

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Bullying & Suicide Prevention

Bullying and its often-tragic consequences have made headlines for years. But bullying is nothing new. In fact, bullying is as old as mankind itself. Still, researchers have only been delving into bullying and its effects for the better part of the past 40 years.

So, what is bullying? How does it contribute to mental health issues and suicide among our youth? Most importantly, what can be done to stop it? Keep reading to find out.

Bullying: A Definition

There is no single definition of bullying, however, most agree on one thing: Bullying is intended to harm. Here's how the PACER Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping educators and families of young people with disabilities, defines it:

Bullying is an intentional behavior that hurts, harms, or humiliates a student, either physically or emotionally, and can happen while at school, in the community, or online."¹

Consequences of Bullying

Research shows that bullying increases the likelihood of mental health issues, substance misuse, poor school performance, and suicide. While the media and others typically focus on bullying victims, any student involved in bullying – perpetrator, victim, or witness – is at an increased risk for negative outcomes, including depression and anxiety.⁴ There's even evidence to suggest that those who have both bullied others and been bullied themselves are at the highest risk for suicide-related behavior.⁴

Fast Facts: Bullying in Ohio

According to the Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey of 35,000+ students in grades 7-12, nearly one-third say they experienced bullying during the 2019-2020 school year.² Compare that to the national average of 1 in 4 students,³ and it's easy to see why Ohio's students are more likely to be the victims of bullying than their out-of-state peers.

In addition, of those surveyed in Ohio, 31.8% reported some being subjected to some type of bullying, including:

- Cyberbullying (6%)
- Violence or theft (7%)
- Being the subject of rumors, taunting, or social exclusion (42%)

Perpetuating the idea that suicide is a natural response to bullying not only normalizes suicide, it can also lead to a copycat response.

Suicide and Bullying: A Complex Relationship

When a young person dies by suicide, everyone wants to understand what happened. But when bullying is identified as a culprit, it's not only doing a disservice to the victim and their family, it also doesn't take into consideration the interwoven web of factors that contribute to youth suicide. Further, it promotes a false and dangerous perception that suicide is the only way out of a bullying situation.

The truth is, most students who are involved in bullying do not die by suicide. Yes, bullying should be investigated as a potential contributor. But other factors, including poverty, abuse, discrimination, death of a loved one, and loss of relationships also should be considered.⁵

How Reducing Bullying Can Help Prevent Suicide

Because bullying is a risk factor for suicide, communities that address bullying also support youth suicide prevention. Here's how:

- Schools can promote inclusivity and kindness, helping students feel safe and supported.
- Parents can model healthy problem solving and conflict management skills.

Peers can stand up to bullies and offer help to anyone involved in bullying – including the bully.

Learn what else you can do to reduce bullying and prevent suicide:

- PACER Center: [pacer.org/bullying](https://www.pacer.org/bullying)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [stopbullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov)
- CDC Strategies: [cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf)
- Youth mental health and wellness: [BePresentOhio.org](https://www.BePresentOhio.org)

References

1. National Bullying Prevention Center. "How is bullying defined? Questions answered." <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/info/questions-answered/how-is-bullying-defined.asp>. Accessed 14 September 2022.
2. Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey. "OHYES! entire state report for 2019-2020." <https://ohyes.ohio.gov/Results>. Accessed 14 September 2022.
3. CDC. "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2019." <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrebs/pdf/2019/su6901-H.pdf>. Accessed 14 September 2022.
4. CDC. "The relationship between bullying and suicide: what we know and what it means for schools." <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/34167>. Accessed 14 September 2022.
5. CDC. "Risk and protective factors." <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/index.html>. Accessed 14 September 2022.

ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

OSPF gives hope to those in crisis, strength to those in the struggle, and comfort to those in grief. OSPF is a non-profit organization that works tirelessly to help all of Ohio's communities reduce the risk of suicide. Our work includes supporting those impacted by suicide, raising awareness of mental health issues, and coordinating community resources and evidence-based prevention strategies across the state.



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