

## **Statement**

**Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.**

## **Topic**

**“School Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health”**

## **BY**

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**Young people who have experienced bullying are more likely to develop an anxiety disorder or suffer from depression.**

Those who both bully and are bullied—suffer the most serious effects. They are at greater risk for mental and behavioural problems than those who are victims or bullies alone. Rates of depression, anxiety and suicide ideation and behaviours are greatest in this group.

Bystanders fall into one of two groups: those who act to stop bullying, and those who don't. The latter could be afraid of retaliation and upset because they wanted to intervene and didn't. They may experience increased anxiety and depression that can affect academic performance, and increase their use of substances like, alcohol and tobacco. Bystanders who act to stop bullying, however, have beneficial outcomes, including increased self-esteem.

Bullying can contribute to the intense feelings of helplessness and hopelessness involved in suicidal behaviours. Victims or perpetrators who experience continued, frequent bullying are at greater risk for suicidal behaviour.

*Types of bullying experienced in a school setting*

**Verbal:** teasing, name-calling, threatening to hurt someone

**Social:** leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumours

**Physical:** hitting, kicking, pinching, taking or breaking someone's things

**Cyber:** sending or posting negative, harmful, false or mean content about someone on a digital device such as apps, texts, or social media

The more that we learn about mental health, the more we recognize about how to address mental health issues. Studies of adults presenting with mental health issues have shown that bullying can lead to depression and anxiety in young people who are bullied, which can continue into adulthood. Those who bully others are likely to engage in violent, unsafe, and risky behaviours as adults. Even those who simply observe bullying taking place are more likely to have mental health issues such as anxiety or depression.

A recent European study looked at adults who had been bullied; adults who had themselves bullied other children, and a control group of adults who had never been involved in bullying. In the control group, 12% had needed treatment for some mental disorder — compared with 20% of bullies, 23% of those who had been bullied, and 31% of those who had been on both the receiving and the giving end of bullying.

What can we do to address this issue?

The fundamental need of any student is to belong – to a family, to a classroom, to a school, to a community, to a country. Outside of family life school life, relationship with peers and relationship with teachers has the greatest influence on young people’s development in all aspects of themselves physically, socially, sexually, behaviourally, creatively, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. In terms of the wellbeing of students, and their adult roles in the future, it is the psychological safety accompaniment by their parents and teachers that will allow them express all aspects of themselves safely. If our schools can *create a culture of psychological safety for staff and students* then we can eradicate bullying. This will involve seeing discipline as a vehicle to transport change. Discipline is about creating psychological safety for the student who has experienced bullying. The focus firstly is put on the person who has experienced bullying and secondly, on the student who has perpetrated the bullying. Discipline means that people experience psychological safety when encountering violations by the creation of a response whereby the teacher supported by school policy models and teaches taking action for self rather than against the student who created the undisciplined behaviour. Taking action for yourself is a mature response to bullying. We need to realise “that all behaviour makes Sense”. We need to educate young people to get underneath the “stand” of their behaviour be that behaviour dominant or passive. This requires a whole school approach. If a young person becomes conscious of what their behaviour is about and what function it has then they can in safety learn to let go of that behaviour. The sad reality is that a young person’s diary knows more about them being bullied than the adults taking care of them. The responsibility lies with parents and educators to recognise, monitor, challenge, confront and maturely resolve bullying and passivity.

Professionals such as Relationship and Parent mentors can offer such support to parents and the school community to effect change.

I have been privileged to journey with many families and schools in helping them to see a young person and not just their behaviour. If I confuse the individual with the behaviour then no change arises.

Thank You.