

SHARE Project

<http://www.psych.illinois.edu/familystudieslab/>

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Note From the Director

Dear SHARE Project Participants,

It is amazing to think that another year has passed since our last newsletter. Many exciting changes have occurred. Most importantly, our first group of SHARE Project participants has now entered middle/junior high school; the second group is preparing for this move next year. It is hard to believe that our 2nd graders are so grown up! This change brings many exciting opportunities, and yet also many challenges as students learn to navigate the more demanding academic responsibilities, as well as often meet different peer groups and form new friendships.

With the help of the dedicated schools and families who comprise the SHARE Project, we continue to learn how children's relationships with their peers develop over time, and how these changes influence their achievement at school. In this issue, we describe some results from our research over the past four years. This research helps us to better understand bullying across the school years, and shows that bullying can influence not only children's emotional health but also their achievement at school. Throughout the newsletter, we provide some suggestions to families and schools about how we can tackle the problem of bullying and improve children's social experiences at school.



We hope that you find this information helpful, and continue on this exciting journey with us. With your help, the SHARE Project can become one of the longest running projects examining the effects of bullying on children's schooling and social development!

Sincerely,

Karen Rudolph, Project Director and the SHARE Project Staff

**Congratulations to the
four families that won
\$150 in our drawing!**

Thank you to all who participated

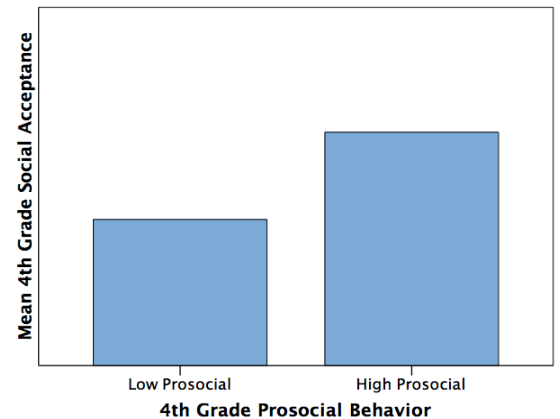
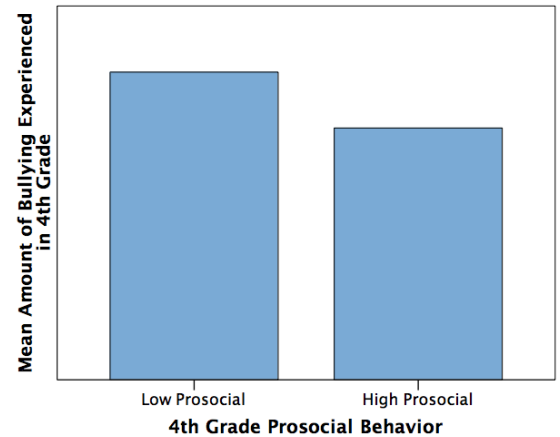
Prosocial Behavior

Inviting a classmate to join in a game. Comforting a peer who is upset. These are examples of prosocial behaviors, or actions intended to benefit or help out other people. The SHARE Project was interested in how kids who show high levels of prosocial behavior are treated by their peers. Are they seen as uncool? Are they more likely to be bullied by their peers? Or are they generally more well-liked and less bullied?

To answer these questions, we asked 4th grade teachers about their students' prosocial behaviors. We also asked how much these kids were bullied by their classmates, and whether they were popular or rejected by their peers. Our results show that, on average, kids who show high levels of prosocial behavior are less bullied and more well-liked. So, popular kids aren't always the "Mean Girls," as movies might lead us to believe. In fact, they are often the ones who stand up for their classmates and try to help them feel a part of the group.

So what can administrators, teachers, and parents do to help stop bullying? One reason why bullying remains a problem in schools is because kids witnessing another child being bullied or left out are hesitant to get involved. Teachers and parents should communicate to kids that one important

It is the responsibility of every student, teacher, and parent to create a climate in which bullying is not tolerated.



prosocial behavior is intervening when another child gets bullied. By doing this, adults may help kids learn how to get along better and may improve the social climate in schools (for other ideas, see "Bullying Prevention – What Can You Do?").



Preventing a “Cycle of Aggression”

Children who are bullied may be caught in a cycle of academic failure, aggression, and perhaps even more bullying that unfolds across the school years.

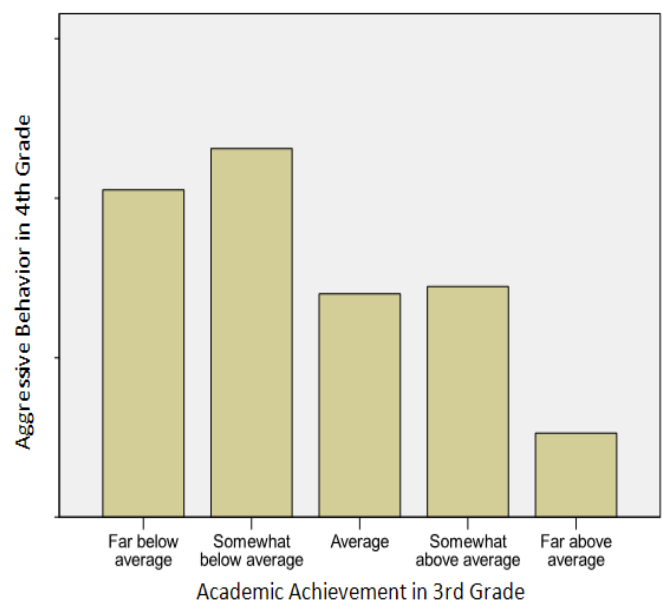
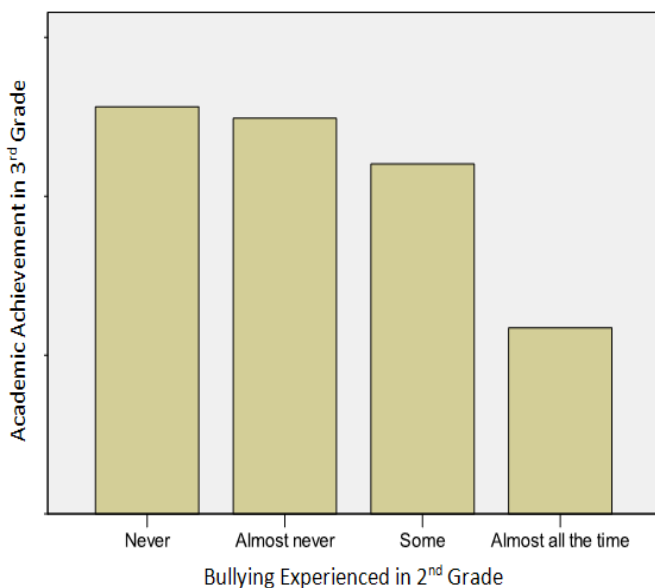
The SHARE Project is interested in how bullying is linked to children’s performance in their schoolwork. Children who are bullied may be distracted from their schoolwork and feel less engaged at school. Unfortunately, children who struggle academically and feel less connected to other peers and the classroom setting sometimes become more aggressive over time. We explored whether this “cycle of aggression” occurred in the SHARE Project.

We asked students how often they experienced bullying by their peers. We also asked teachers to rate students’ academic achievement and displays of aggressive behavior. We found that students who were bullied in 2nd grade had lower achievement in 3rd grade; in turn, students with lower achievement in 3rd grade were more aggressive in 4th grade. And we know from other research that children who are aggressive are

often targets of bullying from others. So, children who are bullied may be caught in a cycle of academic failure, aggression, and perhaps even more bullying that unfolds across the school years.

What can we do to break this “cycle of aggression?” Making efforts to prevent bullying can certainly help (turn to page 6 to find out more about bullying prevention strategies). Assisting students who are struggling academically is also an important part of breaking this cycle. Finally, teaching children who are bullied to stand up for themselves in nonaggressive ways is critical.

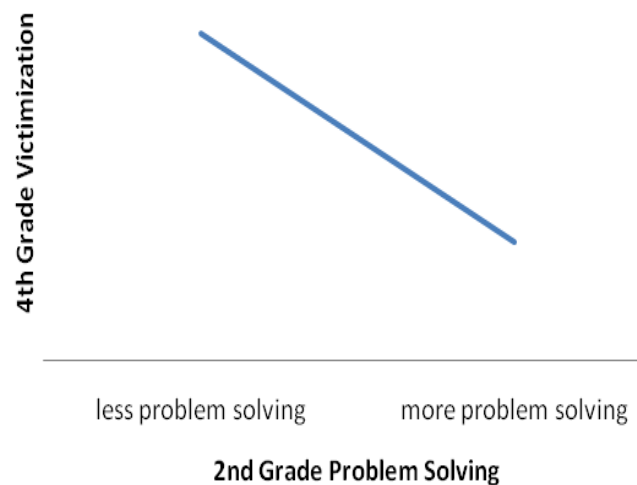
There is no quick and easy way to eliminate bullying and its effects, but every step we take brings us closer to a solution.



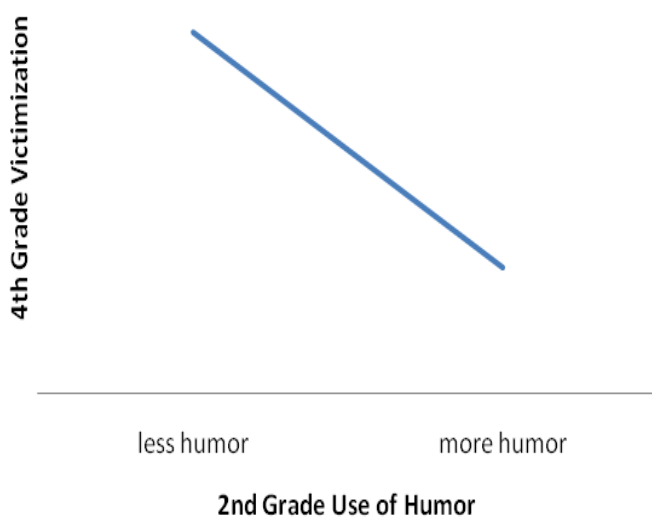
Protecting Children from Bullying

Although some children continue to experience bullying over many years (see *Bullying Through the School years*), some children report less bullying over time. Because teachers often witness bullying or deal with its consequences, we thought that teachers could help us to identify effective strategies for coping with bullying. We asked teachers to tell us how often 2nd graders used two different strategies: problem solving and use of humor. We found that 2nd graders who used problem solving, such as asking a friend what they should do or planning what they will say the next time someone is mean to them, were less likely to be bullied in the 4th grade. Similarly, 2nd graders who used humor, such as trying to see the funny side of the situation or laughing it off and trying not to take it personally, were also less likely to be bullied in the 4th grade.

Effect of Problem Solving on Victimization



Effect of Humor on Victimization



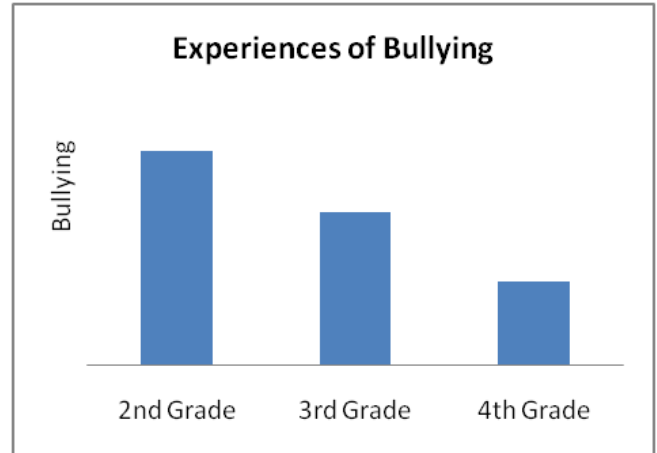
Children who respond with these two strategies seem to be very effective at stopping other kids from bullying them up to two years later. This is helpful information because it means that teaching children to use these kinds of strategies when they encounter problems with other kids in elementary school may provide children with the skills they need to improve their relationships with peers over time. Of course, different strategies may be necessary for coping with different types of problems. If a child is being physically harmed, trying to make light of the situation or using humor would not be recommended, but this strategy may be useful for dealing with minor teasing. One goal for teachers and parents is to help children learn to identify the difference between various types of peer problems, and to figure out the most effective way of dealing with each one.

Bullying Through the School Years

This year marks an important transition for many in the SHARE project. It is hard to believe that some of the students are now in their first year of junior high/middle school! In light of this important change, it is useful to understand how bullying changes through the school years. As we begin our fifth year of working with schools and families, we are starting to look at how our participating children have changed as they get older. Since bullying among school children is a concern to parents, teachers, and students alike, we wanted to know whether children's experiences of bullying have changed across 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade.

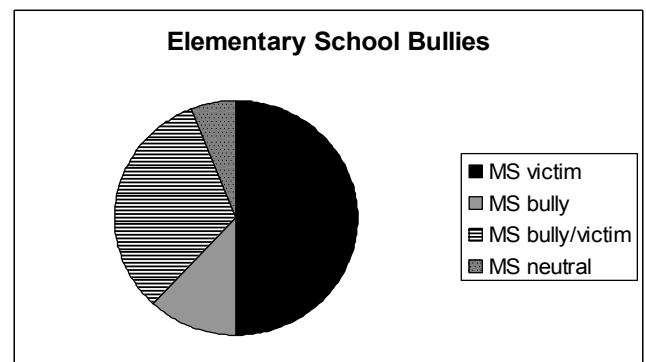
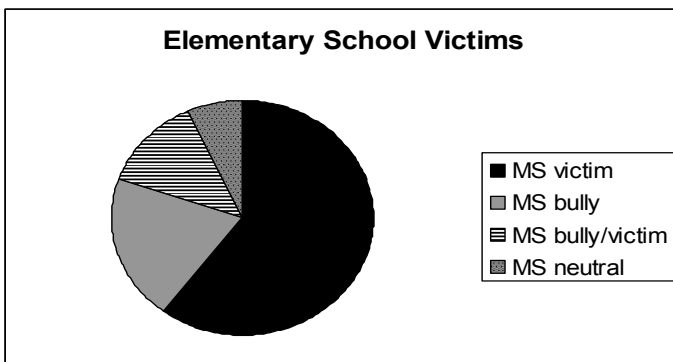
The good news is that, overall, children in the SHARE Project reported being bullied less often by their peers as they got older. This decrease was similar for three types of bullying: physical (e.g., being hit or kicked), verbal (e.g., being yelled at or called names), and relational (e.g., being excluded from a group or having other kids spread rumors about you). Luckily, it appears that peer bullying generally is decreasing across the elementary school years. Unfortunately, for a subgroup of children, being bullied remained a constant problem: If they were bullied in 2nd grade, this experience was likely to last through the 3rd and 4th grade.

Because some of our SHARE Project students are just now entering junior high/middle school, we can not yet report on how their experiences change after elementary school. However, looking at other research can teach us what to expect in the next few years. Past studies have shown that bullying occurs more frequently



in junior high/middle school than in elementary school. This may result from students' increasing concerns about fitting in with their peers and being "cool." In fact, although our elementary school students do not seem to condone bullying (see "Prosocial Behavior"), bullying does seem to increase the popularity of students entering junior high/middle school.

This is a time when we can expect to see a rise in a new type of bullying, called cyber-bullying. One study found that 17% of 6-8th graders reported being a victim of cyber bullying and almost 18% reported being a cyber bully. The roles students play in bullying situations also can change after elementary school. One study found that upon entering middle school, 20% of elementary school victims became bullies, and 50% of elementary school bullies became victims. The graphs below display these shifts.



School transitions can be a very stressful time for students. Being aware of some of the risks associated with bullying during this time is one important step we can take towards preventing bullying, and thus easing this important transition.

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Bullying Prevention – What Can You Do?

Create Consequences. In the classroom and at home, together with children, create clear and meaningful consequences for even minor incidents of bullying, and follow through with these consequences. This makes it clear to children that NO bullying behavior will be tolerated, and can help to curb this negative behavior before it becomes a pattern.

Increase Monitoring. Many incidents of bullying occur at school, yet teachers report witnessing much less bullying than do students. As children move from elementary to junior high/middle school, it is important to continue monitoring their behavior in the halls, lunchroom, and classrooms. Additionally, bullying that originates in school sometimes continues after school via texting and the internet. Talk with your children about appropriate internet usage, as children do not always understand that their actions online have real-world consequences.

Encourage Empathy. Research (including our own SHARE Project findings!) suggests that encouraging children to consider others' feelings can decrease bullying. The more empathy a child feels for his or her peers, the more likely that child is to intervene if they see a peer being picked on. Additionally, children are less likely to bully someone if they feel empathy for them. Talk with your children about how being bullied physically, verbally or relationally (e.g., through social exclusion or gossip) is hurtful, and ask them to consider how they would feel if someone bullied them.

Promote Befriending and Prosocial Behavior. Research has shown that having a peer step in to defend a victimized child is one of the most effective ways to curb bullying behavior. Peer pressure is a powerful dynamic and children often “go along” with bullying that they see taking place. However, this same dynamic can be used to stop bullying; when one kid steps in to stop a bully, others may follow suit. Even if a particular child would never consider bullying another child, they may not realize how important it is to stand up for others who are bullied. Consider encouraging this behavior by publicly rewarding it when it occurs, perhaps by giving out a “Good Citizen” award in your class each week, and talk with children about the importance of standing up for classmates that are picked on.

Act Early! Remember, just like any other misbehavior, the sooner you address these negative behaviors, the easier they will be to stop!

Happy Holidays from the SHARE Project!