



Parents Make A Difference!

Teens and Bullying

January 2014

“Bullying presents one of the greatest health risks to children, youth, and young adults in U.S. society” according to a 2013 research report from the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Bullying can take many forms including

- hitting or shoving someone
- excluding someone
- humiliating someone
- face to face
- digital media like text messages, Facebook, e-mails, Twitter or websites.

A study from the National Institutes of Health revealed that almost one-third of 6th to 10th graders -- 5.7 million children nationwide -- have experienced some kind of bullying.

HOW COMMON IS BULLYING AND HARASSMENT IN SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN SCHOOLS?

The recent Department of Public Instruction Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 5, 410 youth in grades 7 through 12 in Southwest Wisconsin showed that 33% of 9th-12th graders reported they had been bullied or harassed on school property in the past year. Chart 1 also illustrates that almost 37% of 9th graders reported they had been bullied or harassed.

Forty-two percent (42%) of 7th -12th graders in the YRBS survey agreed or strongly agreed that harassment and bullying is a problem at their school.

However, 80% of the 7th-12th graders also reported that they feel safe and secure at school as illustrated in Chart 2. The 2013 research report from AERA showed that schools with both fair discipline and a supportive atmosphere have less bullying.

A positive school climate has been shown to engage students in learning and to promote academic success. A recent study in Virginia high schools demonstrated that schools with a positive school climate and lower rates of bullying and teasing had higher graduation rates.

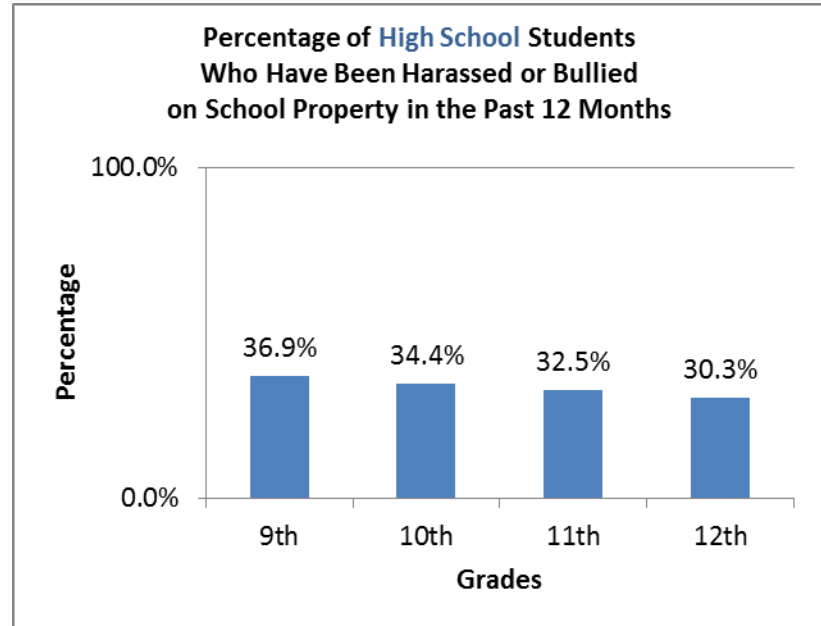


Chart 1: Teen responses to the question: *During the past 12 months, how many times have you been harassed or bullied at school?*

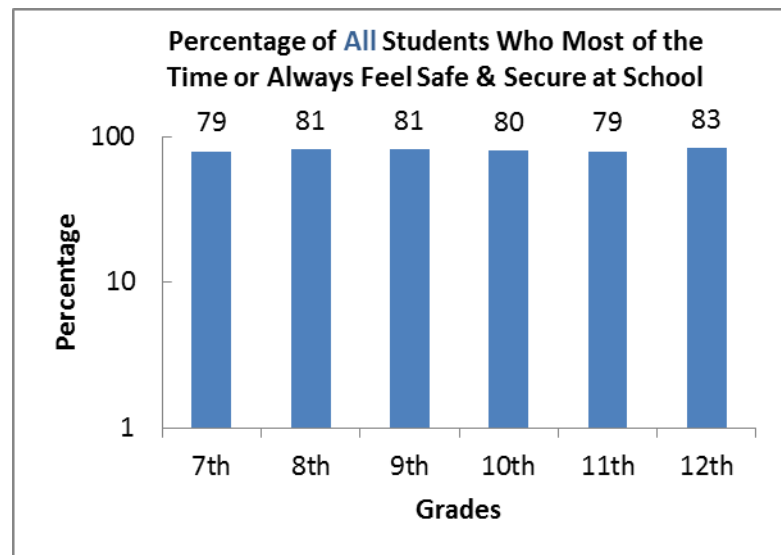


Chart 2: Teen responses to the question: *How often do you feel safe and secure at school?*

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY TEEN IS A VICTIM OF BULLYING?

Teens may not tell their parents that they are being victimized. Teens who are victims of bullying may exhibit some of these signs:

- Comes home from school with torn, damaged, or missing clothing, books, and belongings.
- Has unexplained bruises, injuries, cuts, and scratches.
- Does not bring classmates or other peers home after school and seldom spends time in the homes of classmates or peers.
- Seems isolated from peers and may not have a good friend to share time with.
- Appears to be fearful about attending school, walking to and from school, or riding the bus.
- Has poor appetite, headaches, and stomach pains (particularly in the morning).
- Appears anxious, distressed, unhappy, depressed or tearful when he or she comes home from school.
- Shows unexpected mood shifts, irritability, or sudden outbursts of temper.
- Has sleeping or eating problems

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Helping teens deal with bullying can also help them feel better about the level of safety at school. The U.S. Department of Health recommends the following strategies for parents to help their teens deal with bullying at school:

❖ **Help Teens Understand Bullying**

Talk with your teen about how they plan to stand up to bullying if it happens. Could they use humor? Would they say “stop” directly? Would they walk away and talk to someone they trusted about it?

❖ **Keep the Lines of Communication Open**

Research shows that teens really do look to parents and caregivers for advice and help on tough decisions. Talk to your teen about what is going on in their lives and talk about bullying directly. Assure teens that they are not alone in addressing problems.

❖ **Encourage Teens to Do What They Love**

Help teens take part in activities interests and hobbies they like. They can volunteer, play sports, sing in a chorus, or become part of a youth group or a school club. These activities give teens a chance to have fun and meet others with the same interests. They can build confidence and friendships that help protect them from bullying and other at-risk behaviors.

❖ **Model How to Treat Others with Kindness and Respect**

Teens learn from adults’ actions. Even if it seems like they are not paying attention, teens are watching how adults manage stress and conflict, as well as how they treat their friends, colleagues and families. Parents don’t have to be perfect. Sometimes it is how we fix our own mistakes that sets the best example.

WORK WITH YOUR TEEN’S SCHOOL ON BULLYING AND HARRASSMENT

- ❖ Always discuss the bullying incident with your teen before talking to teachers or school staff.
- ❖ Work with a trusted teacher or administrator to find a solution.
- ❖ Become involved in school programs that prevent bullying and establish a positive school climate.
- ❖ Help your teen connect with supportive adults. "Young people with better relationships with mothers, with fathers, with teachers, and with friends are much less likely to experience violence, either as victims or aggressors," according to a Families & Work Institute report on youth and violence.
- ❖ Encourage your teen to be helpful to classmates who may be bullied and to refuse to engage in or encourage bullying behavior.

Resources: PREVENTION OF BULLYING IN SCHOOLS, COLLEGES, AND UNIVERSITIES, *Research Report and Recommendations*, American Educational Research Assoc. 2013
SAFE SCHOOLS, SAFE COMMUNITIES FACT SHEET, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2009
TAKING A STAND AGAINST BULLYING, National Institute of Health, <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/resources/spotlight/Pages/092110-taking-stand-against-bullying.aspx>

“Parents Make a Difference” is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a program of the Department of Public Instruction, University of Wisconsin-Extension and local school districts. This newsletter is adapted from the UW-Extension newsletters “Whose Kids?...Our Kids!” This issue of “Parents Make a Difference” was written by Deb Ivey, UW-Extension Iowa County and reviewed by Amy Mitchell, UW-Extension Crawford County, Bev Doll and Sarah Hopkins, UW-Extension Grant County; Jennifer LaTour, UW-Extension Richland County, Mary Knellwolf, UW-Extension Lafayette County and Ruth Schriefer, UW-Extension Iowa County. Thanks are extended to nearly 5,410 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2013 YRBS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information: Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; Crawford County (608) 326-0223; Iowa County (608) 930-9850; and Richland County (608) 647-6148. Or visit the website at: <http://fyi.uwex.edu/swys>