

How does a person become a bully: Understanding reasons for a bully's behavior

Lesson 7, Student Activity 3

One common reason that children and teens bully is that they have poor adult role models at home. When children see a parent bullying others – siblings, their spouse, or the child, they may see bullying as an appropriate way to get one's way.

Some young people bully to hide their own feelings of inadequacy or use bullying as a way to vent anger when they feel powerless to direct their anger at the cause of their pain. Some absorb the violence and bullying behaviors modeled on TV, in movies, and in video games.

No child is born a bully. It is a learned behavior, but it is also ultimately a *choice*. Plenty of kids grow up with the same predisposition factors as bullies yet choose to use other methods to solve problems.

Bullies may fail to develop a mature sense of justice. They frequently justify their actions by manufacturing a fault in their target -- it may be that they see the target as "dumb" or conversely see the target as "a smarty." Any trait or perceived difference can be used to create a reason or justification for bullying. When challenged, cyberbullies sometimes defend their actions as benefiting their targets, with claims like "it will help him toughen up" or "it will teach her to fit in."

Parents of bullies often contribute to the problem by minimizing or dismissing the behavior of their child. These parents often fail to agree with other parents, teachers, or school administrators on what constitutes bullying. They consider such behavior as being "just a phase," or say "kids will be kids." Some parents believe kids will (or should) just work out confrontations among themselves.

Often this viewpoint is accompanied by the attitude that the target needs to "learn to take a joke," or "toughen up." Not only does this point of view utterly disregard the damage done to targets; it fails to recognize the very dangerous path bullies themselves walk, or address the underlying causes.