

An End To Bullying

Kids with black eyes. Kids crying themselves to sleep. Kids afraid to go to school. These are just some of the effects of bullying. Millions of students are bullied every month, whether it's through physical intimidation or name-calling or ostracizing or gossiping—in and outside of school, over phone lines and the internet. Organizations such as Stop Bullying and even the White House are calling bullying a pandemic, but even raising awareness is doing little to change the numbers. Clearly not enough is being done. **Bullying should be punished by a fine or jail time because it's too prevalent, it leaves long-lasting emotional and academic scars, it can lead to suicide, and it would most likely be an effective deterrent.**

One reason bullying should be dealt with more severely is that it happens way too often. For example, one study shows that “every 7 minutes a child is bullied” (“Bullying Prevention...”). According to another study, 282,000 students in middle and high schools are attacked physically every month (Lumsden). Another website explains that 75% of students have been bullied in the past ten months (Horowitz). **This shows not just that the vast majority of children are affected by bullying—it's not isolated to a small group of people—but also that just “talking about it” isn't stopping it. A stronger punishment is clearly needed.**

Another reason is because of the academic and emotional harm bullies inflict on their victims. For example, one study states that “160,000 students miss school everyday because they're afraid of being bullied”; obviously if students are not in school, they're not learning (Horowitz). Another website states that 39% of students who are bullied report that their grades have lowered because of bullying (“Bullying and...”). School should be a refuge for students, but clearly for many students they feel unsafe and are potentially concentrating on other things than studying during the day. Just as important is the fact that bullying can lead to long-lasting depression and insecurity: one article mentions that 78% of students who are depressed have been bullied (“Bullying and Suicide”). Seeing that conservative studies estimate that at least 20% of teenagers suffer from depression, that's a huge number of depressed teens being bullied (Borchard)! Finally, a study done in England found that “those who were repeatedly bullied at ages 8 or 10 were almost twice as likely as others to experience” depression as teenagers than others (“Taking on...”). **This shows that bullying clearly doesn't just affect people physically—it can produce long-lasting scars that take years or even a lifetime to deal with. A commensurate punishment is thus needed, both to punish the perpetrator and to prevent bullying in the first place.**

Finally, we should stop bullying because it can lead to suicide. For example, it is estimated that 500,000 teens try killing themselves every year, and 5,000 succeed (“Teen Depression”). According to a study by Yale University, bully victims are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims, clearly indicating a close relationship between bullying and suicidal ideation (“Bullying and Suicide”). In 2010, a thirteen-year-old named Asher Brown killed himself partially because so many students made fun of him (O'Hare). In early October of that same year, Tyler Clementi jumped off the George Washington Bridge after his college roommate “outed” and made fun of him on Facebook (“Tyler Clementi”). Last month in Canada, fifteen-year-old Amanda Todd took her own life shortly after posting a video on YouTube talking about the pain bullying had caused her, and

in January Eric Borge committed suicide after posting a video on Itgetsbetter.org (Stanglin; Goldwart). These are only just four of the more well-known examples; news sites are littered with stories of people who have ended their lives partially because of the effects of bullying. Many people argue that bullying is a common practice, a “rite of passage” that is as normal as apple pie, **but all these tragic stories show that bullying is not just innocent fun; it can be deadly, and clearly needs to end now (“Taking On...”)**.

Many would argue against using such extreme measures to punish bullies. Some would argue that bullying is reflective of the real world—people will always encounter people who try to pick on them, so it’s best that victims learn to stick up for themselves. By that logic, though, then we should try to introduce war, poverty, abuse and deadly diseases to our schools, so students are “prepared” for what actually occurs in the real world. Clearly, just because something is “normal” doesn’t make it right. Others would argue that bullies are too young to be punished, or that a large percentage of them are also bullied or abused at home. While it’s sad that students would have to experience the latter, that fact—or a student’s youth—wouldn’t necessarily excuse him or her from being punished for defacing property, skipping school, robbing or worse. Seeing that the first two don’t necessarily hurt anyone else, unlike bullying, it only seems rational that bullying should be punished as well. Judges would obviously be able to take into account extenuating circumstances when punishing a bully, just as they do for other crimes.

Finally, some would question the effectiveness of fines and jail time for bullies. While research of fines and jail time for bullies is limited, studies of fines for other negative activities shows that these punishments are often successful at reducing the activity. For example, in the U.K. parents of students who skip school are fined up to 75£ for every day missed; authorities have said that truancy has been reduced 79% as a result (Tuttle). In 1991, San Antonio, Texas approved laws holding parents accountable for their behavior; within two years, juvenile violent crime had been reduced 19% (“Strategy: Holding...”). And in Chicago, the Noble Network of Charter Schools institutes a series of fines for student behavior that, while possibly excessive, has yielded results: in terms of both behavior and test scores, those schools do better than the average Chicago public school, even though they are both serving the same population; the mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, has repeatedly praised the Noble Network as a model for other schools, citing their 90% graduation rate compared to 54% for normal public schools in the city (Graybeal; Speilman). There is not yet concrete proof that that fines and jail time will work on bullying, but the evidence above seems to point to its future success; at the very least, with so much at stake, it’s worth a try.

In conclusion, bullying needs to stop now! Too many people are bullied, it raises rates of teen suicide, it affects students emotionally and academically. Based on the evidence, implementing fines or jail time would provide an effective deterrent. Every day that we allow this savage practice to continue is a day that tens of thousands will become victims; in effect, by ignoring this issue we turn a blind eye to the basic human rights of these people. The time to act is now. Doing nothing is just as bad as the bullying itself.

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