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Tales of Bullying

Kids who once took part in bullying are now working to stop it

When 13-year-old Isabella Petrini was in fifth grade, she was guilty of bullying. “We had our own group of friends,” she tells *Scholastic News*. “We would say things about other people that obviously weren’t nice.”

Now an eighth-grader at Cloonan Middle School in Stamford, Connecticut, Isabella says she’s left that kind of behavior behind. She came to realize just how hurtful bullying can be. In fact, she’s now working to put a stop to it at her school.

Last year, Isabella helped put together an antibullying group with about 25 other students. The group tries to raise awareness about the problem. For example, the students held an antibullying poster contest. Group members have also written an

antibullying pledge for all students at the school to sign.

As Isabella knows, there are two keys to stopping bullying. The first is understanding what it is. The second is encouraging others to stand up against it.

What Is Bullying?

According to Joel Haber, an expert on bullying, any ongoing behavior that’s meant to make someone else feel bad is bullying.

It comes in different forms. When most people think of bullies, they think of physical bullying. That’s when “kids push, kick, hit, knock each other’s possessions down, take something from each other,” says Haber.

Verbal bullying includes teasing and **taunting**. It can be as bad as—or worse than—the physical kind. But Haber says another form of bullying, called exclusion, can cause the most pain.

“Who wants to go to school and feel like they have no friends?” he says.

Then there are bystanders—people who watch bullying happen and don’t try to stop it. Experts say that bystanders are just as guilty as bullies. Sixteen-year-old Geoffrey Hill, who attends

**Geoff Hill: a
bystander
no more**



Studies show that girls are about twice as likely as boys to cyberbully—and to be cyberbullied.

West Boylston Middle/High School in Massachusetts, says he was a bystander in middle school.

“One of my friends said something to another kid, basically making fun of his weight, and I was laughing,” says Geoff. He realized later that he was wrong.

“It’s just as bad [as bullying], because you’re just joining in,” he says. Geoff later apologized to the other boy, and they went on to become friends.

Bullying Online

Bullying happens online too, when kids use computers and cell phones to pick on others. This is called cyberbullying.

“We’ve seen a tremendous rise [in] cyberbullying,” says Haber. One reason is that kids are using technology more than ever. And they can be even meaner online than in person. Hiding behind a computer screen, cyberbullies don’t have to deal with someone face-to-face. They don’t have to see the hurt they cause the person they’re bullying.

Why Bullying Happens

There’s no single reason why bullying happens. Haber says that kids sometimes bully other kids to feel more like they’re part of a group.

“They do it . . . to connect with kids they have things in common with,” he says. “Other kids get pushed down or out of a group so that the bullies feel more secure within it.”

Isabella, who bullied kids as part of a **clique**, has her own thoughts on why it happens.

“Some people have a lot of trouble at home, and when they go to school . . . they let it all out there,” she says. “And some people are just insecure or jealous. I’ll admit [those were] the reasons why I would bully.”

Taking a Stand

Isabella and Geoff agree that kids can help stop bullying by sticking up for and supporting each other—and thinking twice.

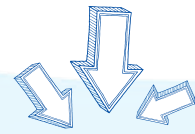
“I just try to put myself in someone else’s shoes and see how I would feel,” Geoff says. He offers this advice to kids who might bully: “Think about it before you do it. . . . Even if you say the smallest thing, it could hurt somebody in a big way.”

—by Laura Modigliani

Words to Know

taunting (tawn-ting) *verb*. making fun of or insulting someone

clique (kleek or klik) *noun*. a small group of friends who do not easily accept other people



Before You Bully

An anyone can be a bully at some point. Some kids bully because they want to fit in. Others do it to feel better about themselves. Joel Haber says that before kids behave in a way that could hurt another person, they should ask themselves some key questions:

• Would I be having fun at someone else’s expense? **YES** **NO**

• Would I be trying to make someone else feel bad because I think it’s cool? **YES** **NO**

• Would I be doing something to someone else just to show off to my friends? **YES** **NO**

• Would I be upset if this were to happen to me? **YES** **NO**

If you answered yes to any of these questions, experts say you’re about to be a bully—and you should stop.

Isabella Petrini (second from right) and her classmates are trying to stamp out bullying.

