*Supporting Every Student Learning Series*

CONVERSATION GUIDE

# The Effects of Bullying on Children

**Part 1. Links Between Bullying and Mental Health**

*(with Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt, University of Ottawa)*

*Reducing the incidence of bullying behaviour decreases risk factors which may reduce the incidence of mental health issues for children, now and over the   
long-term.*

*Alberta’s School Act defines bullying as repeated and hostile or demeaning behavior by an individual in the school community where the behaviour is intended to cause harm, fear or distress to one or more other individuals in the school community, including psychological harm or harm to an individual’s reputation.*

# Key understandings

* 15 to 20 per cent of children have serious mental health issues.
* 50 to 75 per cent of adult mental health disorders began in childhood.
* Mental health difficulties in childhood may lead to longer-term health issues, including depression.
* Bullying behavior includes negative actions on the part of one or more persons, and is:
  + intentional
  + repeated over time
  + an imbalance of power.
* In Canada, 30 per cent of children experience bullying behaviour occasionally (at least once a month) and 7 to 10 per cent of children experience bullying behaviour on a daily basis.
* Long-term consequences of bullying behaviour include:
  + increased absenteeism, truancy and school avoidance
  + academic difficulties
  + physical health problems, including sleep disturbances
  + low self-esteem, social anxiety and social withdrawal and isolation
  + loneliness and depression
  + suicide
  + aggressive behaviour.
* Research also identifies that there are long-term health outcomes of bullying, including internalizing problems such as depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Children and youth become unwell as a consequence of maltreatment by peers.
* Experiencing bullying is also linked to the development of externalizing problems (e.g., aggressive behaviour) in later years.

*Supporting Every Student Learning Series*

The Effects of Bullying on Children (Part 1 cont.)

**Key understandings** (cont.)

* Research on the impact of bullying experience on academic functioning is more limited although some longitudinal studies show that children who experience bullying tend to fare less well academically and avoid school over time.
* Research also shows that children who engage in bullying behaviour (and do not experience bullying themselves) are not at increased risk of poor outcomes in adulthood. The bullying behaviour does not interfere with their need to belong and may be linked to their high status and sense of power.
* However, the research also shows that the small percentage (2 to 3 per cent) of children who engage in bullying behaviour, and are also bullied themselves, are at increased risk of poor health, economic and social-relationship outcomes in adulthood.

# Questions for reflection and discussion

* How is bullying behaviour understood in your school community? Is there a shared understanding? If not, how can you build this understanding?
* What strategies can schools use to monitor the prevalence of bullying behaviour in the school environment? How could this data be used?
* Do school staff understand the short- and long-term consequences of bullying behaviour? How could these research findings be most effectively shared with them?

# For more information

Safe and Caring Schools

<https://education.alberta.ca/safe-and-caring-schools/overview/>

Bullying Prevention

<https://education.alberta.ca/bullying-prevention/what-is-bullying/>

Mental Health

<https://education.alberta.ca/mental-health/overview/>