

Gum In My Hair: How to Cope with a Bully

Study Guide

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GUM IN MY HAIR

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a problem for those who are bullied and those who bully. It is not a part of normal growing up. For those who are bullied it can interfere with their rights to experience a positive learning environment and opportunities for growth. For those who bully it can be a behavior that is easy to use, and interferes with the normal development of social skills, including getting along with, and empathy for others.

Bullying Can Be Defined As:

Behavior of a child or group of children toward another child that hurts or rejects that child.

Negative actions that are repeated and carried out over time. ¹

Behavior by one person or a group of people in order to have power over another person. This behavior can be:

- **Verbal** – Name calling, saying nasty things about the child, threatening them, spreading rumors, persistent teasing, racial, homophobic and sexual taunts,
- **Physical** – pushing, hitting, kicking, pinching, making others do things they don't want to do, stealing or damaging belongings, unwanted sexual contact, rude gestures
- **Isolation** – leaving them out of activities, not talking to them,
- **Written** – writing nasty things about them, graffiti
- **Related to gender, race, sexual orientation.**

Bullying Can Be Situational

Bullying can also be seen as the effect the behavior has on another person, not necessarily the specific action. That is because bullying is contextual, and what is teasing or joking in one situation, can also be seen as bullying in another situation. For example, saying that someone is dumb or too skinny, or making a rude gesture or pushing slightly can be teasing, and not bullying if:

- **If it is mutual and both people like the behavior,**
- **If the relationship between the two is one of friendship**
- **If the tone of voice and body language are non-threatening**

EFFECTS OF BULLYING

Personal

Bullying Can Have Harmful Effects on Children Who Are Bullied

It can make them feel uncomfortable, scared, lonely, unhappy, unsafe, that something is wrong with them. This may lead to interference with their social, academic and emotional development.

Bullying Can Have Harmful Effects on Children Who Bully

Bullies tend to become more aggressive adults who stand a much higher than average chance of having multiple criminal convictions. In one study, 60% of those students in sixth to ninth grades characterized as bullies had at least one criminal conviction by age 24. ² Chronic bullies seen to maintain their behaviors into adulthood, negatively influencing their ability to develop and maintain positive relationships. ³

Bullying Can Have Harmful Effects on Children Who are Bystanders

There are children who are not themselves bullies, but will follow bullies and help them harass or victimize other children. This can them to experience anxiety and fear, negatively affect their environment, and reinforce the notion that they too, could use bullying to solve problems.

Bullying Can Have Specific Harmful Effects on Girls Who Bully

Rachel Simmons says that girls face a cultural mandate to be "nice" and not too powerful, and have few approved outlets for anger or conflict. They often take their aggression underground resulting in nasty gossip, name-calling, isolation and manipulation of relationships. ⁴ If this aggression is turned against themselves it can result in depression, self criticism and even eating disorders. ⁵

Social

Bullying Can Be a Precursor to Sexual Harassment, Dating Violence and Adult Domestic Violence

Bullying can be seen as a form of interpersonal violence, such as sexual harassment, dating violence, adult domestic violence and child abuse. The most important element in such interactions is the imbalance of power in the situation, and all interventions must take this into account.

Bullies appear to derive satisfaction from inflicting injury and suffering on others, seem to have little empathy for their victims, and often defend their actions by saying that their victims provoked them in some way. These are typical characteristics of teen and adult batterers. If boys bully in peer relationships when they are younger, they may think they can use this behavior in dating relationships when they are older. If they have not been made to feel responsible for making others feel badly, and if their need to control is never challenged when they are young, they will think that this behavior is acceptable as a teen and adult.

STATISTICS

- Fifteen % of students are involved in bully/victim problems in elementary and junior high school
- Seven % of children have been bullies and 9% have been victims
- Boys engage in more direct physical bullying than girls, both as perpetrators and as victims
- Girls engage in more indirect bullying such as spreading rumors and manipulating friendships
- Boys engage in most of the bullying toward both girls and boys: 60% of girls who were bullied in fifth to seventh grade were bullied mainly by boys; 80 % of boys were bullied by other boys
- Bullying is most intense in elementary school, somewhat less in middle school, and then decreases as children get older. A large proportion of those who are bullied in lower grades are bullied by older children, emphasizing the role of power differentials in bullying.
- Most bullying takes place in areas unsupervised by adults: going to or coming from school, playground, lunch, hallways, etc.
- Boys and girls both used sexual put-downs toward girls
- Girls' use of words like "slut" and "whore" helped maintain a hierarchy with male-oriented, tough and sexually aggressive boys at the top. ⁶

CAUSES OF BULLYING

Family Factors Contributing to the Development of a Bully

- Lack of attention and warmth toward the child
- Modeling of aggressive behavior at home
- Poor supervision of the child
- Very forceful parental discipline at home
- Less time spent with adults
- Few positive adult role models or positive peer influences are all factors that contribute to the formation of a bully. Role modeling is especially important for children for when they see their fathers, or other males, abuse their mothers it leads to more aggressive behavior of all kinds on the part of the child. ⁷

Individual Factors

Children who are active and impulsive may be more inclined to develop into bullies.

School Factors

Lack of good supervision, particularly in the hallways, schoolyard and playground, and lack of appropriate interventions by adults when they see or hear about bullying encourages its continuation.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

Realize the Benefits of a Safe and Supportive School Climate

Schools that have developed comprehensive, school-wide programs on bullying experienced a reduction of 50% in direct bullying two years after implementation of the program. Teachers and students reported very positive changes in the school climate, improved order and discipline, more positive social relationships, greater satisfaction on the part of the students and reduced vandalism.⁸

Good programs are characterized by warmth, positive interest and involvement by adults; firm limits to unacceptable behavior; non-hostile, nonphysical negative consequences consistently applied in cases of unacceptable behavior; adults acting as authorities and positive role models.

Develop and Implement a School-Wide Policy on Bullying.

Make sure everyone knows what the policy is, that the policy is applied consistently, and that everyone believes in the policy. The policy can consist of:

- Supervising key areas of the school, especially before and after school, and at recess and lunch
- Raising awareness through the curriculum,
- Giving students opportunities to talk about bullying in general,
- Surveying bully/victim problems at the start of program implementation
- Developing procedures for investigating incidents,
- Developing guideline for listening to victims, witness and bullies,
- Identifying specific responsibilities for specific people, including teachers students parents staff.
- Providing effective consequences to bullies
- Providing all children with opportunities to develop good interpersonal skills
- Encouraging good communication between teachers, administrators, and parents so parents can ensure that their concerns for their child are being taken seriously
- Creating a school climate that is supportive and inclusive where aggressive bullying behavior is not tolerated.

When Developing the Policy Ensure There Will Be:

- Consistent and immediate consequences for aggressive behavior.
- Praise for pro-social and helpful behavior by students.
- Class rules against bullying.
- Class meetings about bullying.
- Serious talks with bullies, victims, parents of bullies and victims.
- Meeting of school parent teachers associations on subject of bullying.
- Teaching of social skills, non-violent, non-racist, non-sexist, non-homophobic values and behaviors as a core part of everyday curriculum.

When Dealing With Bullying Incidents:

- Intervene immediately, stop the bullying behaviors as soon as you see it or become aware of it.
- Keep a written record of the incident, investigation and outcomes. Never ignore suspected bullying. Adopt a problem-solving approach.
- Talk to the bully, victim and witnesses separately, and listen carefully.
- Expect that the bully will minimize and/or deny the behavior
- Refer to school codes of conduct in telling the bully why their behavior was unacceptable. Tell them what behavior is expected of them. Tell them of the sanctions that will be imposed and that their parents will be involved
- Be cautious in using a peer mediation as the victim may feel intimidated, afraid of and overwhelmed by the bully
- Reassure the victim that all possible steps will be take to prevent a recurrence.
- Inform the parents of the victim and the bully as soon as possible, and involve them in designing a plan of action, if possible.
- Try to develop victim's peer support, social and other skills and confidence.
- Use specific re-education for the bullies to develop social and empathy skills.
- Follow up repeatedly and check bullying has not resumed. Follow up with communication with all parents.
- Monitor the behavior of the bully and safety of the victim.

In-Service Programs

- Develop and implement in-service programs for teachers on bullying and the school-wide program.
- Encourage external training for teachers and staff that deals with bullying, sexual harassment, and dating violence.
- Ask teachers and staff what types of bullying behavior they have seen, suggestions they may have for reduction in bullying.

Classroom Activities

- Develop a class code of conduct: no hitting punching or kicking, no name-calling or put downs,
- Include everyone when doing group activities, have a friendly class and help others if they are bullied.
- Engage in role-playing exercises to teach assertive behavior to victims, and alternative, pro-social behavior to bullies, ways other students can help victims, and all can work together to create a more positive school environment.
- Praise positive behavior, arrange opportunities for volunteer service toward other students, younger students, and the community.
- Raise awareness through the curriculum about gender, race and sexual orientation stereotyping
- Help girls to develop new skills and expectations about what it means to be powerful

HANDOUT - WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

If Their Child Is Being Bullied

- Ask the child directly. If children show signs of fear of going to school, lack of friends, missing belongings, torn clothing, increased fearfulness and anxiety they may be experiencing bullying and not be able to tell you about it.
- Be empathetic and considerate. Make it clear that the bullying is not their fault, and that they have a right to be safe. Ask them how they have been dealing with the bullying, talk about what else can be done and what action you both can take to solve the problem.
- Work with the school immediately to make sure your child is safe, that effective consequences are applied toward the bully, and that monitoring at school is adequate. Advocate for involvement of the bully's parents.
- Encourage your child to always tell an adult they can trust. Help your child list all the adults they trust, who they could phone or go to for help. Write the names and phone numbers on a card that they can carry with them.
- If the bullying is happening on the way to and from school, arrange for an older supportive child accompany them, or do it yourself until other interventions can take place.
- Try to get your child to participate in positive social groups that meet their interests. Help your child develop special skills and confidence.
- Encourage the school to develop a "no bullying" policy if they do not already have one, and keep working with the school until the bullying stops,

If Their Child Is A Bully

- Stay calm and try to find out how and why they have been behaving in this way. Explain that bullying is wrong and that you will not tolerate this kind of behavior, and ask them how they would feel if someone was bullying them. Do not accept explanations that "it was all in fun". Keep in mind that a bully will try to deny or minimize their wrongdoing.
- Develop consistent family rules. When they follow the rules provide praise and positive reinforcement.
- Arrange for an effective and non-violent consequence that is appropriate for the bullying behavior, their age and stage of development. Make sure the punishment is not physical for it will only reinforce the idea that "might is right". Talk about what might help them to stop bullying and show them how to interact with other children without resorting to bullying.
- Increase your supervision of your child's activities, whereabouts, and friends. Spend time with your child and set reasonable rules. Keep in touch with your child's school to make sure your child is not continuing the bullying behavior.
- Set a good example for your child. Role modeling is important. If you do not have control over your partner's behavior explain to the child that this is still not the right way to behave.
- Talk to your child's school and find out if they have programs to help bullies. Seek help from the school psychologist, a counselor, social worker or mental health center in the community.

HANDOUT – *WHAT FRIENDS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS CAN DO*

- Try to persuade the person being bullied to talk to an adult they can trust. If it is OK with the person being bullied talk to a trusted adult on their behalf.
- Let the bullies know that you are not afraid of them, and will do what you can to see they stop.
- Raise the issue of bullying with the student council if the school has one. Raise the issue in appropriate class discussions. Involve as many people as possible in the issue.
- Do not use violence against the bully as you may look like you are a bully. Do not tell the person being bullied to deal with the problem on their own, and do not try to deal with the problem on your own. Tell a trusted adult.

ADVICE FOR KIDS

- Remember, it's not your fault that you are bullied. You are not the problem, the bully is the problem.
- You have the right to feel safe and secure. No one has the right to hurt you physically or mentally.
- You don't have to face this on your own. Tell someone you can trust: parents, a teacher, school principal, someone from your family, or parents of friends.
- If you find it difficult to talk about being bullied, it may be easier to write down what has been happening to you and give it to an adult you trust.
- If you see someone else being bullied try to show the bully that what they're doing is stupid and mean. Help the person being bullied to tell an adult they can trust.
- If you're a bully think about why you did it and how you were feeling at the time. Were you feeling jealous of the person you bullied? Did you bully to try and make yourself popular, look tough and in charge, get attention, make others afraid? Are you being bullied yourself? Try to find other way to make yourself feel good. Bullies can get help from counselors, teachers and parents help them deal with their feelings.

HANDOUT - TECHNIQUES FOR KIDS TO USE

I. Avoid the Bully

Walk away. Use another hallway. Take a different route home. There is nothing cowardly or weak about this, it's just good common sense.

II. Body Language

Improve your body language. Walk tall by keeping your shoulders back. Look straight ahead. When you talk to people look them straight in the eye. Acting more confident will make you feel more confident. When you feel more confident you will act more confident.

III. Verbal

Agree with the person - Defuse a tense situation. It's hard to argue with people when they agree with you. Remember you're only pretending to agree with the bully. Be honest and tell the bully how you feel: "That really hurts my feelings" or "It's the best my parents could afford". This communicates to the bully, "Hey I feel better about myself than you do. The bully wants to find someone who is feeling worse than himself.

Use humor - Make a joke about how silly the situation is. Then the focus of attention goes to you and not to the bully, and it puts people on your side.

Yell at the Bully - Say, "Stop picking on me." "Leave me alone." Don't get overemotional or upset, just spell it out as loud as you can: "Stop." It draws attention to your situation, usually more than the bully can handle.

IV. Adult Authority - Adults can usually put a stop to bullying pretty quickly. (You need to have an adult who will on your side 110 %.) Choose that adult carefully.

SUMMARY

- Keep a cool head: you have a lot of options.
- You're not alone in this battle against bullies. It's a problem everyone has had to struggle with. Even the bullies themselves get bullied.
- If you ever fear for your safety or the safety of others tell an adult immediately.

REFERENCES

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3. **Oliver, R., Hazler, R. and Hoover, J.**, *The perceived role of bullying in small-town midwestern schools*, *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 1994, 72, 4, 416-410
4. **Simmons, Rachel**, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, Harcourt, 2002
5. **Lamb, Sharon**, *The Secret Lives of Girls*, The Free Press, 2002
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8. **Ollweus**, Ibid.

APPENDIX
Court Cases Where Schools Were
Found Liable for Failure to
Protect Students from Bullying and Harassment

Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education - 526 U.S. 629 646-647 (1999)

When a fifth grade girl was sexually harassed by a male classmate the mother repeatedly notified the school administration but no action was ever taken to prevent the boy from continuing the harassment. Finally, the mother filed a lawsuit against the school district for its failure to prevent the sexual harassment as required by Title IX. The Court found that the school district was liable for "deliberate indifference". It noted that recipients of federal funding may be liable for subjecting students to discrimination where the recipient is deliberately indifferent to known acts of student-on-student sexual harassment, and the harasser is under the school's disciplinary authority.

Nabozny v. Podlesny – 92 F.3d 446 (7th Cir.1996)

Michael Nabozny, a gay student, alleged he had been tormented from the 7th grade until the 11th grade, when he finally dropped out of school. Michael's mother testified that she had made repeated trips to the school to end his physical and mental abuse, and was told that action would be taken and her son would be safe, but no action was ever taken and the abuse continued. Although the district court found for the defendants, on appeal the Seventh Circuit court reversed the decision and found enough evidence to support a claim of discrimination under Title IX and a Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection claim, and the jury awarded Nabozny \$900,000 in damages.