

*“Bullying ... is a pattern of repeated aggressive behaviour, with negative intent, directed from one child to another where there is a power imbalance.”*

Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do  
- Olweus, D.

This definition by Dr. Dan Olweus, the leading researcher in the field, identifies three critical conditions that distinguish bullying from other forms of aggressive behaviours:

**POWER**

- Children who bully acquire their power through physical size and strength, by status or by recruiting support of the peer group

**INTENT TO HARM**

- Children who bully generally do so with the intent to either physically or emotionally harm the other child

**FREQUENCY**

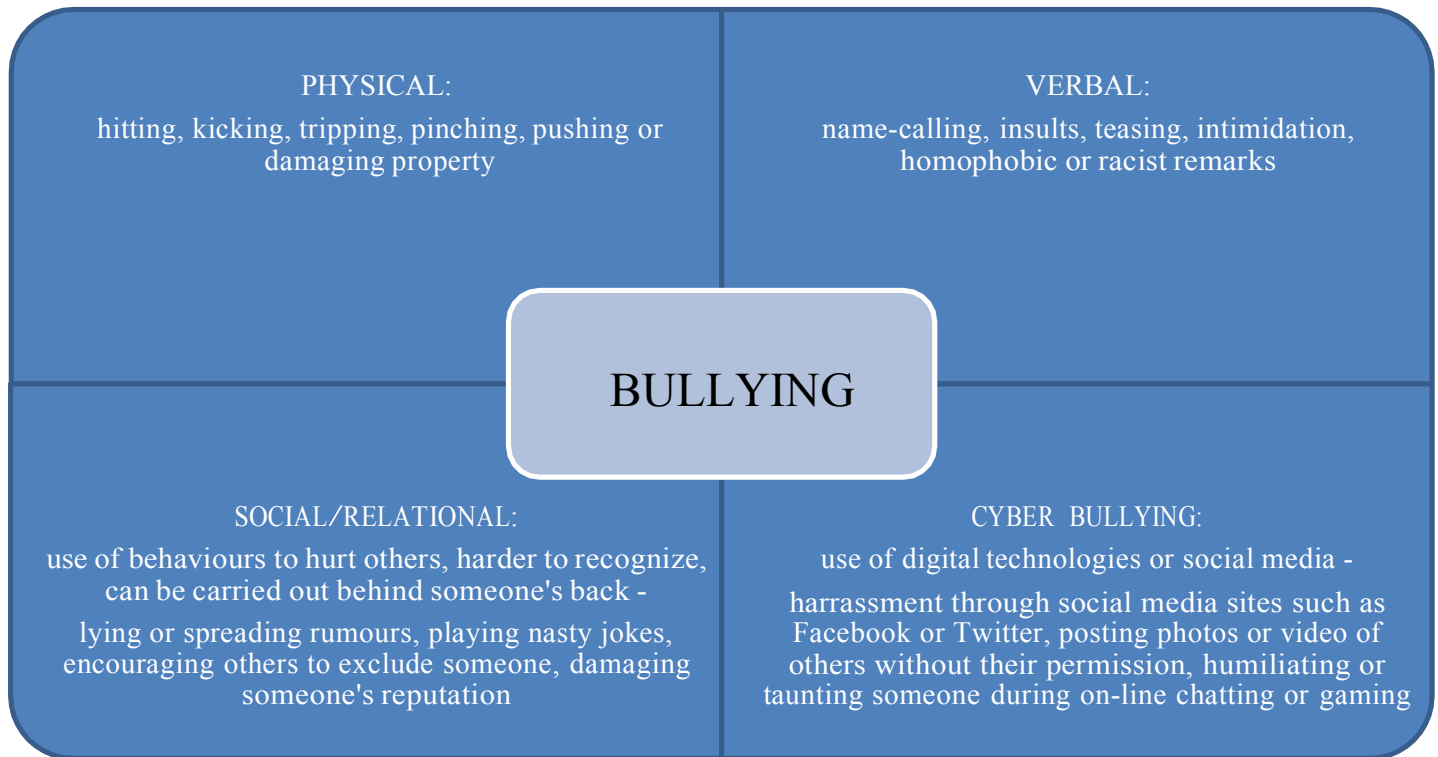
- Bullying is not a random act. Rather, it is characterized by frequent and repeated harassment. This is what differentiates bullying from more common conflicts

When determining if a specific behaviour is bullying, consider whether or not it:

- involves a power imbalance

- is intended to harm

- is repeated over time

**Types of Bullying**

**Cyber Bullying** can happen at any time. It can be public or in private and sometimes is only known to the target and to the person perpetuating the bullying.

Cyber bullying has changed the traditional face of bullying in schools in three significant ways:

- ▶ **Access:** It is virtually impossible for victims to get away from cyber bullies. Most students have access to all types of technology; cyber bullies have access to and can reach their victims at almost any time. Victims do not have a safe haven as they do in some cases of traditional bullying.
- ▶ **Scope:** Unlike traditional bullying, due to technology, the cyber bully audience has few, if any barriers; and the audience easily grows almost exponentially.
- ▶ **Anonymity:** Cyber bullying is not a face-to-face interaction and cyber bullies hide behind technology. Anonymity, which is inherent in electronic communication, promotes a lack of inhibition. As a result, normal behaviour restraints can disappear, allowing students to act harsher than they would in real life.

We need to clearly identify the difference between conflict and bullying in order to appropriately respond to bullying incidents. While the two seem similar in some instances, there is actually a distinct difference:

**Bullying** is a persistent pattern of unwelcome or aggressive behaviour that often involves an imbalance of power and/or the intention to harm or humiliate someone. Bullying often results in feelings of distress for the victim.

**Conflict**, on the other hand, is generally a disagreement or difference in opinion between peers who typically have equal power in their relationships. It's usually an inevitable part of a group dynamic.

### Bullying or Conflict?

#### Example # 1 (Secondary)

*Two female members of the school basketball team are arguing with each other over the loss of a recent game. Annie blames Susan for the loss because when Annie was open during the last seconds of the game, Susan didn't pass the ball to her but instead took the shot herself and missed. Annie calls Susan a derogatory name and then pushes her into the change room lockers and storms out.*

#### Example # 2 (Elementary)

*A group of primary students are on the playground at recess. Two of the students start to argue when Patty wants Lisa trade recess snacks but Lisa doesn't want to. Patty becomes angry and tells Lisa that she can't play with the rest of them if she won't share her recess snack. When the girls don't support Lisa, she bursts into tears and runs back into the school.*

These are both examples of conflict. In the first scenario, Annie may have had an **Intent To Harm** Susan but there is no discernible **Power Imbalance** nor has the behaviour been **Repeated Over Time**. In the elementary example, there appears to be a **Power Imbalance** with the peers supporting Patty over Lisa and there may even have been an **Intent To Harm** Lisa's feelings but there is no pattern of the behaviour being **Repeated over Time**.

The fact that one or even two of the elements of bullying exists does not automatically categorize the incident as bullying. Many conflicts include an imbalance of power and or an intent to harm but may be isolated occurrences and therefore are examples of inappropriate behaviour. An incident cannot be categorized as bullying unless there is a pattern of the behaviour being **Repeated Over Time**.

**NOTE:** Even though an incident does not fit the definition of bullying, it still needs to be responded to. **Inappropriate Behaviour**, if not consistently dealt with by staff, can easily escalate into behaviour **Of Concern** or **Of Serious Concern** and can evolve into a pattern of bullying.