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# Bullying the problem

**B**ullying—Systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt and/or psychological distress on one or more students.

However it is defined, bullying is not just child's play, but a terrifying experience many American school children face every day. It can be as direct as teasing, hitting or threatening, or indirect as in exclusion, rumors or manipulation. During the past decade, bullying has become more lethal and has occurred more frequently than it had in the previous two decades. In our quest to provide the quality education the America's children deserve, this problem can no longer be treated lightly. NEA's National Bullying Awareness Campaign is designed to assist communities in developing solutions that will eradicate bullying from America's public schools.

Bullying can no longer be explained away, as some adults are inclined to do, as a normal part of growing up. Bullying has only harmful, not beneficial, effects for the target and the perpetrator—even the bystander. Many children in our nation's schools are robbed of their opportunity to learn because they are bullied and victimized daily. Bullying exacts a terrible toll on children, and the scars can last a lifetime.

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## Damage to the target

Students who are the targets of repeated bullying behavior can, and often do, experience extreme fear and stress:

- Fear of going to school
- Fear of using the school bathroom
- Fear of the bus ride to and from school
- Physical symptoms of illness
- Diminished ability to learn

## Damage to the perpetrator

If bullying behaviors are allowed to continue, they can escalate into even more serious behavior, such as sexual harassment, or criminal activity in higher grades and in adulthood.

- Boys identified as bullies in grades six to nine had one criminal conviction by age twenty-four, according to one study.
- Forty percent of those identified had three or more arrests by age thirty.
- Bullies, one study shows, are at even greater risk of suicide than their targets.
- Bullies often grow up to perpetuate family violence.

## Damage to the bystander

Bystanders can be deeply affected:

- Feeling anger and helplessness for not knowing what to do.
  - Nightmare about being next target.
  - Guilt for not taking action.
  - Fear of certain areas in school.
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## What can schools do?

The school, or preferably the school district, can initiate a whole school campaign. This involves strong commitment and a willingness to work together on the part of everyone involved. It must involve all school personnel, other professionals, as needed, students and parents. These elements are important to a successful campaign:

- A code of conduct, effectively communicated to all students, is an essential part of a whole school campaign.
  - Making the school become a telling school. Any child who is bullied by another child or adult, or who sees another child being bullied, is urged to report the incident to designated school personnel.
  - Coaching on what to do when being bullied and how to describe the incidents to adults needs to be available to children in the early stages of the implementation of this program.
  - Experts from outside the school for all staff training and planning can help determine the success of the program. There are a number of good programs that can be brought into the school district to assist in whole school campaigns.
  - Social skills instruction should be incorporated into classroom activities and school events. Wise selection of materials can increase students' awareness of when they are being bullied and how to respond.
  - Students exhibiting bullying behavior need to be shown other ways to use their energy.
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## What can **communities** do?

NEA believes that bullying and harassment are community issues and require total community involvement to find solutions. Numerous opportunities will arise for community involvement. A community task force could incorporate many of the following suggestions:

- Develop a multifaceted, systemic approach that includes all community stakeholders.
- Sponsor a conference or forum to educate, and raise awareness.
- Create a speakers bureau to speak out on the issue.
- Encourage civic groups to provide venues for presentations.
- Work with mayor's offices to celebrate "Respect for Everyone" campaigns.
- Sponsor "Teach-In's" for parents and community using students, parents, and teachers to discuss strategies to prevent bullying on campus.
- Partner with higher education institutions to publish data showing how bullying contributes to absenteeism and low achievement in school.
- Connect with service learning programs in schools.
- Arrange for public relations support from local TV, radio and print media.
- Sponsor early childhood and after-school programs.

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## What can **parents** do?

It is essential that parents are acquainted with their child's school and have knowledge of the school's policies and practices. There is considerable evidence that children learn better when their parents are involved with their school in some manner.

- Parents need to talk with their child and show interest in his/her school life.
- Parents need to ask questions of teachers and administrators; inquire about school policies for handling incidents of bullying, or its ugly relative sexual harassment.
- Ask to be notified should their child become involved in an incident.
- Ask for written copies of school policies long before an incident has had time to occur.
- Report any incidents that do occur, and make sure to keep good records.
- If school personnel make excuses for the bullying behavior, or refuse to address the incident, report the incident to the local superintendent and demand the issue be addressed.
- Offer assistance to the school by volunteering your time.

This brochure was designed as part of NEA's national Bullying Campaign. Feel free to reproduce this brochure in part or in its entirety.

### **WVEA-NEA**

For more information about  
The Bullying Campaign, visit  
[www.nea.org/issues/safescho/bullying/](http://www.nea.org/issues/safescho/bullying/)

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# National **BULLYING** awareness Campaign



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"If we want to have peace in the world  
we will have to start with the children."

--Gandhi

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