

Parenting and Bullying

Parents play many critical roles in promoting their children's capacity to have healthy relationships. As attachment figures, parents provide infants and children with a secure base in times of distress. A secure base promotes children's ability to trust others and cope with stress throughout the lifespan. As authority figures, parents teach children appropriate social behaviors and set limits on misbehavior. As role models, parents teach many social skills and values by the examples set by their own behaviors and attitudes, such as resolving marital and family conflicts non-violently through assertive communication, treating others with respect, self-control, tolerance of differences, and a sense of justice and fair play.

Not surprisingly, research suggests that the parenting characteristics that place children at risk for aggression and mental health problems are also associated with bullying and victimization problems. Understanding the reasons why children become involved in bullying (as a child who bullies others, is bullied, or is "dually involved" in both bullying and being victimized) is complex. Many factors interact including: individual characteristics (e.g., gender, history of parenting, temperament, personality) and situational factors (e.g., peer group dynamics, social norms, etc.).^{1,2} Parenting practices can have significant effects, but their impacts may vary by gender, culture, socio-economic, and other environmental factors.³

Key Research Findings

Parenting Factors Linked to Bullying

- Children and youth who bully others are more likely than non-bullying youth to come from families characterized by low levels of family warmth and cohesion.^{4,5}
- In mid-adolescence, youths with a long history of frequently bullying others report significantly more conflict with their parents, and significantly less trust in their parents (i.e., not feeling that their parents would be there for them when they needed them) when compared to youths who did not bully. In the same study, adolescents with a history of moderate bullying also reported significantly less trust in their parents than adolescents who did not bully.⁶
- Adolescents whose parents use physical punishment are more likely to bully others than adolescents who are not physically punished.^{7,8}
- Youth who bully others are more likely than other youth to experience low levels of parental monitoring (e.g., being in touch, enforcing a curfew, knowing where the youth is, knowing the youth's friends).^{9,10,11,12,13}
- Students who bully report more trouble communicating with their parents than students who do not bully.¹⁴

Parenting Factors Linked to Victimization

- Children and youth who are victimized are more likely than other youth to experience high levels of parental intrusiveness (e.g., controlling the child's play, interrupting the child's activities, interfering with the child's goals).¹⁵

Parenting Factors Linked to Bullying and to Victimization

- Children who are exposed to aggression and violence between their parents are likely to learn that violence is the accepted way to handle conflict and are more likely to be involved in bullying and victimization problems.¹⁶
- Living with only one biological parent is a risk factor for involvement in bullying or victimization for white youth, but not for black or Hispanic youth.¹⁷
- White students who bully, or who are victimized, and black students who are “dually involved” in both bullying and victimization are more likely to report low parent involvement in school than other students.¹⁸
- Black students who bully or are victimized, and Hispanic students who are “dually involved” were more likely to report difficulty in communicating with their parents than other students.¹⁹

Key Themes

- Parenting characteristics linked to bullying all point to a problem in the parent-child relationship, including: low levels of warmth and cohesion, low levels of youth-reported trust in their parents, high levels of parent-child conflict, physical punishment, low levels of parental monitoring, and poor parent-child communication.
- Intrusive parenting is linked children’s experiences of victimization.
- Additional parenting characteristics that predict bullying involvement (as a child who bullies, is victimized, or is dually involved in bullying and victimization) are: exposure to marital aggression and violence, single parenting, and low parent involvement in child’s school.

Implications

Education

- There is a vast need for parenting education for parents of children of all ages. Key areas of focus include: secure and connected parent-child relationships, positive child management strategies, the need to protect children from exposure to marital aggression, and parent motivation to become involved in their children’s school.
- Schools and other child and youth service delivery programs should endeavour to welcome parent involvement, especially the involvement of parents who are not generally comfortable in community social institutions.

Assessment

- Comprehensive assessments of children’s involvement in bullying and victimization must take into account their relationships with parents, as parents are the primary socialization agents.
- More prospective longitudinal research is needed to examine the links between attachment, parenting practices and the various forms of bullying involvement and types of bullying among diverse populations.

Prevention and Intervention

- Bullying prevention programs that include a parenting education component should be delivered in childcare, early education, school, and community programs.
- Parents need support and encouragement to promote children’s social competencies and healthy relationships.

- Parents of children with chronic involvement in bullying problems may need additional parenting support and family mental health intervention.

Policy

- Parenting risk factors for children's bullying involvement are also known risk factors for poor mental health, low academic achievement, and antisocial behavior. Improving parenting may improve children's development in all of these domains.
- Accessible parenting education programs, and mental health supports for at-risk parents can address the common parenting risk factors for bullying involvement and other negative life outcomes.

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 - ⁴ Flouri, E., Buchanan, A. (2003). The role of mother involvement and father involvement in adolescent bullying behavior. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18, 634-644.
 - ⁵ Steven, B. S., Joyce, L. E. (2002). Improving student behavior and school discipline with family and community involvement. *Education Urban Sociology*, 235, 4-26.
 - ⁶ See note 3 above.
 - ⁷ Baldry, A. C. (2003) Bullying in schools and exposure to domestic violence. *Child Abuse Neglect* 27(7), 13-32.
 - ⁸ Bauer, N. S., Herrenkohl, T. I., Lozano, P., Rivara, F. P., Hill, K.G., Hawkins, J. D. (2006). Childhood bullying involvement and exposure to intimate partner violence. *Pediatrics*, 118(2), 35-42.
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 - ¹⁰ Gage, J. C., Overpeck, M. D., Nansel, T. R., Kogan, M. D. (2005). Peer activity in the evenings and participation in aggressive and problem behaviors. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 37, 517.
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 - ¹² See note 2 above.
 - ¹³ See note 3 above.
 - ¹⁴ Spriggs, A. L., Iannotti, R. J., Nansel, T. R., & Haynie, D. L. (2007). Adolescent bullying involvement and perceived family, peer and school relations: Commonalities and differences across race/ethnicity. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 41(3), 283-293.
 - ¹⁵ Espelage, D. L., Bosworth, K., Simon, T. R. (2000). Examining the social context of bullying behaviors in early adolescence. *Journal of Counselling Development*, 78, 326-33.
 - ¹⁶ See note 7 above.
 - ¹⁷ See note 14 above.
 - ¹⁸ See note 14 above.
 - ¹⁹ See note 14 above.