

# SHARE Project on Children & Bullying

## Social Health and Relationships in Education

Professor Karen Rudolph  
University of Illinois

September 2006



### Inside this issue:

Dear Educators, Parents, and Students	1
What is bullying?	2-3
What do kids find stressful?	4
What can parents and educators do?	5
Teachers' perspective	6

Dear Educators, Parents, & Students,

We would like to thank all of you for your participation in the University of Illinois SHARE (**Social Health and Relationships in Education**) Project! SHARE is a federally funded research project designed to improve our understanding about children's social relationships during the school years. In particular, the goal of this project is to understand why some children get along well with their classmates whereas others experience more difficulties.

**Bullying has become a growing concern at schools.** Research shows that 10% of children (that is about 2-3 in every class) are *repeatedly* bullied at school. Others are bullied every now and then. Over the past few years, there have been several reported incidents of serious violence in the schools, and the media has suggested that many children who eventually turn to violence were once bullied themselves. We would like to understand better how bullying affects children, and how to teach children to cope with conflict. We hope this under-

standing will help psychologists, educators, and parents learn effective ways of creating a positive school climate and preventing some of the negative effects that are associated with bullying.

**Beginning in January of 2006, the SHARE team met with 373 second graders** (202 girls, 171 boys) in seven elementary schools in Champaign County and Sangamon County. Twenty-six teachers and 297 parents also participated in the project. Children completed surveys that asked about their experiences with bullying, how they deal with problems with peers, their goals in social situations (for example, do they think it is important to get along with others or to be in control), and their emotions. Some children were observed while on the playground so that we could see how children play together. Teachers and parents also completed surveys about children's social and psychological adjustment, and parents helped us to understand how they encourage their children to deal with teasing by their classmates. We are still in the process of compiling all of the information that we gathered, but would like to provide some feedback

about what we are finding. In the articles that follow, we describe some of our important findings and what they mean for teachers, parents, and students. We look forward to continuing our work with you over the next few years. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact us at:

Family Studies Lab  
University of Illinois  
603 E. Daniel Street  
Champaign, IL 61820  
(217) 244-9385

**Thanks again for making the SHARE Project such a success.** We will be in touch soon for the next stage of the project!

Sincerely,  
The SHARE Project staff  
Jamie Abaied  
Molly Bartlett  
Megan Flynn  
Sarah Kang  
Cathy Koerber  
Karen Rudolph, Ph.D, Director

Think back to second grade and try to recall the days when you went outside for recess.

Do you remember who your friends were? Was there a group of kids who you always wanted to be friends with or included in their games? Were you ever left out from playing tag or from shooting hoops? Do you recall how that felt?

Some people believe that getting teased or bullied by other children is part of the normal childhood experience; some say that when peers tease, hurt, or spread rumors, it helps to build a child's character because children learn how to stick up for themselves. Even though these misconceptions are common, recent studies suggest otherwise.

**Peer relationships can have both positive and negative effects on children.**

For many children, friendships help children to establish a sense of identity and belonging.

However, some children have negative encounters with their peers. For instance, a child might be hit by a classmate or might have other children gossip about him or her.

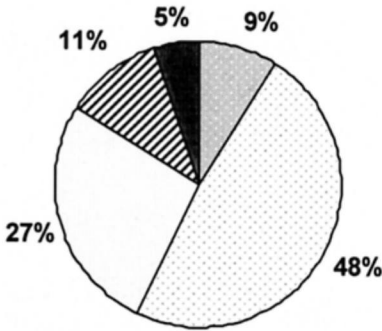
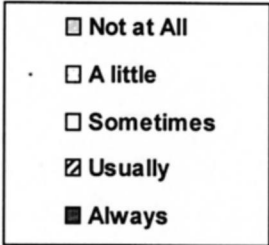
**Bullying is when a child commits an act that is potentially damaging to another child's physical, emotional, behavioral, or relational well-being.** There are two general types of bullying: Overt Bullying and Relational Bullying. So what do these types of bullying mean? Overt bullying is what you usually think of when you hear the word "bully": The

prototypical boy grabbing his classmate by the shirt, ordering him to hand over his lunch money, or else! In reality, recent research has taught us that overt bullying is more than that.

**There are different forms of overt bullying, some that involve physical harm and some that involve verbal harm.** Physical bullying involves harmful acts such as hitting or kicking another child to injure him or her.

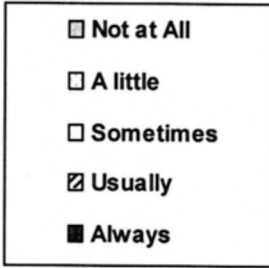
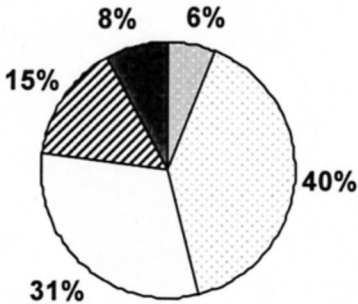
Below is a chart that shows how much physical bullying kids in the SHARE project said they experienced.

**Physical Bullying in the SHARE Project kids:**



Verbal bullying, on the other hand, involves harmful acts that injure someone psychologically, such as name-calling, teasing, and insulting another child in order to hurt his or her feelings. Below is a chart that shows how much verbal bullying kids in the SHARE project said they experienced.

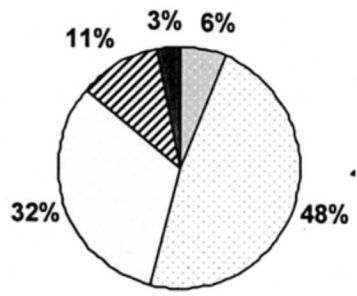
**Verbal Aggression in the SHARE Project Kids:**



Relational bullying involves harmful acts that damage a child's relationships with their peers in order to get back at them or distress them, such as gossiping, spreading rumors to damage someone's reputation, excluding another child from play, or purposely ignoring someone. It is really important to remember that even though we can't see the damage caused by verbal and relational bullying, it can hurt the victim just as badly as physical bullying does. Here's another chart that shows how much kids in the SHARE project said they were relationally bullied:

**Relational Aggression in the SHARE Project Kids:**

- Not at All
- A little
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Always



As you can see, the good news is that most kids experience relatively little bullying in any form. However, there are a significant number of children (almost a half of those we spoke with) who report that they experience bullying at least sometimes at school, and quite a few children (the equivalent of 3 – 4 in every class) who report that they usually or always experience bullying. These experiences are important to pay attention to because bullying can become a difficult problem for children and can have very negative consequences. Some children have difficulty coping with the stress from being bullied, and show low self-esteem, anxiety, and even depression. According to the information that we gathered in the SHARE Project:



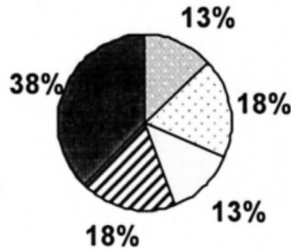
Because bullying is relatively common and interferes with kids' everyday lives, it is important to understand why it happens and find ways to prevent it. The information that we gather in the SHARE Project will help us to understand more about bullying and how it affects kids, as well as to figure out how to teach kids to cope with bullying. Parents and teachers can play an important role in detecting bullying and trying to lessen the problem (you can read more about this later in the newsletter!). It is our goal to learn about children and their experiences with peer relationships so that we can provide useful information to educators, parents, and kids themselves. Thanks to your participation, we have been able to collect information that will provide insight into children's social, psychological, and academic experiences during the elementary school years.

# Even though second grade can be a lot of fun, it can also be stressful!

Our research shows that second graders have stressful experiences with friends and other kids at school, such as problems and arguments. In fact, 98% of the kids we surveyed reported that they had experienced at least one type of stressful event with other kids since the beginning of the school year, and some kids reported experiencing up to eleven types of stressful events!

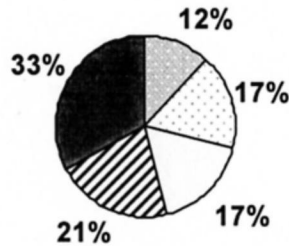
Which types of experiences do you think kids found to be the most stressful?

Here's how stressful second graders thought it was to have a friend move out of town:



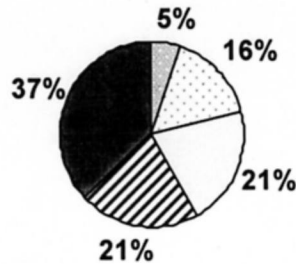
- Not Bad At All
- A Little Bad
- Somewhat Bad
- Really Bad
- Horrible

Here's how stressful second graders thought it was to have an argument with a friend:



- Not Bad At All
- A Little Bad
- Somewhat Bad
- Really Bad
- Horrible

And, here's how stressful second graders thought it was to have a friend be picked on or teased by other kids:



- Not Bad At All
- A Little Bad
- Somewhat Bad
- Really Bad
- Horrible

Learning about the kinds of stressful experiences kids encounter, and the ways in which kids respond to these stressful experiences is important because research shows that kids who experience more stress show more social and emotional problems, such as depression. SHARE Project findings indicate that kids who express their emotions and engage in strategies like problem solving

and positive thinking following a stressful experience are less likely to become depressed. Conversely, kids who feel as though they cannot control their responses to stress are more likely to become depressed. These kids tend to respond impulsively and without thinking, or instead to escape or avoid people and places associated with stressful experiences. The ways that kids respond to

stress also influence the quality of their interactions with peers. Our research shows that kids who feel as though they cannot control their responses to stressful interactions with peers experience more bullying at school. Teaching kids how to effectively respond to the stress that they encounter is important, so we can ultimately help kids lead socially and emotionally healthy lives.

## What Do Teachers Say?

See if you can guess the answers to the following:

- What are the most common things that teachers see when kids are playing together?
- What do teachers say are the most common problems kids have with other kids at school?
- What do teachers say are the most common ways that kids deal with these problems?

Turn to page 6 for the answers!

As this newsletter discusses, bullying can have many negative consequences for children. So, the next question is what parents and educators can do to prevent bullying?



**One way to help is to teach children effective ways to handle conflict and to get along with each other.** Children often turn to adults for advice and support because adults have more resources, insight, and authority. If parents and educators value the importance of bullying prevention, children will too. Ignoring the problem lets bullies gain more power and acceptance. In contrast, stopping bullying in the early school years might help to prevent worse problems later in life for both the bullies and the children whom they pick on.

### **Bullying prevention programs include:**

- reinforcing prosocial attitudes
- encouraging cooperative play
- teaching positive conflict resolution
- building children's empathy (that is, how much they care about other people)
- reinforcing prosocial attitudes
- providing opportunities for positive leadership and teamwork

### **Strategies that are used include:**

- group activities, discussion, games, stories, and role-plays. (example: reading a book in class about a child who is bullied and discussing with the children why, what happens, how they feel, what to do about it, and the harmful effects of bullying)
- opportunities for social problem solving, decision making, stress management, positive leadership, and teamwork
- communication, cooperation, decision making, and problem solving
- acknowledging each other's feelings, compromising, and accepting differences
- positive role models and leadership opportunities to get involved in the community positively impact the child.

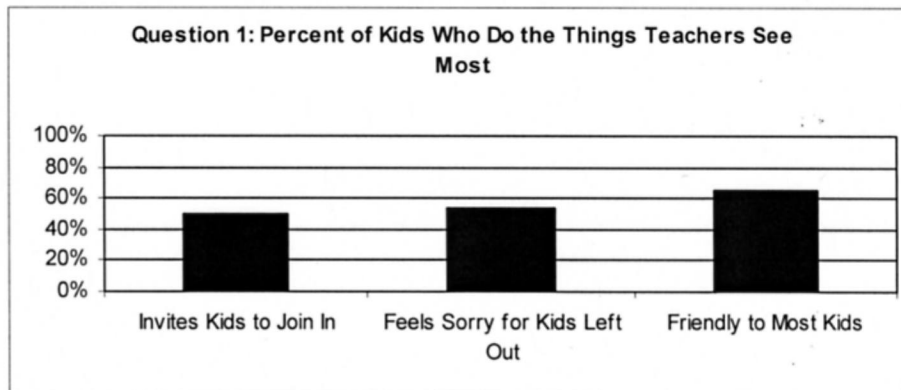
Changing or tackling the issue of bullying takes time and effort. However, these efforts can help schools become safe and enriching environments for children.



**Q: What are the most common things that teachers see when kids are playing together?**

- Kids inviting each other to join in their group or activity
- Kids feeling sorry for other kids who are left out
- Kids being friendly to most other kids

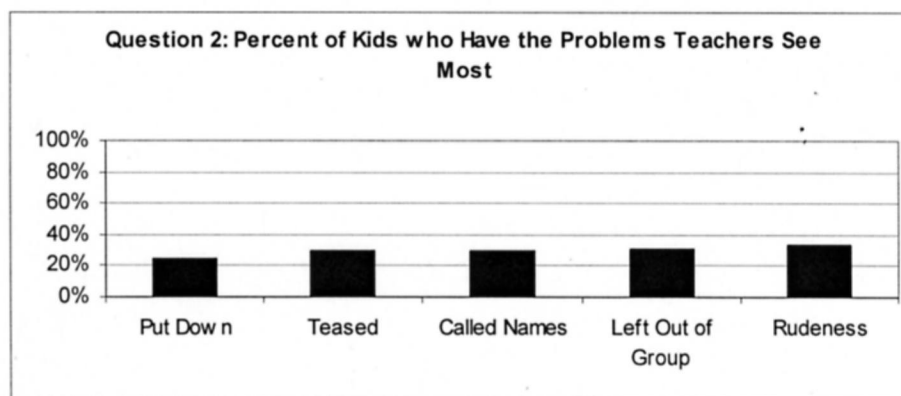
It's great to know that so many of our SHARE Project kids are treating their classmates with kindness.



**Q: What do teachers say are the most common problems kids have with other kids at school?**

- Being put down
- Being teased
- Being called names
- Being left out of groups or activities
- Experiencing rudeness

As you can see from the chart, teachers only see *some* kids experiencing these problems. This means that although there are some problems to work on, teachers say that many kids are getting along well with their classmates.



**Q: What do teachers say are the most common ways that kids deal with these problems?**

- Going off alone to think about what happened
- Asking a teacher for help
- Feeling like crying
- Thinking about the problem for a long time
- Telling a friend what happened
- Telling a teacher what happened

This shows us that teachers notice kids doing all kinds of things as they deal with problems at school. Because most children tell teachers when they have problems with other kids, this gives teachers a great opportunity to help kids learn how to deal with these problems!

