

# What motivates children who bully, and can they change?

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.

## What motivates children who bully others



Value dominance



Need to gain high status and popularity



Seek approval from peers by being "cool", "tough", "powerful"



Lack empathy for others' suffering

## How can bullies be popular?



Fear of being the next target



Perceived as "cool" or "useful to know"



Bullying episodes are perceived by some bystanders as "entertainment"

## Incidence of bullying



Boys are more likely than girls to bully and cyberbully others  
World Health Organisation, 2020, pp. 30-31



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

## Signs and symptoms in bullies



Feel unsupported by teachers



Report a high incidence of headaches



Display conduct disorders, e.g. hyperactivity and anti-social behaviour



Score low on measures of prosocial behaviour



Risk of alcohol/ drugs dependency



Risk of depression



Heightened risk of suicidal ideation

## Persistent bullies



Frequently have experienced extreme rejection and violence within their families



Very resistant to change



Gravitate to similar peers who share their values and reinforce aggressive behaviour

## What roles do other children play in bullying?

### reinforcers



cheer on and encourage the bullies

Stuart et al., 2022

### assistants



help the bully to harm others, e.g. by looking out for adults

### outsiders/ bystanders



those who watch but take no action

## How can schools and parents liaise to resolve the issue?

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

Schools can be proactive in addressing wider issues in the local community, such as xenophobia, racism, homophobia, that perpetuate discriminatory behaviour from one generation to the next.

Stuart et al., 2022

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

- 1 Implement the Method of Shared Concern (Pikas, 2002), a "no-blame", a non-punitive approach that gives students who are bullied and those who bully a voice, and creates opportunities for students who bully to change their behaviour. [LEARN MORE](#)
- 2 Implement inclusive policies and celebrate diversity in collaboration with youth services, community and education authorities, as well as through SEL curriculum and other interventions that enhance a positive school and classroom climate. [LEARN MORE](#)
- 3 Enhance student voice through restorative practice (e.g. conflict resolution and peer mediation) where different perspectives are shared and positive outcomes explored collaboratively. [LEARN MORE](#)
- 4 Workshops that challenge bystander apathy e.g. Anti-Bullying Ambassadors. [LEARN MORE](#)
- 5 Implement Nurture Groups in collaboration with educational psychologists/psychotherapists. [LEARN MORE](#)

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