

# York Region schools deal with bullies

**PATRICK CASEY**  
Staff Reporter

"I think that bullies will be the biggest mystery of my life for me because I have a lot of people who bully me, plus my friends who bully me too. They beat me up and make me feel worthless. I want to end this bully thing now, but I can't. Won't they ever stop?"

In a letter to our sister paper, *The Liberal*, 11-year-old Kelly Anne Hunt poured out the suffering she experiences at the hands of bullies almost every day.

Whether it's the biggest kid in the schoolyard or the most popular member of the cheerleading squad, everyone has come in contact with a bully at one time or another.

Bullying can be verbal, physical or psychological in nature. Teasing, threats, the use of weapons, shoving, hitting, kicking, confinement, racist remarks, sexual innuendos and social ostracism are all examples.

"Even at a very young age where kids don't even understand what they are actually saying, these things all happen," said Glenn DiPasquale, the chief psychologist at York Region's public school board.

"Bullying is not a one-shot deal. That's called aggression. Legitimate bullying happens repeatedly over time and most victims are victims for a long period of time," he explained.

"But our culture doesn't seem to like victims and we have a picture of a whiny little kid that's frightened," he added. "Clearly, these are the kids that need to be protected."

"My mom always says that bullies do mean stuff to you so they can feel better and stronger than you. I think they do it because they feel so bad, they take it out on somebody not that popular."

**"Always, I mean always, bullies try to make you feel bad or give up your happiness so that you no longer have as much happiness as you did before in your body."**

~ letter from a Gr. 7 student

Figures vary, but an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of children are involved in bullying, either as a bully or a victim, more than once or twice in a school term. And in a Canadian study conducted earlier this decade, 15 per cent of students reported that they bul-

lied others. Bullying can reach tragic extremes. According to a British report, at least 10 teenagers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland commit suicide because of bullying each year.

And a survey by the children's charity Kidscape indicates bullied children are nearly seven times as likely to attempt suicide as non-bullied children.

Acts of violence and intimidation, including bullying, are punishable with a maximum 20-day suspension under the safe schools policy at both York Region boards.

But proving acts of bullying can be a difficult matter.

A Grade 7 Lake Wilcox Public School suffered a ruptured kidney earlier this month after being repeatedly kicked by a group of boys during a soccer game. There were no suspensions, only in-school consequences.

"Always, I mean always, bullies try to make you feel bad or give up your happiness so that you no longer have as much happiness as you did before in your body." The region's separate

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