

How Teachers Can Spot Bullies in the Classroom

Discover the subtle indicators of a bullying

Spotting a bully in your classroom is not as easy as it sounds. In fact, there is more than one type of bully at school. Bullies come in all shapes, sizes and personality types. Some bullies are popular and well-liked while others are loners with only a few friends. Other times, kids resort to bullying as a way to avoid becoming a target themselves. These bullies are usually referred to as bully-victims because they have been victimized in the past. As a result, they are either looking for revenge or are using the components of bullying as a self-preservation tool. Yet, regardless of what type of person is doing the bullying, there are some signs that can help you determine if a child is a bully or not. Knowing this information is helpful for teachers looking to identify bullies in their classrooms. Here are the top nine ways to spot kids that bully others.

Know the Common Types of Bullies

Bullying is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. In fact, there are six different types of bullies including relational bullies, serial bullies, indifferent bullies, bully-victims, group bullies, and aggressive bullies. If you embrace some of the myths about bullying, including that all bullies are loners with no friends and low self-esteem, you are going to miss a lot of other types of bullies. You will especially miss the serial bullies, which are often the most difficult types of bullies to spot because their behavior is often very covert and hidden from the watchful eyes of adults. Get to know the characteristics of each type of bully and then see if you have any of them in your classroom.

Understand that Boys and Girls Bully Differently

No one will argue that physical bullying is much easier to spot than any other type of bullying. For this reason, parents and educators often miss the fact that girls are bullying too. They just may not use physical aggression to do it. Instead, they resort to relational aggression, verbal bullying, and name-calling. Therefore, it's important to broaden your perspective.

The emotional wounds that female bullies leave in their wake are just as painful as the bruises left by a physical bully.

Look for Signs of Entitlement

Many times, bullies believe that the rules do not apply to them. Or, they may feel that because they are good in school, good at sports, or come from a prominent family that they can do whatever they want. They also believe that others are below them. You will see a strong sense of contempt in this type of bully, especially when they interact with others that they feel are beneath them. Watch how these kids treat lunchroom employees, janitors, wait staff, store clerks, and other people in service-oriented positions. Most kids with entitlement issues will bully others in your classroom and feel like they are doing nothing wrong.

Pay Attention to Outbursts of Anger or Aggression

Sometimes bullies have difficulty managing emotions, especially anger. So they are controlling and aggressive in order to get what they want. They also pressure other kids to do what they want them to do. There is very little cooperation and often a great deal of manipulation. When you see these types of behaviors on a consistent basis, bullying may be a tool these kids use to get their way when you are not looking.

Look Closer at "Charming" Kids

This bullying trait is often likened to Eddie Haskell. Eddie Haskell was a fictional character on *Leave it to Beaver* who would greet his friends' parents with overdone good manners and compliments. But, when the parents were not around, Eddie was not a nice kid. He was often conniving and pressuring his friends. Or, he was bullying Wally's younger brother Beaver. Typically, parents and educators are shocked to learn that this type of child is a bully because he or she has always been so nice and polite. But if a student in your class seems too good to be true, pay attention.

Investigate if There Are Issues with Authority

While some bullies are subtler with their aggression, other bullies clearly have issues with following rules and listening to authority figures. For instance, some bullies will get into arguments with teachers, coaches, guidance counselors, and parents. They also may talk back, make sarcastic remarks and have an overall disrespectful attitude toward anyone who has authority.

If a child is willing to act aggressively toward an adult or a person in authority, they are also likely to be aggressive with their peers.

Don't Overlook the Followers

Many times, bullying is about attaining or even maintaining a position on the social ladder at school. As a result, many otherwise good kids will bully others because of peer pressure. They also may bully to get attention or to feel like they are part of a group or clique. In other instances, bullies will get these followers to do their dirty work. And these kids comply because they are afraid of becoming targets themselves. Or, they comply because they feel it's the only way to remain in the group. Keep an eye on the kids that follow another person's lead and see if you can direct them to be a leader. You may keep them from going down the wrong path.

Watch out for Kids Who Exclude Others

One of the biggest forms of relational aggression is ostracizing, excluding or icing out other kids. If a child regularly refuses to be friends with other people, doesn't want to be inclusive of everyone or picks and chooses people to associate with, this is a good indication that bullying may be an issue. Another indication of bullying is a child who is not accepting of another person's differences.

Intolerant kids often bully others who are different.

Pay Attention to Kids Surrounded by Drama

Mean girls, fake friends, and frenemies often create a lot of drama. In addition to subtly bullying others, they also seem to create tension and anxiety among groups of friends. They also are more prone to spreading rumors, cyberbullying and slut-shaming others. While much of this type of behavior is done outside of the watchful eyes of adults, the drama that it causes will be visible. Consequently, if you see a lot of drama among a group at school, do a little research in order to discover the root of the problem. Most of the time, you will find a bully in the end.

A Word From the Author

As an educator, it can be frustrating at times to deal with bullying on a regular basis. But if you establish a climate of respectfulness in your classroom early on, you will discover that bullying issues occur much less frequently. Additionally, your students will learn more and do better overall in your classroom if they have confidence that you will not tolerate bullying. They can focus on learning instead of worrying about being targeted because they know you have it under control.