POLICYMAKERS

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

The National Academies of
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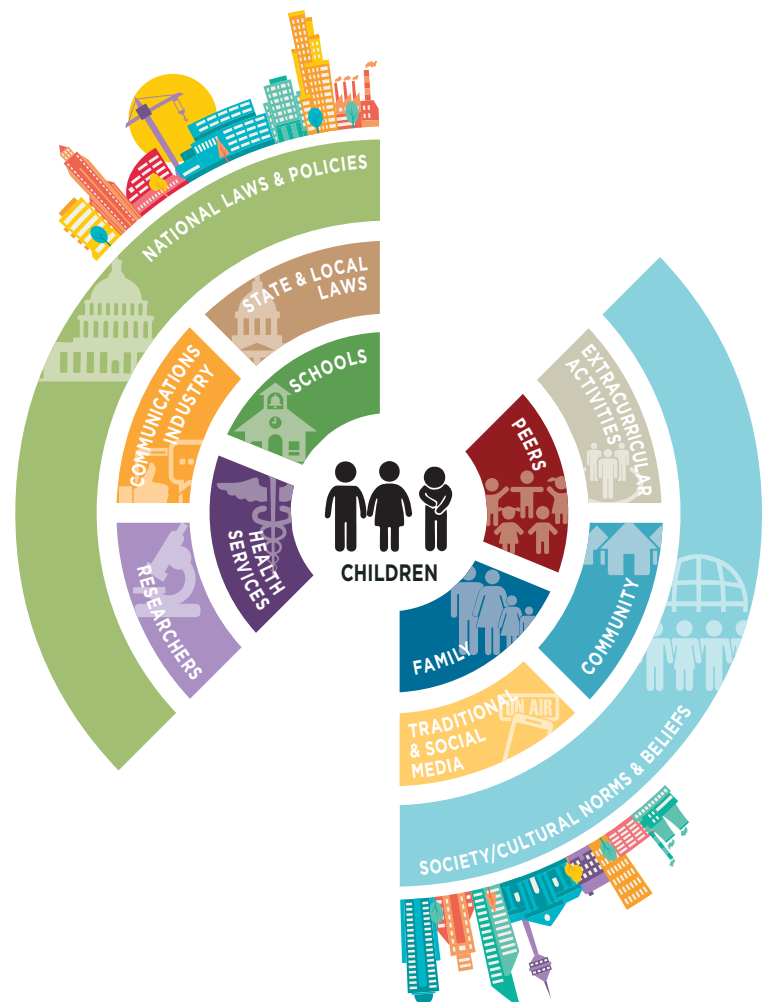
Bullying affects a large number of children and youth.

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.
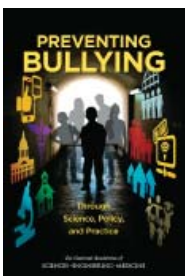
www.nas.edu/ScienceOnBullying

Many laws against bullying exist, but more information is needed on their effectiveness and how to strengthen it.

Currently, there is no comprehensive federal statute that explicitly prohibits bullying among children and adolescents, including cyberbullying. However, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted laws to address bullying, and 49 states and the District of Columbia include laws about electronic forms of bullying.

Many federal, state, and local governments have responded to the prevalence of bullying by adopting laws and implementing programs to prevent bullying and deal with its consequences. However, many of these responses have been undertaken with little attention to what is known about bullying and its effects.

The development of anti-bullying laws or policies should be based on evidence about what is effective. Additional research is needed to determine the specific components of an anti-bullying law that are most effective in reducing bullying, in order to guide legislators who may amend existing laws or create new ones.

- Federal civil rights and anti-discrimination laws offer important protections against bullying, but may be limited in addressing bullying of individuals who are not a member of a protected class.

- States and localities have been exploring law and policy solutions to bullying. There is substantial variation across states, and state laws differ on a number of critical issues, including how bullying is defined and the scope of schools' authority to respond to bullying.

- Litigation offers a potential remedy for victims of bullying. Although some claimants have been successful in pursuing a remedy through the courts, significant challenges exist in pursuing litigation, and most cases litigated to date have favored defendants (most commonly, schools). Evidence-based research on the consequences of bullying can help inform litigation efforts at several stages, including case discovery and planning, pleadings, and trial.

- There are limited evaluations of the effectiveness of bullying laws in preventing bullying and reducing its harmful consequences. Emerging evidence suggests that such laws and policies can have a positive impact on reducing bullying and on protecting groups that are disproportionately vulnerable to bullying, such as gay and lesbian youth.

- Zero tolerance policies have not had an impact in keeping schools safer and could have adverse consequences. Such policies should be discontinued, and the resources should be redirected to evidence-based policies and programs.
  Multicomponent schoolwide programs, which combine elements of universal programs, such as providing class time to discuss bullying, along with more targeted interventions for youth at risk of bullying or being bullied—for example, teaching more intensive social-emotional skills—appear to be most effective at reducing bullying.

Additional research is needed to further evaluate the effectiveness of anti-bullying laws and policies, including determining:

- whether anti-bullying laws and policies are effective in reducing bullying perpetration;

- the mechanisms through which anti-bullying laws and policies reduce bullying – for example, whether they change in perceptions of school safety or norms around bullying;

- whether anti-bullying laws and policies impact all forms of bullying—relational, physical, reputational, and cyberbullying—or only some;

- whether the beneficial consequences of these laws and policies also extend to other forms of youth violence, such as fighting and carrying weapons, and risky behaviors such as drug or alcohol use;

- whether anti-bullying laws and policies are effective in reducing the harmful consequences associated with being bullied, such as poor academic achievement, depression, and suicidal ideation; and

- subgroups of youth for whom anti-bullying laws and policies are most, and least, effective—and in particular, whether these laws and policies are effective at protecting those most vulnerable to bullying.

Future studies are also needed to shed more light on the institutional, contextual, and social factors that impede or facilitate the implementation of anti-bullying laws and policies.

Government agencies and offices should link research to policy.

- The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, the state attorneys general, and local education agencies together should

  - partner with researchers to collect data on an ongoing basis on the efficacy and implementation of anti-bullying laws and policies;

  - convene an annual meeting to facilitate collaborations between social scientists, legislative members, and practitioners responsible for creating, implementing, enforcing, and evaluating anti-bullying laws and policies and to review research on anti-bullying laws and policies; and

  - report research findings on an annual basis to both Congress and the state legislatures so that anti-bullying laws and policies can be strengthened and informed by evidence-based research.

Federal Resources for Policymakers

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Prevent Bullying
  http://www.cdc.gov/features/prevent-bullying/

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
- Bullying: Overview
  https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/bullying/Pages/default.aspx

Health Resources and Services Administration
- Bullying Prevention
  http://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/bullying/

- Children Safety Network; Bullying Prevention
  http://www.childrenssafetynetwork.org/injury-topics/bullying-prevention

- Bullying Prevention: 2015 Resource Guide
  http://www.childrenssafetynetwork.org/sites/childrenssafetynetwork.org/files/Bullying%20Prevention.pdf

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- KnowBullying mobile app
  http://store.samhsa.gov/apps/knowbullying/index.html

PACER.org
- PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center
  http://www.pacer.org/bullying/

United States Department of Health and Human Services
- Stopbullying.gov
- Policies and Laws
  http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/

United States Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Bullying in Schools: An Overview
  http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/234205.pdf