

Let's Stop Bullying

OVERVIEW:

Bullying is a serious threat to adolescents' mental health and is becoming a public health crisis. Between 20 and 56 percent of young people are involved in bullying annually, as victim, perpetrator, or both. Bullying threatens mental and physical health and can have long-lasting harmful effects, such as depression, anxiety, abdominal pain, and tension. Researchers are also pointing to links between bullying and suicide.

Source: Journal of Adolescent Health, Volume 53, Supplement 1 (July 2013), published by Elsevier

GOAL:

Determine essential questions to ask about the bullying epidemic and focus the public's attention on those questions through artistic expression.

ROLE:

You are a team of public health researchers and anti-bullying advocates.



OBJECTIVE:

PH1.12: Pose relevant, rigorous, and probative questions to investigate a public health crisis.

DELIVERABLES:

- 1) List of essential questions.
- 2) Creative advocacy piece (poem, artistic piece, song, or short story) focused on one essential question.

ASSESSMENT:

Your essential questions will be graded on a rubric based on their demonstration of being rigorous, relevant, and probative.

Case Introduction:

School bullying's chilling new front

By Francey Hakes, Special to CNN

September 5, 2013

(CNN) -- Can cruel words really kill?

The answer, unfortunately, is yes. Recently, a teenage boy killed himself in Connecticut. Bart Palosz was just 15 when he took his family's shotgun and decided, apparently, that he had no other option but suicide. Last year, 12-year-old Joel Morales of New York hanged himself in his family's home. Earlier this year, 17-year-old Rehtaeh Parsons of Nova Scotia, Canada, died from self-inflicted hanging injuries.

What did these two boys and one girl have in common?

They appear to have been bullied to death, friends and family members have said. For Bart, it was his size and Polish accent that the bullies repeatedly targeted. With Joel, bullies targeted him because of his small stature and stuttering. Joel's mother said she reported this to the school, but the bullying merely escalated.

Rehtaeh was the target of a bullying campaign after she made allegations that four teens sexually assaulted her. After the alleged assault, during which at least one photo was taken, someone distributed the photo, an illegal act, and still police indicated at the time that they would charge no one.

Rehtaeh's mother said her daughter suffered more than a year of harassment where her tormentors used the photo to ruin her reputation and break her spirit. We learned only last month, far too late to help Rehtaeh, that officials have finally charged two people in connection with the distribution of the photo.

Many schools say they have zero tolerance to bullying policies in place. In fact, officials at Cowetta Intermediate High School in Oklahoma say they have just such a policy.

Authorities are still investigating whether 15-year-old Triston Stephens, who shot and killed himself in that school's bathroom on a Monday morning earlier this year, was a target of bullying. Some parents in the district said school officials ignored bullying that was taking place there.

Why do these problems seem more frequent and the bullying more vicious than ever before? After all, bullying existed long before cyberspace, social networking and text messaging. What has changed?

Are bullies meaner? Are there more of them? Why do children who are bullied today experience overwhelming feelings of isolation and despair, such that they feel compelled to end their young lives rather than endure any more torment?

The answer is simple. Now one person or a small group of bullies can exponentially raise the torment to an unimaginable level in cyberspace. One nasty comment can be "liked" on Facebook, retweeted or forwarded dozens or hundreds of times in an instant, making it seem to the bullied child that the whole world is out to get her.

Teens naturally feel a need to belong, to fit in. When they are bullied, especially by those using technology as a weapon, it may seem that they are all alone and that everyone they know is participating in the hate. The bullying is also much harder to escape, no longer limited to occasions when bully and victim are in the same place.

It can go on anywhere and anytime with the victim not only receiving bullying texts or tweets or posts, but also knowing that the bully is gratified when others read, view, or repost the nasty comments or photos.

Teens can fear repercussions if they disclose this abuse. And, yes, let's call it abuse since that is what goes on in a bullying case. They may feel they will never escape the reputation the bully has built for them and then see no alternative to suicide. Tragedy flows from such desperation.

Is there a solution?

Clearly, zero tolerance policies don't always work. There are definitive steps schools and parents should take. It's not enough for schools to declare zero tolerance, they must also engage their students in wide-ranging discussions on bullying and its impact on the victims.

Some schools have student-lead councils where rules are established and bullying accusations are adjudicated by the students themselves. Peer pressure works both ways, after all. Schools must establish clear rules and enforce severe consequences for students who bully at school, whether it is in person or via electronic devices issued by or used on school property.

Schools should also monitor cyberbehavior by students. There are good software tools that monitor cyberactivity in real time and flag threats based on keyword libraries that are specific to threatening, bullying, suicidal or violent language. Every school should have this kind of sophisticated monitoring to capture such behavior.

Parents should be equally responsible. Parents are often told to monitor their children's cyberbehavior to protect them from being groomed by predators or from sending illicit images of themselves. But parents should also monitor their children to see if they are doing the bullying.

They should talk broadly about cybersafety with their children.

They should talk to their children about the effect of one post or one photo on their futures. They should regularly monitor their child's technology, whether on social networking sites or on devices themselves.

It is time to reframe the debate over bullying.

It is not just "mean girls" or "boys being boys." It is the aggressive emotional abuse of a child, and we must all stand against it. Lives depend on it.

Explore the Problem:

KNOW-NEED TO KNOW CHART:

Complete the Know-Need to Know chart below based on the following directions:

- **Know:** In this column, write any facts or information you already knew about bullying AS WELL AS any key information from the article.
- **Need to Know:** In this column, write a list of QUESTIONS you have about bullying. These should range from basic questions (to help you identify what other background information you need), to rigorous questions that probe factors relevant to bullying.

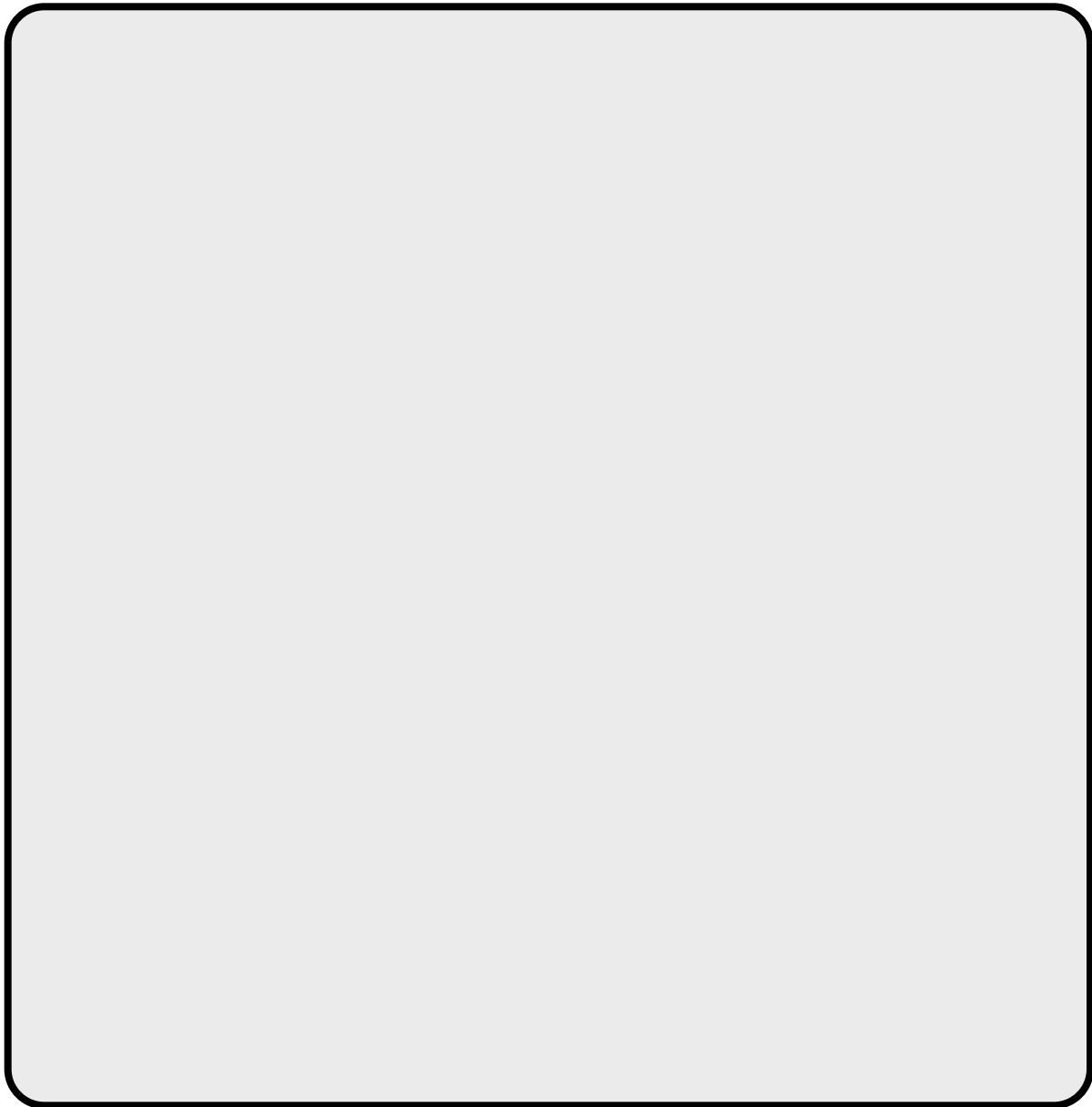
Know	Need to Know

(chart continues on next page)

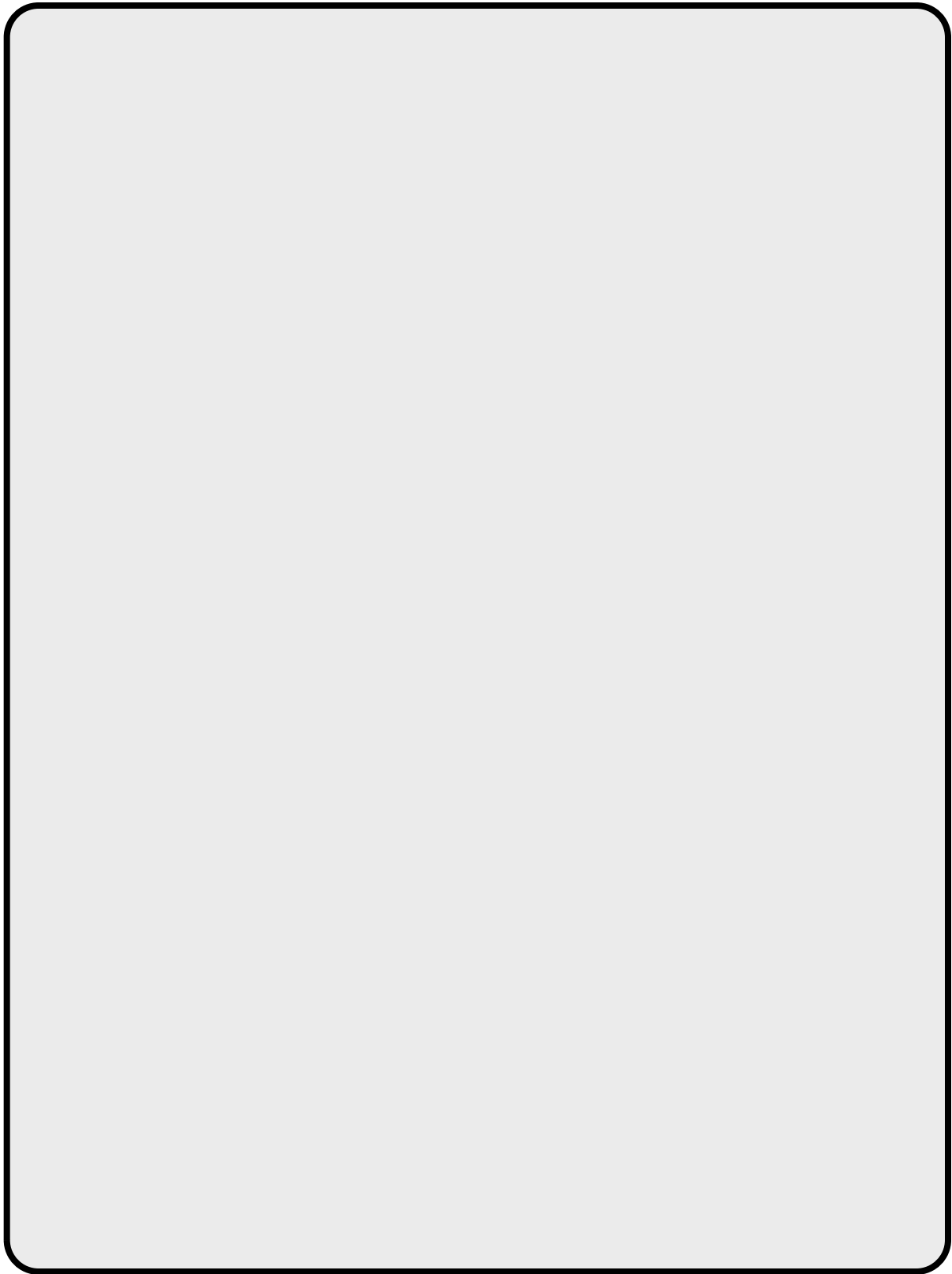
Know	Need to Know

BACKGROUND RESEARCH:

Now take time to gather more information about bullying. Be sure to refer to your list of questions in the chart above and check off each question as you learn the answer. Begin by using the website: www.stopbullying.gov. If you use other websites, be sure to document the source of information. Take notes on the essential information you learn.



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RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS:

Review the information you learned about bullying. As a team, make a list of all the risk factors or protective factors that influence the likelihood of someone BULLYING or BEING BULLIED that you came across in your research. Add any other factors that you hypothesize may influence the problem. (Note: You do not need to double-list factors and their opposites in both columns. For example, if you list "Low self-esteem" as a risk factor, you do not need to list "High self-esteem" as a protective factor as well. But if you prefer to do so, you can!)

RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Identify Solutions:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

For this case study, your solution will involve advocating for awareness of an important research question. Each member of your group needs to come up with one essential research question to ask about bullying. This short list of questions will be submitted for evaluation, so you should all work together to ensure the questions are as excellent as they can be. Excellent questions are relevant, rigorous, and probative.

REVIEW: What does it mean for a question to be relevant, rigorous, and probative? Write an explanation in your own words below. Refer back to lesson 1.11 if needed:

RELEVANT:

RIGOROUS:

PROBATIVE:

RISK/PROTECTIVE FACTORS: Earlier, your team brainstormed a list of potential risk factors and protective factors. Each essential question should relate to one risk or more protective factor. Review some examples (for a different topic: eating disorders) that are listed below. (Note: The risk factor or protective factor is **bolded**.)

- To what extent does exposure to **media portrayals of extremely thin female bodies** influence teenage girls self-image?
- Do **health classes that include education on eating disorders** improve adolescents' knowledge of the risks of unhealthy eating behaviors?
- Do **positive body image affirmations from family** influence the eating habits of teenagers?
- Does **providing personal BMI information** to adolescents and their parents/guardians change the prevalence of eating disorders in a population?

Brainstorm possible questions and use the table below to record the final essential research questions your team decides upon:

Team Member	Risk or Protective Factor	Essential Research Question

Rubric: Your questions will be evaluated using the criteria below. As a team, use the rubric to self-evaluate the questions you came up with. Make any adjustments to improve them.

PH1.12: Pose relevant, rigorous, and probative questions to investigate a public health crisis.

	Needs Improvement	Emerging Mastery	Partial Mastery	Mastery
RELEVANT	Question does not clearly relate to topic	Question relates to topic but does not involve a risk or protective factor	Question relates to topic but explores a risk or protective factor that is already well-understood by scientists.	Question explores a risk or protective factor that is novel, controversial, or not well-understood by scientists.
RIGOROUS	Question seeks to uncover only a basic fact about the problem with no relationship between variables (Ex: What percent of teens have an eating disorder?)	Question seeks to discover a weak relationship between two basic variables (Ex: How is self-esteem related to eating disorders?)	Question seeks to discover either a weak relationship between to complex variables or a logical relationship between two weak variables (Ex: How does media influence girls' self esteem? (weak variables) OR How do media portrayals of extremely thin female bodies influence eating disorders? (weak relationship)	Question seeks to discover a logical relationship between two complex variables (Ex: To what extent does exposure to media portrayals of extremely thin female bodies influence teenage girls self-image?)
PROBATIVE	Question DOES NOT seek to demonstrate evidence that will help solve the health problem.	Question seeks to demonstrate evidence that will MARGINALLY help solve the health problem.	Question seeks to demonstrate evidence that will BE USEFUL BUT NOT ESSENTIAL to help solve the health problem.	Question seeks to demonstrate evidence ESSENTIAL to helping to solve the health problem.

Final Deliverable: After having devised, evaluated, and edited your essential research questions, they are now ready to use. For this case study, we will not spend time DOING the actual research (finding secondary sources that answer the questions or gathering primary data to answer them ourselves). Don't worry, we will learn those skill soon! Instead, we will put our creative sides to work to advocate for building awareness of the problem of bullying, with the theme of our essential research questions in mind.

Your task is to create an original expression of your essential research question in the form of one of the following:

- visual art (using any media form)
- musical piece (ex: song lyrics)
- creative writing (ex: poem or short story)
- a different idea (must propose and get approval from instructor)