

HOW TO MAKE A BULLY FROM SCRATCH VIDEO: RESEARCH REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION: Becoming a Bully

Bullying is a specific and very serious type of aggression.¹

Becoming a bully is a journey of specific life experiences starting at birth. There are road signs along the way that signal intervention is needed. We must know the signs to effectively derail the bully life path. To do this it's important to distinguish between normal aggression and bullying. Children no longer say, "he teased me," or "she hit me," and instead announce, "I was bullied at school." Even a President of the United States, Barack Obama, says he was bullied for having big ears. He was indeed teased, but probably not bullied.

ROAD SIGN #1: Difficult Temperament (0-3 years)

Children who experience Prenatal stressors and develop a difficult temperament.

These little ones are hard to soothe, and have trouble sleeping or eating. You love them deeply, but they are a little hard to fall in love with. When you play "peek-a-boo," there are no smiles or giggles; these children turn and squirm away.

Some of these children with difficult temperaments will have very out-of-control behaviors.²

They are defiant toddlers and later, hard to manage three-year-olds. Feeling powerless, parents resort to chronic, punitive discipline that victimizes the children.

By age three we start to see two different types of victims emerging. One is aggressive, defiant and hot tempered. The other is passive, acquiescent and anxious.

ROAD SIGN #2: Difficulty playing with Friends (3-5 years old)

During this time, our children find themselves in more complex social settings like school. **They have trouble playing with others from a lack of basic social skills and the ability to regulate their behavior.** Other children often exclude them, finding them boring or being frightened by their aggression and outbursts. **Teachers** don't have the skills either, and further compound the problem **by using their own exclusion strategies** - "TIME OUT! GO SIT IN THE CHAIR!"³

These kids are emotionally reactive when things don't go their way:

- The aggressive child goes from upset to rage in seconds.
- The passive child gives up just as quickly.

Since they cannot self-regulate they are unable to learn appropriate social skills:

- The aggressive child hits, grabs and takes what he wants.
- The passive child allows others to hit and grab without saying a word.

Their chronically stressed brain creates mental distortions in the way they perceive themselves and others:

- The aggressive child sees hostile intent in others' everyday actions.
- The passive child believes he should be treated poorly and expects poor treatment from others.

Adults tend to see the aggressive child as mean, and the passive child as unmotivated or lazy. These judgments blind us to the road signs, allowing the aggressive child to move one step closer in becoming a bully and the passive child in becoming a victim.



ROAD SIGN #3: Difficulty with Friendships

Things get worse as children move further into the world of friends. **All human beings require a sense of belonging.** ⁴ These children, desperate for connection, are often pushed to the side by classmates, teachers, and schools.

They have been excluded from connections with others since birth. **This immense social pain actually involves the same pathways in the brain as physical pain in the body.** Somewhere during this time, the social pain of rejection becomes so great the brain undergoes significant changes. ⁵

For both bullies and victims, the brain compensates for a life of painful disconnection.

ROAD SIGN #4: Social exclusion & "I Don't Care" Language (8-12 year-olds)

Both our bully and victim are still searching for connection and a place to belong. Since the mainstream tends to exclude them, they move towards one another.

The bully says:

"You're mine. I own you. Now, do what I say, or else."

And the victim acquiesces because a bad connection seems better than no connection at all.

Both our bully and victim are now immune to consequences because they simply don't care. One of the changes their brain has gone through is to shutdown the caring system. ⁶

Adults might threaten with:

"You are going to get kicked out of school!" "Go ahead, kick me out, I don't care."

"We are going to call your parents." "So what, I don't care."

"We are going to take away computer privileges." "I don't care, I don't like the computer anyway."

"We are going to ground you, spank you, send you to the alternative school." "Yeah? So what."

Since the part of the brain responsible for the motivation to care is literally turned off there is no punishment or discipline that will help. Re-wiring this system can only occur through connections with others.

When children say, "I don't care," their brain is unconsciously saying, "I don't feel cared for by anyone."

Our final stop brings us to the teenage years.



ROAD SIGN #5: The Brain's Empathy System Is Offline (teenage years)

The bully, continually trying so hard to belong, may join a gang of tough guys or hook up with some mean girls. They perfect their craft through cyber-bullying, spreading rumors, physical action and day-to-day threats. ⁷

At this point, the bully is now a dangerous teenager whose brain has changed in two very significant ways:

- 1) **The brain has become programmed to biochemically experience pleasure from hurting others.** The bully's internal pharmacy provides him with opioids that act like morphine to deaden the pain of his life journey. The teenager is literally addicted to causing others pain.
- 2) **The brain is immune to rejection and ostracism. This teenager no longer feels a need to belong or care. The skill of empathy is offline.** ⁸

Our **victim**, on the other hand, lacks the internal pharmacy that a bully has to provide him with relief. The teenager **is prone to suffering quietly and then exploding. The pain can become so intense that he or she may kill himself or others**, as we have seen play out in school shootings. ⁹

Bullying a bully with tough measures and excluding him with "no tolerance" policies compounds the problem. We are systemically applying the exact treatment that created the bully in the first place—and then expecting it to help. ¹⁰

Effective discipline consists of two parts: The slow building of bonds and healthy relationships, and the quick strategies needed in the heat of the moment when conflict occurs. **Bully prevention and intervention can only occur in the slow stages of relationship building.** ¹¹

Our awareness of the five Road Signs in How A Bully Is Made will save countless lives. Conscious Discipline has effective researched interventions for every road sign along the way.



REFERENCES:

- ¹ Swearer, S M.: Hymel, S. (2015). Understanding the psychology of bullying: Moving toward a social-ecological diathesis-stress model. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 344-353.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038929>
- ² Edwards, R C.; Hans, S L. (2015) Infant risk factors associated with internalizing, externalizing, and co-occurring behavior problems in young children. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol 51(4), 489-499.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038800>
- ³ Hemmeler, M. (2011). Social and Emotional Competency and Exclusionary Discipline. (Electronic Thesis or Dissertation). <http://etd.ohiolink.edu/>

Brown, T. M. (2007). Lost and Turned Out: Academic, Social, and Emotional Experiences of Students Excluded from School. *Urban Education*, 42(5), 432- 455.
- ⁴ Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- ⁵ MacDonald, G., & Leary, M. R. (2005). Why Does Social Exclusion Hurt? The Relationship Between Social and Physical Pain. *Psychological Bulletin*, 131(2), 202-223.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.2.202>
- ⁶ DeWall, C. N., & Baumeister, R. F. (2006). Alone but feeling no pain: Effects of social exclusion on physical pain tolerance and pain threshold, affective forecasting, and interpersonal empathy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(1), 1-15.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.91.1.1>
- ⁷ Swearer, S M.: Hymel, S. (2015). Understanding the psychology of bullying: Moving toward a social-ecological diathesis-stress model. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 344-353.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038929>
- ⁸ DeWall, C. N., & Baumeister, R. F. (2006). Alone but feeling no pain: Effects of social exclusion on physical pain tolerance and pain threshold, affective forecasting, and interpersonal empathy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(1), 1-15.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.91.1.1>
- ⁹ Rodkin, P. C., Espelage, D. L., & Hanish, L. D. (2015). A relational framework for understanding bullying: Developmental antecedents and outcomes. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 311-321.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038658>

Swearer, S M.: Hymel, S. (2015). Understanding the psychology of bullying: Moving toward a social-ecological diathesis-stress model. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 344-353.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038929>
- ¹⁰ Swearer, S M.: Hymel, S. (2015). Understanding the psychology of bullying: Moving toward a social-ecological diathesis-stress model. *American Psychologist*, 70(4), 344-353.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038929>
- ¹¹ Duggins, S. D., Kuperminc, G. P., Henrich, C. C., Smalls-Glover, C., & Perilla, J. L. (2015). Aggression Among Adolescent Victims of School Bullying: Protective Roles of Family and School Connectedness. *Psychology of Violence*. Advance online publication.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0039439>

