullying and Sextortion

Online bullying has grown with social media. People of all ages can be targeted through messages, posts, and private apps, with behaviors ranging from harassment and exclusion to spreading rumors. About one in four teens has experienced cyberbullying in the past 30 days.³

Sextortion, in which predators coerce minors to send sexual images or money, has led to tragic outcomes. Victims, often boys ages 14–17, are particularly vulnerable to manipulation and isolation. Warning signs include sudden secrecy, emotional distress, withdrawal from friends, or unexplained requests for money or gifts. Social media platforms can increase these risks through engagement-driven designs and insufficient safeguards. Experts recommend early conversations about online safety, clear parental guidance, and teaching children that predators are to blame.⁴

Resources

[StopBullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov/): Federal resources on preventing and responding to bullying.

[PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center](https://www.pacer.org/national-bullying-prevention-center/): Information, tips, and programs to prevent bullying and support affected youth.

[STOMP Out Bullying](https://www.stompoutbullying.org/): Provides education, support, and resources to combat bullying and cyberbullying.

[Ohio Department of Education – Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Resources](https://www.ohio.gov/education/anti-harassment-intimidation-and-bullying-resources/): State-specific guidance and resources for creating safe and supportive schools.

“From schools to workplaces to online spaces, bullying can damage mental health, relationships, and a person's sense of safety.”

Impact of Bullying

Bullying impacts victims, perpetrators, and bystanders alike, with effects that ripple far beyond the immediate conflict:

- **Mental and emotional health:** Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, loneliness, social withdrawal, and physical symptoms such as headaches or sleep problems.
- **Academic or work challenges:** Trouble concentrating or staying on task.
- **Behavioral risks:** Aggression, substance use, and potential legal problems for those who bully.

Bullying and Suicide

Bullying and suicide are strongly connected. Those involved in bullying, whether as victims, perpetrators, or both, face higher risks for suicidal ideation, attempts, and, in some cases, death. Those who both bully others and are bullied, sometimes called bully-victims, are at the highest risk.⁵

Because suicide-related behaviors arise from multiple interacting factors, bullying should be understood as one part of a broader risk picture. When bullying occurs alongside mental health concerns, family conflict, discrimination, or trauma, the overall risk increases. Early intervention and strong access to mental health support are key protective strategies.

How Reducing Bullying Can Help Prevent Suicide

Bullying is a risk factor for suicide in schools, communities, and workplaces. Reducing bullying protects mental health and creates safer, more supportive environments.

- **Schools and Workplaces:** Promote inclusion, respect, and kindness. Anti-bullying programs, policies, and supportive cultures reduce bullying and improve well-being.
- **Leaders and Managers:** Model healthy conflict resolution, set clear expectations, intervene when bullying occurs, and foster open communication and support for those affected.
- **Peers and Colleagues:** Speak up against bullying, avoid reinforcing harmful hierarchies, and offer help to anyone involved.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Bullying | Youth Violence Prevention." <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/about-bullying.html>
2. Bhatia, Richa M.D. "How to Recognize and Deal With Adult Bullying." Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/healthier-minds-happier-world/202311/how-to-recognize-adult-bullying>
3. Patchin, Justin W. "Cyberbullying Continues to Rise among Youth in the United States." Cyberbullying Research Center. <https://cyberbullying.org/cyberbullying-continues-to-rise-among-youth-in-the-united-states-2023>
4. Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Sextortion: A Growing Threat Targeting Minors." FBI. January 16, 2024. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/sextortion-a-growing-threat-targeting-minors>
5. Vevers, Sarah. "What to Know About the Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide." Medical News Today. February 16, 2024. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/bullying-and-suicide>

ABOUT OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



(614) 429-1528 / OhioSPF.org

