

## Who are Their Victims?

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Every morning there are students who dread the approaching school day. Their apprehension stems from the treatment they receive at the hands of classmates. These are the children positioned on the bottom rung of the social ladder, severely victimized by bullies. Long-term effects on a child bombarded with insults and taunts can include diminished self-esteem, declining grades, dropping out of school, and depression. Research shows that victims of prolonged bullying will eventually become withdrawn or aggressive, in extreme cases, suicidal or violently retaliative (Fried and Fried, 1996).

A child suffering from constant harassment might think his actions caused the bully to single him out. He can blame himself for the bully's behavior. Often a child at the mercy of the playground bully will fail to report the abuse, fearing retaliation.

The downtrodden tend to fall into two categories: those who are provocative, and those who are passive. The passive victims are anxious, insecure, cry easily when attacked, and avoid confrontation. They may be smaller and weaker than their counterparts and always have trouble standing up to a bully (McNamara and McNamara, 1997).

The provocative victims account for a small number of bullied children. These students may have a learning disability or lack social skills that would allow them to interpret body language and facial expressions. Behaviors of these children "send messages that create uneasiness" (Goleman, 1995). Because of this cognitive deficit, provocative victims can tease and annoy their classmates until someone lashes out at them. Unfortunately, teachers can mistake this skill deficit solely for repeated misbehavior and often dislike these children. Social skills training can be extremely beneficial for this type of student (Fried and Fried, 1996).

When students are allowed to abuse power and bully others, a climate develops similar to one in an abusive home. Again, consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs – it is paramount that children feel safe before they can learn. "Continual emotional distress can create deficits in a child's intellectual abilities, crippling the capacity to learn" (Goleman, 1995). A child always under stress will be robbed of his or her potential (Goleman, 1995). How can students immerse themselves in projects if they always have to watch their backs? Canadian researchers Wendy Craig and Debra Peplar (1996) wrote, "Bullying...is likely to interfere not only with children's academic development, but also with their social and personal development." Bullied students can become socially isolated and are then at a greater risk for dropping out of school.