



Is Your Teen Suffering? The Powerful Impact of Bullying

Bullying is a common experience for many teens But it can have serious and lasting effects on mental health. Research shows that bullying increases anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts in teens. This article explores the link between teen bullying and mental health issues.

Time to Confront the Crisis: The Dominance of Teen Bullying

Bullying is a repeated aggressive behavior intended to cause harm or distress to the victim. It can take many forms including:

- Physical bullying
- Verbal bullying
- Relational aggression
- Cyberbullying

Studies estimate that between 18-31% of teens experience bullying at school. Rates are higher among middle school students than high school students. Bullying based on race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation is also common.

With the rise of social media, cyberbullying has become increasingly prevalent. A 2018 Pew Research study found that **59% of U.S. teens have been bullied or harassed online**. LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience cyberbullying. The anonymity provided by the internet may embolden bullies. Hurtful comments, rumors, or images spread quickly online, leading to cyberbullying. Unlike other forms of bullying, it reaches teens at home after school.

The 2021 Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows 21.3% of Idaho high school students reported bullying. This happened on school property in the past 12 months. Rates were higher among female students (18.3%) compared to male students (13.9%). 16.4% of students experienced electronic bullying. This was through texting, chat rooms, or social media in the past year. These statistics show bullying remains a large problem facing Idaho teens today.

Its Hidden Toll: Bullying's Mental Health Impact

Being bullied can seriously affect your teen's mental health in several ways:

- **Anxiety** - Bullied teens often feel more anxious and worried than others. Bullying victims may develop generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety, or panic attacks. Fears of being bullied again can become consuming
- **Depression** - Bullying increases rates of depression, sadness, and loneliness in kids. Bullied Teens have a greater risk of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts
- **Low self-esteem** - Verbal bullying often involves insults, teasing and humiliation. Over time, this can erode a teen's self-esteem. Bullied teens are more likely to see themselves negatively and have poor body image.
- **Anger issues** - Some teens respond to bullying with increased anger, irritability, and violence. Bullied youth are more likely to get into physical fights, vandalize property or misuse weapons.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress** - Being bullied, especially over years, can be traumatic for some teens. It may lead to symptoms like flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, and avoidance of reminders.

- **Mental Health Disorders** – Bullying can cause mental illnesses like depression and anxiety disorders. Children bullied at ages 8-10 had higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts by age 25.
- **Substance abuse** – Bullied teens have higher rates of substance use. This includes smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, using marijuana, and other drug use. Self-medicating with substances provides temporary escape but worsens long-term mental health.

The impact of bullying can last long after the bullying has ended. This includes psychological, physical, and academic tolls. Without support, the mental health consequences can linger for years. Childhood bullying is linked to higher rates of adult depression and anxiety.

Early Signs Your Teen Is Struggling With Mental Health

How can you tell if a teen is developing mental health issues due to bullying? Warning signs may include:

- Withdrawing from friends and activities
- Anger, moodiness, agitation
- Expressing feelings of helplessness or decreased self-worth
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Talking about suicide or self-harm
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Unexplained wounds, bruises or physical complaints
- Avoiding school or declining grades
- Loss of interest in hobbies

Any sudden changes in mood or behavior could be a sign a teen is struggling with a mental health issue. Speak up if you notice anything out of the ordinary lasting longer than two weeks.

Seeking Help for Mental Health

Are you worried your teen is experiencing mental health issues because of bullying? Talk to them calmly and share your concerns. Make it clear you take their feelings seriously. Ask questions without judgment and let them know they're not alone.

Consult the school counselor, a therapist or the teen's doctor. They can properly check what's going on and determine if treatment is needed. Outpatient counseling provides support and teaches healthy coping strategies. Early intervention leads to the best chance of overcoming mental health disorders.

Ways to Prevent Bullying from Impacting Mental Health

What can be done to protect teens from the detrimental mental health effects of bullying? Strategies include:

- Promoting a culture of kindness and tolerance in schools. Make bullying unacceptable.
- Implementing strong social-emotional learning programs that build resilience.
- Encouraging teens to speak out if they witness bullying. Establish safe ways to report it.
- Increasing adult supervision in bullying hot spots like hallways, cafeterias and locker rooms.
- Separating victimized teens from bullies to prevent repeated harm.
- Providing counseling to help bullied kids heal and learn coping techniques.
- Offering empathy training for bullies so they understand the impact of their actions.
- Ensuring swift consequences for bullying while also teaching desired positive behaviors.

With compassion and care, we can foster mentally healthy teens. We can prevent bullying behaviors that harm youth. Mental health disorders associated with bullying are treatable. By working together, we can avoid lasting scars and help teens thrive.

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