

## PARENTS, DID YOU KNOW...?

While we all have images that come to mind when we hear the word *bullying* there is a working definition of the word which is used in education and among those involved in developing laws, policies and/or codes of conduct around bullying.

According to one website, [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov), the most common definition of bullying is unwanted, aggressive (not necessarily physical but, rather, hostile) behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. (This power imbalance might have to do with the size, strength, popularity differences between the two persons involved OR could mean that a group of individuals 'gang up' against one or two others – clearly a power imbalance). The behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time. The power imbalance and repetition must be part of the behavior in order for the behavior to fall in the domain of bullying. In other words, there are many things we can do that are 'rude', 'inconsiderate', 'insensitive' and even down right 'mean' but these actions are only considered bullying IF the criteria of power imbalance AND repetition (potential) are met.

If the criteria stated in the definition are present, then even very subtle behaviours can be bullying. Examples of verbal bullying might include (and remember, only IF there is a power imbalance and repetition) teasing, name-calling, taunting, threats of harm, or inappropriate sexual comments. Social bullying (also known as relational bullying) involves deliberately hurting someone's reputation or relationships, including leaving out a specific individual from a group, telling other children to not be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, embarrassing someone in front of others. Physical bullying involves hurting someone or a person's possessions. Physical bullying includes hitting/kicking/ pinching, spitting, tripping/pushing, taking or breaking someone's things or making mean or rude hand gestures or facial expressions.

Here are some examples of what would NOT be considered bullying unless all the criteria of the definition were met:

Two friends having an argument, even to the point of breaking off the friendship; not being invited to a birthday party; one child grabbing a toy from another; one student being bossy or mean to other students in general (ie. not picking on anyone in particular); students who spontaneously laugh at someone because of something funny he/she said or did; students quickly making groups for their class project and not noticing that one student doesn't have a group; a student kicked/tackled/hit with a ball during a game in gym or at recess; a physical fight between peers – even if it results in injury.

According to Barbara Coloroso, "Bullying is not about anger. It is not a conflict to be resolved, it's about contempt—a powerful feeling of dislike toward someone considered to be worthless, inferior or undeserving of respect. Contempt comes with three apparent psychological advantages that allow kids to harm others without feeling empathy, compassion or shame. These are: a sense of entitlement, that they have the right to hurt or control others, an intolerance towards difference, and a freedom to exclude, bar, isolate and segregate others"

(Barbara Coloroso, *The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander*, 2003).

The first step to stopping bullying is to understand and be very clear about what it is. Then, parents and educators can work together more effectively to help students recognize bullying behaviours in themselves or in others, and we can all work together to stop it!

*V. Ginter*

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[kidsareworthit.com/Barbara\\_s\\_Biography.html](http://kidsareworthit.com/Barbara_s_Biography.html)

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