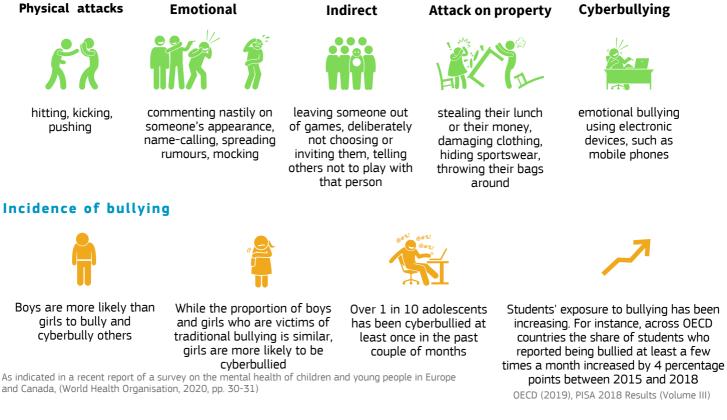European Commission

What can schools do about bullying?

Bullying happens when a student hurts another on purpose, this behaviour is done more than once over time, and one student has more power than the other (is physically stronger or more popular).

Types of bullying

Physical attacks

hitting, kicking, pushing

Emotional

commenting nastily on someone's appearance, name-calling, spreading rumours, mocking

Indirect

leaving someone out of games, deliberately not choosing or inviting them, telling others not to play with that person

Attack on property

stealing their lunch or their money, damaging clothing, hiding sportswear, throwing their bags around

Cyberbullying

emotional bullying using electronic devices, such as mobile phones

Incidence of bullying

Boys are more likely than girls to bully and cyberbully others

While the proportion of boys and girls who are victims of traditional bullying is similar, girls are more likely to be cyberbullied

Over 1 in 10 adolescents has been cyberbullied at least once in the past couple of months

Students' exposure to bullying has been increasing. For instance, across OECD countries the share of students who reported being bullied at least a few times a month increased by 4 percentage points between 2015 and 2018

As indicated in a recent report of a survey on the mental health of children and young people in Europe and Canada, (World Health Organisation, 2020, pp. 30-31)

OECD (2019), PISA 2018 Results (Volume III)

Signs and symptoms in victimised children

Short-term

Parents are often the first to notice immediate signs of distress such as:
- Behaviour changes: child becomes moody, aggressive, angry
- Complains of stomach aches, headaches, sleeplessness
- Comes home with damaged or lost belongings
- Has unexplained injuries

Long-term

Over time, signs of continued bullying can be noticed by school professionals:
- Loss of confidence, becomes withdrawn
- Relationship difficulties, is isolated, mistrusts peer group
- Academic attainment drops
- At risk of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety
- At risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation

Education and Training

How can schools, parents and community liaise to resolve the issue?

Parents provide emotional support to a victimised child by increasing their child's sense of self-worth.

Parents can support the school's anti-bullying policies and interventions.

Schools can provide guidance on strategies such as blocking, monitoring, limiting access to potentially damaging technology.

Schools can be proactive in addressing wider issues in the local community, that perpetuate discriminatory behaviour from one generation to the next

Schools can regularly update parents with information on bullying, knowledge on its impact, effective interventions and advice on ineffective responses, such as retaliation ("hit the bully back") or minimising the damage ("bullying prepares you for life")
Stives et al., 2019

Schools can provide opportunities (e.g. through parents' meetings/newsletters/ open days) to explain the value of whole-school approaches, including anti-bullying policies and the implementation of SEL

What can schools do through a whole school approach (WSA)?

1 Implement inclusive policies and celebrate diversity through (SEL) curriculum and other interventions that enhance a positive school and classroom climate

2 Enhance student voice through peer support systems; engage health care professionals (such as counsellors/psychologists) in the training and supervision process
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3 Facilitate workshops from local charities/NGOs that address violence in school, such as Anti-Bullying Ambassadors
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4 Develop evidence-based anti-bullying programmes
LEARN MORE ›

5 Ensure wide circulation of the school anti-bullying policy

6 Initiate interventions such as NoTrap! anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying (Palladino et al. 2016) and European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments (ENABLE)
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7 Implement restorative practice, e.g. conflict resolution, peer mediation, throughout the school
LEARN MORE ›

8 Foster empathy for others across the curriculum, e.g. through cooperative games and through drama, role play and story
LEARN MORE ›

9 Develop good links between school, home and community, involve local services, social and health professionals. educational psychologists.

10 Develop a Circle of Friends system
LEARN MORE ›

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