



# SOCIAL MEDIA

## Bullying is a public health problem.

Bullying has long been tolerated by many people as a rite of passage among children and teens. But bullying is not a normal part of childhood. It is a serious public health problem. ***Bullying harms the child who is bullied, the child who is the bully, and the bystanders.***

## There are four main types of bullying:

1. **Physical bullying** involves the use of physical force (such as shoving, hitting, spitting, pushing, and tripping).
2. **Verbal bullying** involves words or writing that cause harm (such as taunting, name calling, offensive notes or hand gestures, verbal threats).
3. **Relational bullying** is behavior designed to harm the reputation and relationships of the targeted youth (such as social isolation, rumor-spreading, posting mean comments or pictures online).
4. **Damage to property** is theft or damaging of the target youth's property by the bully in order to cause harm.

Cyberbullying is not a separate type of bullying, but a way in which some types of bullying can happen. For example, verbal bullying and relational bullying can happen online.

Bullying can happen as early as preschool, but bullying is most likely to happen during middle school. It can happen in many different settings—in classrooms, in school gyms and cafeterias, on school buses, and online.

## THE LANDSCAPE OF BULLYING





## Bullying affects a large number of children and youth.

School-based bullying probably affects between 18 and 31 percent of children and youth, and cyberbullying probably affects about 7 to 15 percent of youth. Some young people are more likely to be bullied: youth with disabilities, obese youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth.

## The harm caused by bullying can last a long time.

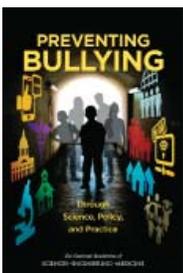
Bullying can have long-lasting effects on youth who are bullied, for youth who bully others, and for youth who witness bullying. These consequences include poor school performance, anxiety, depression, and future delinquent and aggressive behavior. The harmful results of being bullied can last into adulthood.

Bullying can have long-lasting consequences for those who are bullied:

- Children and youth who have been bullied can experience problems such as sleeping problems, headaches, stomachaches, and bedwetting.
- Psychological problems are also common after being bullied, and can include depression, anxiety, and especially for girls, self-harming behavior. Anger, aggression, use of alcohol, and conduct problems are common, especially for boys.
- Children and youth who have been bullied can suffer academic problems such as poor grades or test scores.
- The harmful consequences of being bullied can last into adulthood.
- Children and youth who both bully others and are bullied themselves are at even greater risk of experiencing harm as a result.
- Individuals who are bullied or who bully others—or both—are much more likely to consider or attempt suicide, compared to children who are not involved in bullying.

## Bullying CAN Be Prevented.

Reducing the presence and impact of bullying will require many groups working together: families and schools, communities, health care workers, the media and social media, and federal and state governments and agencies.



[www.nas.edu/ScienceOnBullying](http://www.nas.edu/ScienceOnBullying)



## Social media companies are in a unique position to intervene.

Outside of school, the online world is among the most common public “places” where today’s youth spend time. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are used by the majority of youth; most youth log into social media at least once daily, and most youth maintain more than one social media platform. Social media provides youth opportunities to stay connected to friends, develop an online identity, and seek information about peers. Studies have shown that peer interactions online can be just as important, in relation to self-esteem and friendships, as those expressed offline. Other work has illustrated that social media has become a normative part of the friendship formation and maintenance process.

Because of the popularity of these tools among youth, and their easy, anytime-access using mobile devices, they have become woven into the fabric of teens’ lives and relationships. These technologies present both new opportunities and challenges to teens as they navigate relationships, social situations, and bullying behavior.

There is evidence to support a correlation between being bullied online and in person. In contrast to school-based bullying, where a youth can seek respite at home, the online context is available 24/7 and may lead to a youth feeling that the bullying experience is inescapable. In contrast to in-person bullying where the perpetrator’s identity is easily known, the online context provides the potential for bullying to be anonymous. However, a recent study found that cases in which a perpetrator’s identity is unknown to a target are relatively infrequent.

A single bullying event can be distributed widely (or “go viral”), which can lead to varied interpretations of what it means to have a bullying experience be repeated. An area in which concern for bullying experiences exists but little research has been done is in the online gaming context. A salient feature of the online video game environment that may impact bullying rates or experiences are that many popular games promote aggressive behavior or violence to win the game; one study found that at least half of adolescents’ listed favorite games were violent in nature.

## What can social media companies do to prevent and respond to bullying?

- Social media companies, in partnership with the Federal Partners for Bullying Prevention Steering Committee, should adopt, implement, and evaluate on an ongoing basis policies and programs for preventing, identifying, and responding to bullying on their platforms and should publish their anti-bullying policies on their websites.
- Social media companies should evaluate and measure bullying behavior on their platform and share this information with researchers and policymakers.