

# Cruel Intentions

## FINDINGS ON BULLYING

From the March 2010 Youth Risk Behavior Survey  
Arlington, Virginia

THE ARLINGTON  
**PARTNERSHIP**  
for Children, Youth & Families

*The choices that young people make today have a big impact on their health and well-being, now and in the future.*

*The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest link to their health.*

*This brochure looks at the results on bullying and other forms of victimization from Arlington's March 2010 survey of middle and high school students. It suggests ways to get help if your child is a victim of bullying or a bully.*

## **BULLYING IS NOT A CONFLICT, BUT AN ABUSE**

Being bullied means being repeatedly exposed to verbal, physical, and/or psychological attacks, characterized by an imbalance of power.

Characteristics of a typical victim:

- Unlikely to retaliate;
- Shy, quiet, and physically weak or different;
- Lacking social support from peers.

Characteristics of a typical bully:

- Aggressive and has a strong need for power and dominance;
- Has a positive view towards the use of violence;
- Has little or no empathy for his/her victims.

## **WHY WORRY?**

Bullying creates problems for both the victim and the bully.

Bullying is reported to have immediate as well as long-term consequences for victims. Studies show that victims are more likely to have low self-esteem, feel depressed or anxious, miss more school, and experience increased social isolation. Moreover, victims of bullying are at risk for violent retaliation. For example, a 2002 U.S. Secret Service investigation found that among 41 school shooters (between 1974 and 2000), 71% had been victims of bullying.

*Being a bully* also puts a young person at risk. Studies have shown that young bullies tend to remain bullies without intervention and that bullies are more likely to drop out of school and have criminal records when they become adults.

*Every individual should have the right to be spared oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation, in school as in society at large.*

Dan Olweus,  
*Bullyvine at School*

## KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Here are some key findings for bullying in Arlington:

- ✓ 22 percent of young people were victims of bullying in the past 12 months.
- ✓ 70 percent believe that adults will help if they are told about cases of bullying.
- ✓ 4 percent missed school due to safety concerns.
- ✓ In 2010, 27 percent of 6<sup>th</sup> grade students reported being victims of a bully, up from 23 percent in 2007.
- ✓ Girls are more likely than boys to be victims of bullying and to be victims of cyber-bullying, but also to believe adults will help.

### HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2850 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington's public secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their child. Less than one percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled out a questionnaire. Most of those who did not were absent from school.

## WHO'S AT RISK?

Bullying peaks in early adolescence, occurring frequently from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. During the transition from elementary to middle school, students begin to form peer groups for social support. Students feel pressured by peers to attain acceptance and popularity. They also want to establish autonomy from their parents by demonstrating characteristics that they believe reflect independence, such as aggression and disobedience. Bullying is thus a way of demonstrating superiority over other students in a new environment.

This behavior significantly decreases during the high school years. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 27 percent of students report being victims of bullying. By 12<sup>th</sup> grade, reports of bullying decrease to 14 percent.

## BOY AND GIRL BULLIES

*Boys* are more likely to be bullies than girls; they engage in different types of bullying.

*Boys* are less subtle in their methods of bullying. They tend to use physical strength to bully others, and they verbally assault their victims with threats.

*Girls* usually bully through indirect forms of aggression. They are likely to use psychological means such as spreading vicious rumors and/or excluding a girl from social groups. Girls are also using Cyber-bullying, sending hurtful messages through emails, instant messaging, and camera phones.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE VICTIM

1. Tell your children that bullying is wrong, not their fault and that you are glad they had the courage to tell you about it.
2. Suggest your child walk away from the bully/bullies, rather than fight back.
3. Encourage your child to ask for help from a responsible adult or teacher.
4. Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. Often this makes it worse.
5. Work with the school administration to spread anti-bullying messages.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS THE BULLY

1. Make clear that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
2. Confer with your child's teacher and ask the teacher to monitor her/his activities and actions closely
3. Help your child imagine that she/he is walking in the victim's shoes. Teach empathy.
4. Monitor your own behavior and aggression. Be a role model who shows respect for others.

## TO LEARN MORE

*Teenage Bullying and Violence: Is There a Cure?* (Institute for Youth Development)  
[www.youthdevelopment.org/download/YouthConnectionBullying.pdf](http://www.youthdevelopment.org/download/YouthConnectionBullying.pdf)

*Social Life in Middle and High School: Dealing with Cliques and Bullies* (New York University Child Study Center) at  
[www.aboutourkids.org/files/articles/sept\\_oct.pdf](http://www.aboutourkids.org/files/articles/sept_oct.pdf)

*Cyberbullying* (National Crime Prevention Council) at  
[www.ncpc.org/topics/by-audience/parents/bullying/cyberbullying/](http://www.ncpc.org/topics/by-audience/parents/bullying/cyberbullying/)

*The Problem of Bullying in Schools* (US Department of Justice) at  
[www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e07063414-guide.pdf](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e07063414-guide.pdf)

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