BULLYING
IN THE KNOW

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BULLYING

Although the definition of bullying focuses on the aggressive behaviour of individual students, bullying is actually a group phenomenon, playing out in a social context. It is important to remember that many students engage in some form of bullying behaviour on a periodic basis, and that most students are teased or experience some form of peer harassment during the school year. Peers are also present as bystanders during most bullying episodes and play a pivotal role in either the prevention or the promotion of bullying.

There are numerous individual, peer-level, school level, familial, and community factors that influence bullying. At the level of the peer group, social theories describing why bullying increases during late childhood and early adolescence include homophily theory, dominance theory, and attraction theory.

Homophily theory states that people tend to form friendships and spend time with those who are similar to them in certain key ways. Students tend to hang out with others who bully at the same frequency, and among these bully-prone groups, bullying frequency increases over time. According to *dominance theory,* students use bullying as a strategy for moving higher in the social pecking order, particularly during the transition from elementary school to the middle grades, when patterns of social hierarchy are being established. *Attraction theory* posits that as children enter middle school, their attraction to aggressive peers increases.

Family interaction patterns may also influence peer interaction patterns. Children who are both victims and perpetrators of bullying at school are much more likely to also bully and/or be victimized by siblings. Parents of children who bully others are more likely to lack emotional warmth and be overly permissive. Parents of victimized children, in contrast, are more likely to be highly restrictive, controlling and over-involved.

Adapted from CASEL's 'Social and Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention'