

Disruptive kindergartners are likely to be bullied later in elementary school

May 3 2022, by Paul L. Morgan



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Kindergartners who act out, disrupt classrooms, get angry and argue with their teachers are especially [likely to be bullied](#) once they reach third, fourth and fifth grade, our research group has found.

We continue to investigate bullying in U.S. [elementary schools](#), but our initial findings indicate that the odds that disruptive kindergartners will be shoved, pushed or hit, teased or called names, left out, and have lies told about them are roughly twice as high as for kindergartners who do not act out in classrooms. We observed this in analyses accounting for many other [risk factors](#).

Our findings are consistent with, but also extend, prior research documenting that children who are [from poor families](#) or who are [struggling academically](#) are more likely to be bullied than their peers who are from [wealthier families](#) or who are more academically skilled.

[As with older children](#), we find that young boys are more likely to be shoved, pushed or hit, while [young girls](#) are more likely to be teased or called names, left out, and told lies about. Children with disabilities, particularly boys, are more likely to be frequently bullied. Black boys more frequently experienced other children telling lies about them than white boys, consistent with prior work finding that Black children are at greater [risk of being bullied in adolescence](#).

We believe our study represents the first analysis of a nationally representative sample that identifies which kindergartners are most likely to be bullied later in U.S. elementary schools. We hope the information helps parents and school staff identify and support [young children](#) who are especially likely to be bullied.

The harms of bullying

Schoolchildren who are frequently bullied are likely to later be [depressed](#), anxious and [suicidal](#) as well as to be [unemployed](#), impoverished and [abusing substances](#). These risks are as large as those associated with being placed in foster care or [experiencing maltreatment](#).

Early identification can help support those children who are being bullied and so limit the potential damage. Screening and prevention efforts are [more effective](#) when delivered while children are still young. [Mental health supports](#) may be needed for those being frequently bullied.

And looking at specific types of bullying may help schools and parents more directly serve the [different psychological needs](#) of children experiencing physical or nonphysical bullying.

The results suggest that [the more schools can do](#) to help kindergartners learn to manage their disruptive behaviors, the [less likely](#) these [children](#) are to be bullied later on in elementary school.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Disruptive kindergartners are likely to be bullied later in elementary school (2022, May 3) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-05-disruptive-kindergartners-bullied-elementary-school.html>

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