



## Bullying and Hazing

According to the N.C. Center for Safer Schools, “school violence” is “any behavior that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions and disorder.” School violence can be seen as a continuum of behaviors ranging from put-downs to suicide. Included on the less “violent” end of the continuum is bullying. Recent research indicates that two-thirds of the school shooters felt bullied at some point prior to attacking their schools and supports the notion that the prevention and early intervention of bullying behaviors needs to be pursued to stop the escalation of violence from one end of the continuum to the other much more destructive end.

Bullying can be defined as a form of aggression that involves one or more students verbally, physically and/or psychologically harassing another student repeatedly over a period of time. Bullying often begins at the elementary school level, peaks at the middle school level and then lessens in high school. Three perspectives are represented in most bullying circumstances: the bully; the target/victim; and the witness/bystander. Bullies have been categorized into two types: the “reactive bully” and the “proactive bully.” The “reactive bully” has often been a target or victim of bullying and is now participating in the act; the “proactive bully” needs no provocation and is naturally more aggressive towards other people. Targets/victims of bullying tend to be those who are the most vulnerable. Witnesses/bystanders see the bullying happening but are not part of the bullying interaction. Important to note when addressing the topic of bullying is that the vast majority of students fall into the last category of witness/bystander. Also important to note is that recent research indicates the type of bullying being experienced by students today is in many cases more severe than bullying in the past and has the potential for long-lasting negative consequences.

There are many different variations of bullying behavior, with hazing being one type. Hazing encompasses the basic categories of bullying and both types of bullies. Acts of hazing include any form of physical brutality (e.g., beating or whipping), any form of a physical activity (e.g., sleep deprivation or exposure to the elements, or consumption of any undesired food or drink), any activity that places mental stress on the student, and/or any activity that causes the student to break the law. North Carolina G.S. 14.35 defines hazing as an act undertaken “to annoy any student by playing abusive or ridiculous tricks upon him (her), to frighten, scold, beat or harass him (her), or to subject him (her) to personal indignity.” Hazing can be seen as an organized form of bullying. One difference between these behaviors is bullying in most forms is an attempt to exclude a person from the activities of the group or individual that is doing the bullying while hazing is often done in an attempt to complete a rite of passage or initiation into a group. Hazing is done to create a sense of a bond between the person being hazed and the person/group doing the hazing.

Bullying and hazing can be prevented. Firm and standard punishments for such behaviors need to be posted and followed with consistency. Schools and community organizations need to establish expectations and guidelines for students that will prevent inappropriate behaviors while encouraging positive peer relationships. Schools and other organizations need to make sure adult supervision is available at all activities in addition to maintaining climates of respect. Bullying and hazing can be prevented by empowering students and adults with positive alternatives that build relationships and teach needed life skills. The option of viewing bullying as a “necessary evil” needs to be dismissed, as the building of resiliency in young people needs to be accomplished through positive rather than negative approaches.