

# The school bully -- does it run in the family?

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A shove, a taunt or name-calling on the playground or in the hall, away from the eyesight, earshot and authority of the teacher – childhood bullying can involve physical contact, spreading rumors and other negative behaviors committed over and over again to intimidate, humiliate and isolate the receiver of the behavior.

A review of national and international research on the issue is finding a family connection to the origins of young bullies. Elizabeth Sweeney, a University of Cincinnati master's degree student in sociology, presented her findings Aug. 3 at the 103rd annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

Sweeney reviewed research out of England, Germany, Norway, Japan, South Africa and the United States, which she reports lagged behind the European countries in examining the phenomenon of bullying prior to this decade. The majority of the research that she examined involved children between the ages of nine and 16.

Sweeney says her review of the literature found that children raised by authoritarian parents – parents who are demanding, directive and unresponsive – are the most prone to act out bullying behavior.

On the other hand, there were parallels showing that children raised by nurturing, warm, responsive parents were less likely to bully.

"Children who experience hostility, abuse, physical discipline and other aggressive behaviors by their parents are more likely to model that

behavior in their peer relationships," she writes. "Children learn from their parents how to behave and interact with others," Sweeney says. "So if they're learning about aggression and angry words at home, they will tend to use these behaviors as coping mechanisms when they interact with their peers." Her review also found that children from middle-income families were less likely to bully than children from the high and low ends of the family income scale.

She says that while some studies suggest boys are more prone to bullying than girls, others state that it runs equally among the genders, although boys are more likely to act out bullying physically, while girls are more verbal.

Sweeney adds that it is the tolerance of bullying that "has served as one of the primary contributors to its persistence and severity." She is advocating research that would delve more deeply into the issues of bullying, including in-depth interviews with children, families and school officials.

Source: University of Cincinnati

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