



Information on bullying and related phenomena





Contents

Preface	3
1. What is bullying?	4
2. Clique formation and peer pressure	5
Clique formation	5
Peer pressure	5
Positive peer pressure	5
Negative peer pressure	6
Nonverbal communication	6
3. Roles	7
Roles in bullying situations	7
4. Online bullying	9
5. Stigmas	10
Persistence of stigmas	10
Impact of stigmas on identity, self-image and self-esteem	10
6. Silent witnesses	11
What to do and how to support someone being bullied?	11
7. Consequences of bullying	12
Consequences for the victim and bully	12
Consequences for bystanders and the community	13
8. Criminal activities	14
Bullying meeting the essential elements of an offence	14
Conclusion	15

Preface

The victim, bully, sidekick, defender, reinforcer, bystander and outsider. Identifying bullying and related phenomena and roles is important in order to address them.

This information pack focuses on bullying between young people. It describes the different roles and forms of bullying and the consequences that bullying can have. The information pack allows you to deepen your understanding of bullying-related phenomena and gain tools for the identification and prevention of bullying.

The information pack is aimed at professionals working with children and young people and instructors of leisure activities. Guardians and young people themselves can also get valuable information about this topic.

The information pack is part of the JÄLKI ('MARK') entity: a video and PowerPoint presentation for pupils in grades 5–9 and instructor's instructions.

The entity was created in 2022 in collaboration with the City of Helsinki's substance abuse prevention of young people – Klaari Helsinki, the City of Helsinki's Youth Services' Luuppi Media, Espoo Circus and Theatre School Esko and Kiusaamisasioiden tuki- ja neuvontakeskus (Counselling and support centre related to bullying) Valopilkku, managed by the Harjulan settlementti association. Valopilkku also produced the factual content of this information pack.



1. What is bullying?

Bullying refers to a situation in which a person is repeatedly subjected to offensive, discriminatory or injurious behaviour by one or more other persons. Bullying involves an imbalance of power: the exercise of power can be physical, mental, social or a combination of all three. The victim of bullying feels defenceless in relation to the bully or bullies. Defending oneself in a bullying situation is difficult for the victim, because the bullied person is often alone and bullies operate in a group. Long-term bullying affects self-esteem and self-worth, making it even more difficult to defend oneself. The victim can also be afraid that the bullying will get worse or more brutal if the victim starts to defend himself/herself.

Bullying can take the form of shoving, hitting, slapping, tripping, blocking movement or touching without permission, all of which are violations of physical integrity. It can also be verbal: dissing and mocking, name-calling, inventing different stigmas. It can also be social: exclusion, making someone invisible in a group setting, spreading lies and malicious rumours or isolating, for example, from the social interactions of a class, hobby group or virtual group.



2. Clique formation and peer pressure

Clique formation

We have a natural need to belong to a group and to be a meaningful part of a community. Clique formation responds to this basic need and also creates a sense of security. Clique formation means that smaller, closed groups are formed within a larger group (e.g. a class) in which it is difficult or impossible for others to join. Clique formation does not necessarily lead to bullying, but the formation of strong cliques increases the likelihood of seeing persons and groups outside the clique as threats or opponents. Within a clique, there is often a compelling team spirit and strong pressure for uniformity. This can lead to others – ‘they’ – being seen as inferiors or having little importance or wrong characteristics.

Peer pressure

Peer pressure guides each person’s social activities on a largely unconscious level. Particularly in youth, it is typical to want to please our own peer group and, on the other hand, to avoid situations where we would be subjected to the contempt of our peers. Peer pressure also increases the sense of unity. It is expressed, for example, through a uniform style and clothing, taste in music, opinions and values.

It is important that young people become aware of the existence of peer pressure and its impact on their own behaviour and that of others. Understanding it contributes to a good team spirit and encourages to intervene in bullying.

Positive peer pressure

Peer pressure can work positively, for example, when a group cheers and encourages its members to perform well. Positive peer pressure prevents bullying in a situation where the group’s internal norms do not tolerate exclusion or offensive behaviour targeting any of its members. In this case, bullying is not acceptable within the group and the group members try to act accordingly.

Negative peer pressure

Negative peer pressure tempts or pressures group members to do things they might not otherwise do. Peer pressure can cause a person to change their behaviour, values or attitudes and to act in a way that they know is wrong or contrary to their own principles, for example to bully others or to be involved in bullying – either actively or as a passive bystander. Peer pressure can be difficult to resist because there is a risk of being bullied or left outside the group.

Nonverbal communication

Peer pressure is also maintained through nonverbal communication between the group members. Gestures, facial expressions and body language reflect the mutual relationships of the group members and their attitudes towards other people. Quiet bullying usually takes place through different gestures and facial expressions hidden from adults. Laughing, smiling, tones of voice, imitating, rolling one's eyes, sighing, turning one's back and ignoring a person are all forms of quiet bullying that can be challenging for an adult to notice in daily life.



3. Roles

Taking on a role is an important process of socialisation and identity development, and the ability to take on different roles helps people to connect socially with others. Roles within a group are created in mutual interaction, where each member of the group develops a role or several roles. The roles can be established or vary from situation to situation. However, the roles are necessary for the group to function well. In addition, awareness of one's own role in the group brings security and a sense of continuity.

Roles in bullying situations

Social roles related to bullying situations are formed, for example, within the school community or a class. It can be difficult to get rid of one's role, even if one is motivated to do so. Bullying situations involve many different roles. The roles can be divided as follows (paraphrasing Salmivalli, 1998: Koulukiusaaminen ryhmäilmiönä):

- **The bully** starts bullying and can urge or push others to engage in bullying.
- **The victim** can be anybody. A child or young person who is insecure, timid, shy, quiet or otherwise already in a vulnerable position is particularly vulnerable to bullying. Examples include a new pupil in the class, someone with an immigrant background or someone with special characteristics. The victim can try to oppose this role, but in most cases that does not change the situation and the victim ends up accepting it. Chronic bullying affects the person's self-image and identity so that the person begins to believe that he or she is so worthless and bad that he or she deserves to be bullied.
- **The bully's sidekick** is a facilitator in the situation. In some situations, the sidekick does the 'dirty work', i.e. bullying, while the actual bully remains in the background.
- **The victim's defender** takes the side of the victim or supports the victim and may try to persuade others to stop bullying. The defender's role requires courage, as the risk of being bullied or excluded as a result is real.
- **The reinforcer** gives positive feedback to the bully, for example, by laughing, encouraging and coming to see the situation up close.

- **The bystander**, i.e. a silent witness, sees the bullying situation, but does not intervene in it. Even if the bystander often does not accept bullying as a concept, the bystander passively accepts bullying by not intervening in it.
- **The outsider** stays on the side-lines and does not pay attention to the bullying situation – may not even see it.

The roles of the reinforcers and bystanders are often not sufficiently taken into account, although it is their actions that enable and maintain bullying (see Section 6 Silent witnesses for more details). Unspoken rules in a class or group, i.e. internal norms, can support bullying.



4. Online bullying

Online bullying is often linked to other forms of bullying and is not a separate phenomenon. Bullying can begin online and move to the real world or vice versa. Online bullying can include dissing, humiliating, threatening, intimidating, extorting, sending of inappropriate content or sexual messages, creating a false profile or spreading information, photos, videos or lies about a person.



The threshold for engaging in bullying online is low: it is easy to engage in bullying, for example, with likes and emojis. When one is unable to see how the other is hurting, one does not feel compassion for the other in the same way as in person. Online bullying can involve a large group of people who do not even know the victim personally.

The bully can think that he or she can get away with writing anything that comes to mind online. The victim should record all related messages and images, so that he or she has evidence of bullying and can take the matter to the police. Material distributed over the Internet may be copied to various online services and to computers of other Internet users. It can be difficult to get material off the Internet once it has been uploaded.

Online bullying is equally harmful and serious for the victim as any other form of bullying. The Internet is part of almost every young person's life and it enables contact 24/7, so that the victim cannot escape bullying even when at home. Bullying can also take place in a social media group by isolating or removing the victim from the group or by adding the victim to a group without permission. Bullying can also take place in a group where the victim is not present and, as a result, has no means to defend against it.

5. Stigmas

Persistence of stigmas

Slandering and stigmatising the victim is a way of bullying that makes the victim stand out in a negative way. At the same time, it is used to justify bullying. When bullies stigmatise the victim, the stigmas tend to become the sole truth about the victim, and they are no longer questioned, even if there is no truth in them. Even adults can, without knowing or understanding, participate in the stigmatisation process by discussing the victim's specific features, behaviour or skills related to the stigmas chosen by the bullies. Stigmas are usually very difficult to shake off. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the victim alone to change them. Many of those who have been bullied say that the stigma has persisted, even though the victim has changed groups or schools.

Impact of stigmas on identity, self-image and self-esteem

When bullying continues, the stigma begins to negatively affect the victim's identity, self-image and self-esteem. Eventually, the victim starts to believe that what is being said about him or her is true. The victim starts to believe that he or she is what he or she is being called. Slowly, his or her identity begins to form around the feelings of inferiority and uselessness. Furthermore, if the victim's experience is belittled, he or she often keeps quiet, tries to tough it out or withdraws into one's shell. Bullying can be belittled by adults or friends. As a result, the victim keeps quiet about the experienced bullying.

Stigmatisation is used to classify and oppress a person to a certain position and to maintain it. The victim's stigma is an externally produced assumption of who or what the person is and what he or she is good for. At the same time, the stigma aims to justify the domineering and wrongful behaviour towards the victim, without it being seen as wrong or unacceptable. However, there is no justification for stigmatising or disrespecting the victim.

6. Silent witnesses

Bullying situations create different social roles. The so-called silent witnesses are those who see and hear the situations, but do not actively participate in them. They are bystanders whose silence plays a key part in the continuation of bullying. Their passivity and silence can be a result of fear or of not knowing what to do in the situation. The situation can be distressing and some of them may have experienced bullying in the past and are afraid to act because they fear being bullied again. A very common reason for staying silent is the fear of being bullied yourself after, for example, defending the victim.

What to do and how to support someone being bullied?

Bullying would stop if a large majority were visibly and loudly against it and bullying would be openly discussed. This attitude should be taught, as it is the best way to stop bullying from the very beginning. Defending oneself should also be taught, and both should be openly discussed and highlighted as the desirable course of action. In addition, adults should set an example by openly discussing bullying and believe when someone tells them that they are being bullied. When peer pressure works in favour of the bullies, the bullies are feared and bullying is not discussed, bullying often gets more intense as it is masked by silence. Silence allows bullying to continue.

Silent bystanders can also support the victim, even if they are afraid to do anything in the situation itself. They can support the victim by taking him or her into consideration, talking to him or her and being friends with him or her in situations where it feels safe to do so. Sending a message to the victim after the bullying situation has ended and telling him or her that you do not approve what happened can have a huge impact on the victim. Just one person expressing the fact that bullying is wrong, can be a great source of strength for the victim.

7. Consequences of bullying

Consequences for the victim and bully

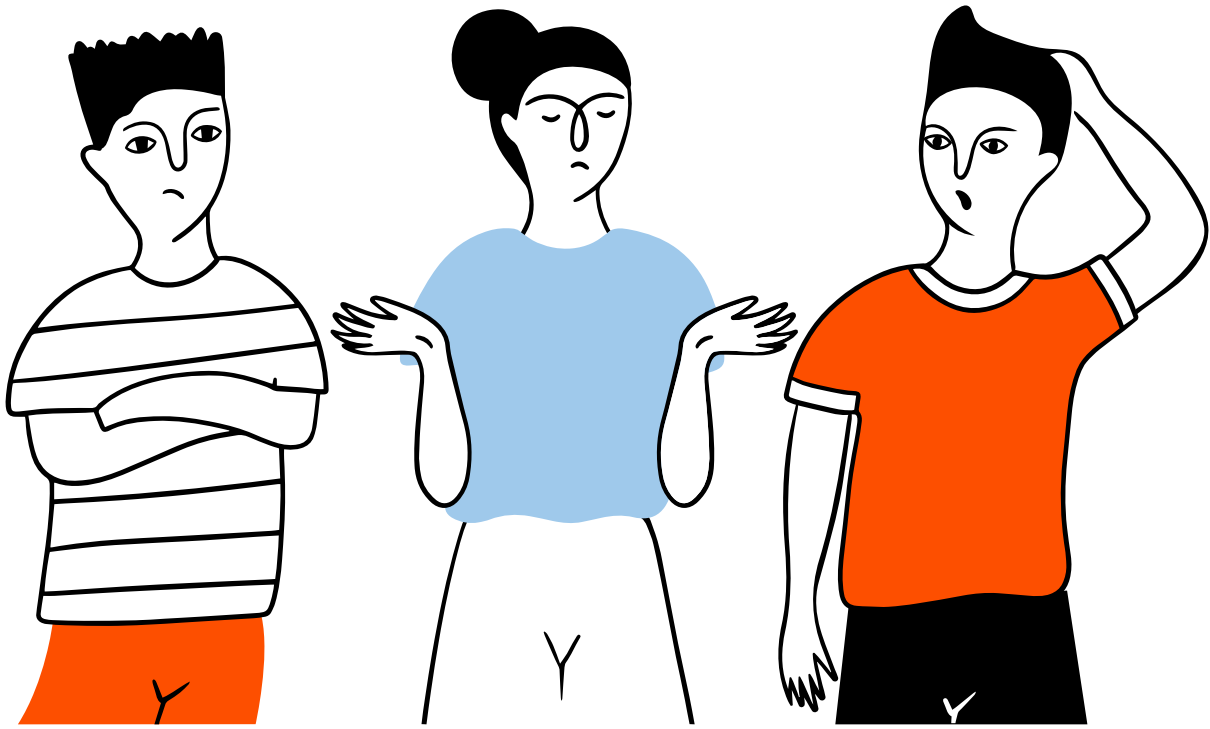
Bullying can have long-term consequences for both the victim and bully. The long-term consequences for the victim often include:

- fear of social situations
- poor self-esteem
- feelings of inferiority and uselessness
- negative thoughts about oneself and one's own identity
- anxiety
- self-destruction.

Prolonged consequences can lead to mental health issues, such as anxiety, self-destruction or panic symptoms. Usually, the victim is given symptomatic treatment without addressing the underlying bullying experiences. However, it is important to process the experiences in view of the victim's future, so that they do not interfere with life and prevent moving on in life. For many people who have experienced bullying, group situations can become so distressing that they avoid participating in group activities.

The bully may have been bullied in the past or has learnt to get what he or she wants by bullying others. The bully has possibly adopted a way to manipulate others in order to gain a dominating position, and if this behaviour continues, it may lead to dismissing, stigmatising, domineering and violent behaviour in relationships. The bully rarely recognises in him- or herself the risks of his or her own behaviour or the need for change. The bully feels that he or she benefits from the dominating position and interprets the silence of others as acceptance.

Studies show that people who have persistently bullied other people during their school years also have violent relationships in adulthood. They also use more intoxicants than others and experience, despite their external success, a lot of loneliness, exclusion and uselessness, just like the bullied persons. As bullying is learnt behaviour, it can also be unlearned. The earlier the bully learns to be less domineering and violent in his or her relationships, the easier it is to change behaviour that destroys good relationships.



Consequences for bystanders and the community

Bullying also has consequences for bystanders and the community in which it occurs. A community where bullying takes place is an environment that arouses uncertainty and fear for all its members. It is impossible to know who is safe, who is included in the group or who cannot be trusted. Uncertainty creates a mistrusting atmosphere in which everyone is on their guard and tries to cover their own back in order to be safe. We all need safety and acceptance and we will do everything in our powers to make it happen. A community where bullying takes place undermines the atmosphere of caring for one another, empathy and encouragement. It is also a poor platform for building community spirit and ensuring equality.

Bystanders may have to watch their best friend or other good friends being bullied. This can create feelings of guilt due to not having been able to intervene in the situation or the courage to stand up for the victim. Bystanders can get distressed when they experience helplessness and powerlessness, but they can also be afraid for their own safety.

8. Criminal activities

Although bullying in schools is not separately itemised in the Criminal Code, the applied methods are similar to those used in activities classified as a crime. Bullying can be classified as a criminal offence when it involves, for example, an assault, extortion, malicious damage, stealing, threats, slander and deprivation of liberty. The use of these means is familiar to bullies. However, many of them do not come to think that their actions meet the essential elements of an offence.

The limits for intervening in bullying should be clear and known to everyone. Meeting the essential elements of an offence should not be taken as an indicator of the gravity of bullying. Even when bullying does not meet the essential elements of an offence, it puts the victim in a vulnerable position and it can be very traumatising. For example, exclusion in social media or in person can have long-lasting impacts on the victim's life.

Bullying meeting the essential elements of an offence

Some acts of bullying clearly meet the essential elements of an offence for which the bully can be held criminally responsible. Criminal responsibility begins at the age of 15. If a person under the age of 15 is responsible for a criminal offence, the police will file a child welfare notification and inform the guardians. (poliisi.fi/en)

Bullying can be classified as a crime, for example, when it involves malicious damage, minor assault, assault, petty theft or theft. Persecution, violation of the freedom of communications, slander and dissemination of information on private life can also be punishable offences. Often, bullying includes at least some features of the above, even if bullies do not always recognise it. Therefore, it is important to identify an act meeting the essential elements of an offence.

Conclusion

We hope this information pack has given you information and encouragement to prevent bullying. Bullying is not cool but it is cool to talk about it and intervene in it. We encourage you to speak up and intervene.

Kind regards,

JÄLKI ('MARK') Workgroup 2022

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More information on bullying and related matters is available from Kiusaamisasioiden tuki- ja neuvontakeskus (Counselling and support centre related to bullying) Valopilkkku.

On the website of Valopilkkku you will find information about bullying and trainings as well as materials and instructions for dealing with bullying situations. Valopilkkku organises peer support groups for both victims and people close to the victims.

www.valopilkkkuja.fi

