chapter

1

A Day in the Life

I don't even know how it got started, but for weeks this group of guys had been hassling me. It started with them laughing and calling me names when I walked by their lockers. They'd point at me and make faces and pretend that they were imitating me in these really weird ways. One time one of them said, "Yeah, that's it! He must be gay!" and the other guys joined in and went off on that. I felt my ears go red when they shouted, "Hey little faggot-boy. Are you going to ask Michael out on a date?" Michael is this other kid in my class that they always pick on too. There's nothing wrong with him, but they're always saying mean things about him and making up stories about him. You try to ignore it, but you can't. Other kids see it too, and you wonder what they're thinking. I hate feeling like people are judging me when they don't even know who I am or what I'm like.

I tried to avoid them by walking the long way around the halls to get to my classes, but it was almost impossible not to run into them. Every time they saw me, it would happen, and it kept getting worse. One day, I was walking home after school, and I saw them. They saw me too and turned and started walking toward me. I thought, "Maybe I should run," but then they'd make fun of me for that. And, besides, they'd have caught me anyway. So I thought I'd just try to get through whatever mean things they were gonna say. But when they got up to me, the guy who was the loudest of the group pushed me, and I fell down. I tried to get up, but there were at least three of them surrounding me. I looked around, and some other people were watching. It was just off of the school property, so there were plenty of other kids around. I waited for them to do something, but they just stood there. Then one of the guys started kicking me, and I covered my head to protect myself.

The next thing I saw was another guy put a padlock in a bandana and began to swing it around. I heard them yelling, "Hit him! Hit him!" I felt the lock smash into my elbow. The pain was unbelievable. I could hear my own bones cracking. They whooped and yelled and ran away. I tried to get up, but it hurt too much. It seemed like I was on the ground forever. I wondered, "Why did this happen to me? How come nobody tried to stop them?" Someone could have said, "Hey, you guys, chill out" or "Leave him alone," but they

> didn't. They just watched. Finally, a teacher and the security guy showed up, and they called an ambulance.
>
> I still keep thinking about it. Why me? Why was I singled out? What did I ever do to them? I didn't even know those guys. And how come no one stood up for me? If this happened to me, how many other kids are scared or messed with or feel like they're lower-than-life and that no one really cares what happens to them? I don't ever want to come back to this school.
>
> —Ninth-grade boy, New York

YOU MAY READ THIS ACCOUNT and be shocked by the brutality of the aggressors or the callousness of the bystanders. Or you might nod your head in silent acknowledgment that these kinds of incidents are a part of the lives of too many youth today. Perhaps you'll breathe a sigh of relief that this degree of visible violence is not happening to the young people in your school, community, or family. Or is it?

Visible Mistreatment: What Adults See

In the years immediately following the Columbine tragedy in April 1999, a great deal of public attention and educational policy was focused on school shootings—tragic but thankfully rare events. Over time, that focus has broadened to encompass school violence, which includes attacks like the one described at the start of this chapter. It also includes fights, robbery, hazing, use of weapons, hate-motivated incidents, and other acts that break clearly defined rules. After the terrorist attacks of September 2001, even threats of violence against people and property began to be taken more seriously. More recently, many school safety discussions have broadened to include bullying.

The statistics are sobering:

- From 1992 to 2003, the violent crime victimization rate at school for *students* ages twelve to eighteen declined from 48 incidents per 1,000 students to 28. Nevertheless, in 2003 there were still 154,200 serious violent crimes: rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault (855 average each school day), 584,500 simple

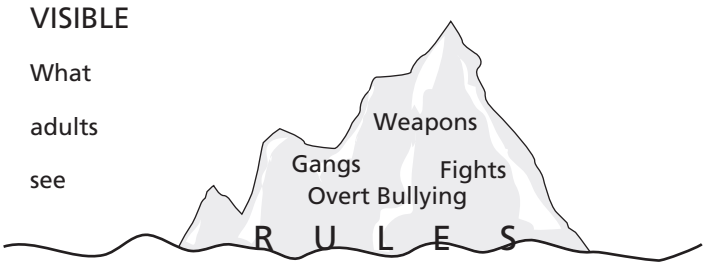
assaults (3,250 average each school day), and 1.2 million thefts reported (6,620 average each school day).[1]

- During 2003, 33 percent of high school students reported being in a fight at least once in the twelve months preceding the survey, and 13 percent reported being in a fight *on school property.*[2]
- Every year between 1999 and 2003, an average of 7,400 *teachers* were victims of serious violent crime: rape, sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault (40 per school day), 57,200 were victims of simple assault (315 per school day), and 118,800 had property stolen (660 per day).[3]
- During the 1999–2000 school year, approximately 9 percent of all teachers (304,900) reported that they were threatened with injury *by a student* during the previous twelve months (almost 1,700 each school day).[4] In addition, during the same period, 4 percent (134,800) reported being physically attacked by a student.[5] The apparent discrepancy between this figure and the 57,200 simple assaults might be due to the protocols two different federal agencies used to gather and analyze their data; nonetheless, either number indicates a serious problem.

These are all examples of visible mistreatment: the violent or harmful student behaviors that adults actually see. However, a growing body of research suggests that these visible incidents make up a very small percentage of the broad spectrum of cruelty, bullying, and violence that is part of the daily lives of students throughout the country (Figure 1.1). As the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education state in their guide, *Threat Assessment in Schools,* "Targeted school violence (where an attacker selects a target beforehand) is arguably only the tip of the iceberg of pain, loneliness, desperation and despair that many students in this nation's schools deal with on a daily basis."[6]

Wendy Craig is the director of the Bully Lab at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and co-leads the Canadian Initiative for the Prevention of Bullying. Her research clearly shows that adults' perspectives on school violence and mistreatment are very different from students' perspectives. In their field research, Craig and her team asked school staff members, "How often do you intervene in bullying?" Most said, "All the time." However, when researchers carefully reviewed and analyzed hundreds of hours of videotape of children in school playground settings, they saw teachers intervene less than 5 percent of

Figure 1.1
Visible Mistreatment



the time.[7] This huge disparity between adult perception and student experience shows that the problem of mistreatment goes far beyond the visible acts that most adults see. Referring to bullying and other forms of mistreatment, Craig notes, "We rarely see it. We don't hear it. And we don't intervene."[8]

Researchers examining the factors contributing to the Columbine High School shooting noted that students described their school as having "a lot of tension between groups . . . almost continuous conflict, anything from verbal abuse to physical attacks and violence," but the teachers and staff did not seem to notice the bullying and aggression.[9] The fact that so many adults simply do not grasp the extent or severity of the problem often leads to complacency, that is, the sense that the problem is under control, and ineffective efforts, such as stricter rules and policies about bullying, which do little to address the real problem. (These responses to the problem are explored further in Chapter Three.)

Less Visible Mistreatment: What Students See

We have met and talked with more than twenty thousand elementary, middle, and high school students in the United States and Canada. These students have described in graphic detail how students are mean to each other in classrooms, lunch areas, and common spaces; on playgrounds and athletic fields; in hallways and walkways; on buses and in parking lots. They have recounted more than fifty thousand painful and often frightening interactions that they or their peers

experience daily as either targets of mistreatment or bystanders who witness it. Here are just a few of those examples:

> The other day in science class, the teacher was making up new groups, and she put this kid Mark in this one group. The other people in the group started doing and saying mean things about Mark. They'd groan and roll their eyes, and try to imitate him asking questions and saying things. The teacher told them to be quiet, but it didn't stop. A lot of what happens is not so easy to see as that was, but it happens.
>
> —Fifth-grade girl

> Oh, yeah, they say all kinds of things here. They make fun of you for being stupid, or if you seem smart, they call you a geek or a brainiac. They put you down if you wear certain clothes that are out of style. Then there's gay. People say that all the time. If they don't like you or you look just the slightest bit different, they'll say you're gay. And people will just say things like "loser" or "bitch" or "whore" to you for no reason at all, just when you're walking by. And then there's the racial stuff. They call the Mexicans "beaners" and the blacks "niggers" and the whites "crackers."
>
> —Eighth-grade boy

> These guys always hang out together. They are pretty popular. This other guy wanted to be friends with them, so they told him he had to go into the classroom and get the answers to the math test they had to take tomorrow. He didn't want to do it, but they said to him, "Look, if you want to hang out with us, you gotta do it. What are you, scared?" So he did it and got the answers for the test for them, and they laughed at him. They are always making him do stuff, and he does it. But they don't really like him.
>
> —Seventh-grade girl

> People get pushed into lockers all the time. They'll just be walking down the hall, and these bigger people will walk by and "accidentally" bump into them. Sometimes they'll fall down and drop their stuff all over the place. That's when all of them really laugh.
>
> —Ninth-grade girl

> The fights, they still happen, but not at school so much. They know they'll get suspended, so they just do it on their way home. They know which way you go, and they'll wait for you if they really want to get you.
>
> —Eleventh-grade boy

> In PE, when we have to run a long course, I've seen the older and bigger guys grab the freshmen. They'll hold them by the ankles and dangle them from the bridge over the creek. I'm just glad they never got me.
>
> —Tenth-grade boy

These anecdotal accounts provide insight into the lives of today's students, but it is the statistics that show how pervasive mistreatment is. Many studies and reports focus on bullying:

- A 2001 landmark study of more than fifteen thousand students in grades 6 through 10 found that roughly 30 percent of students were directly involved in bullying: 10 percent reported that they had been bullied, 13 percent reported that they had bullied others, and 6 percent reported that they had been bullied *and* had bullied others.[10]
- A 2003 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services indicated that approximately 22 percent of students surveyed had been bullied during the current school term and over 4 percent reported that the bullying had occurred once a week or more. In the same report, 31 percent of the students responded that sometimes they had taken part in bullying, with over 5 percent reporting that they had participated in this behavior once a week or more.[11]
- A 2007 study conducted by Stanford University and the Lucille Packard Children's Hospital found that 90 percent of elementary students have been bullied by their peers, and nearly 60 percent have participated in some type of bullying in the past year.[12] Other research shows that 15 percent of all students in grades 5 through 8 report that they have been bullied on a regular basis during the current school year.[13]

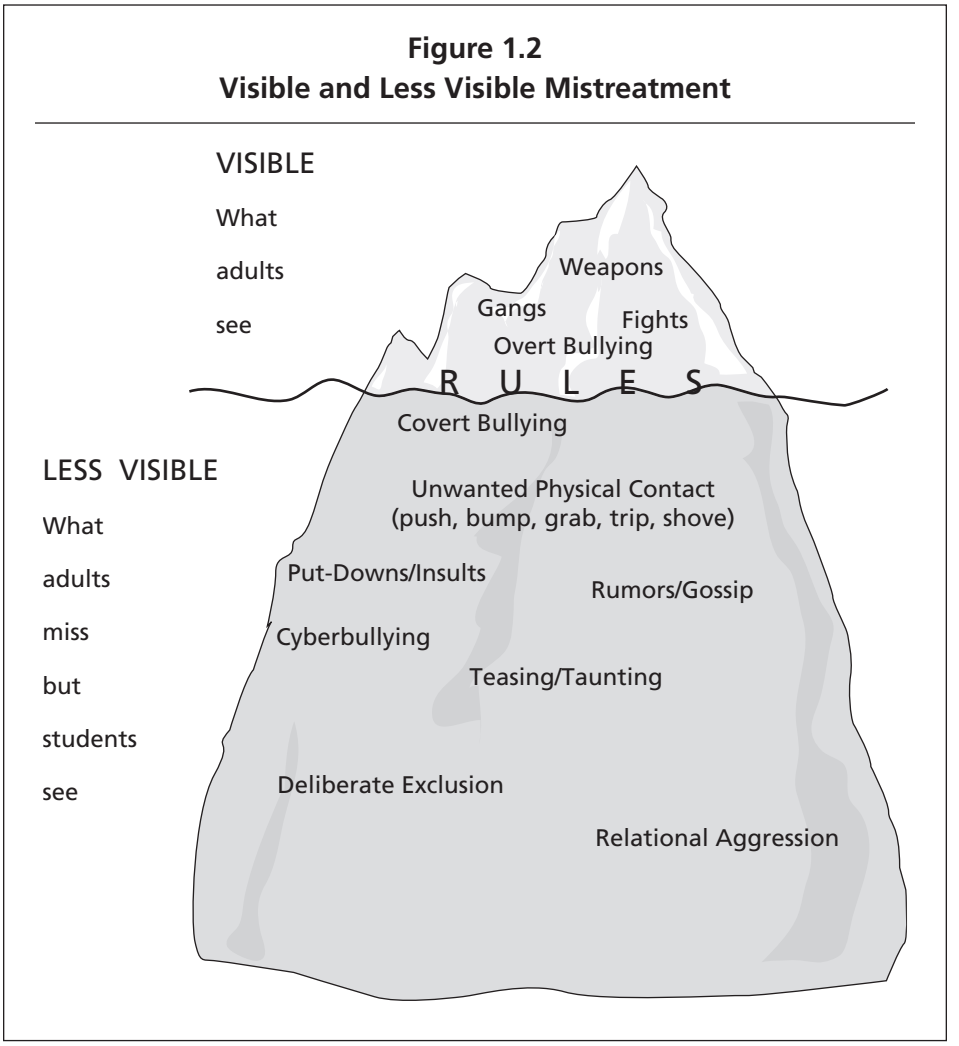
Bullying is often used to describe a range of different behaviors that are better understood under the larger category of *mistreatment.* To understand the many varied kinds of mistreatment that students experience, it is helpful to examine some of the details revealed by the research—for example:

- One-third of the nearly seven thousand students in grades 6 through 12 who participated in the first national Students Speak Survey agreed with the statement, "Students say things to hurt or insult me."[14]
- A 2004 report on a five-year study of a diverse group of nearly nineteen hundred students in grades 8 through 12 offers some insights into how many students reported being:
  - Left out of activities: 67 percent (43 percent sometimes and 24 percent often)
  - Called names: 74 percent (47 percent sometimes and 27 percent often)
  - Teased: 62 percent (45 percent sometimes and 17 percent often)
  - Hit or kicked: 46 percent (35 percent sometimes and 11 percent often)
  - Threatened: 42 percent (33 percent sometimes and 9 percent often)[15]
- In a 2002 study by the Families and Work Institute, 66 percent of youth said they had "been teased or gossiped about in a mean way at least once in the last month," and 25 percent have had this experience five times or more. Over half (57 percent) said they had "teased or gossiped about someone at least once," and 12 percent had done so five times or more in the past month.[16]
- In 2002, a nationally representative survey sponsored by the National Mental Health Association revealed that 78 percent of all teens report "that kids who are gay or thought to be gay are teased or bullied in their schools and communities." More than nine out of ten teens (93 percent) hear other kids at school or in their neighborhood use words like *fag, homo, dyke, queer, or gay* at least once in a while, and 51 percent hear them every day.[17]
- The landmark 1993 study on sexual harassment commissioned by the American Association of University Women was updated in 2001 and showed remarkably little change. Based on surveys of more than two thousand students in grades 8 through 11, the report revealed that 83 percent of girls and 79 percent of boys have been sexually harassed, and 85 percent of students report that the perpetrators are other students.[18]
- A 2003 U.S. Department of Education study found that 10 percent of all sixth graders and 6 percent of all eighth graders feared attack at school or on the way to or from school, some or all of the time.[19]
- A 2007 survey conducted under the auspices of the National Crime Prevention Council found that 43 percent of teens ages thirteen to seventeen were victims

of cyberbullying: the use of electronic means (cell phones or the Internet) to hurt or embarrass another person.[20]

Facts and figures like these seem to imply a sense of certainty, but in fact the numbers, especially those that come from official school reports, may not accurately represent what really happens. Several studies in England and the United States have indicated that only 25 to 50 percent of the students who are

Figure 1.2
Visible and Less Visible Mistreatment



regularly bullied report the mistreatment to school staff.[21] For this reason, the problem of mistreatment could very well be two to four times what the figures in this chapter suggest.

As it is with icebergs, what is visible is at best an incomplete picture. The violence and overt bullying that most adults see are just the tip of the iceberg (Figure 1.2). As these accounts and studies show, meanness, exclusion, name-calling, teasing, gossiping, sexual harassment, and threats are all too common. Mistreatment has no zip code; it happens to students every day, in any school, in any community. It happens in public schools and private schools. It happens in inner-city, suburban, and rural schools. It happens in huge schools of 3,000 or more students where staff members struggle to learn the names of the 150 to 200 students they see daily, and it happens in schools of 300 where most students and their families have known each other for years and see each other every Sunday in church. It transcends income level, social class, and race. While school shootings are relatively rare, mistreatment happens everywhere and often.

The Players in the Drama of Mistreatment

In every example of mistreatment represented in every statistic noted in this chapter, three main roles are played out time and time again—aggressor, target, and bystander.

- *Aggressors* are the people who do the hurting, physically or emotionally, or both. This broad term includes not only bullies who use their physical power to push, hit, or injure others but also perpetrators of more subtle mistreatment, such as put-downs, rumors, and acts of exclusion. Both individuals and groups can be aggressors.
- *Targets* are the people who get hurt, physically or emotionally, by aggressors. Some researchers refer to these people as victims. However, the term *target* carries none of the emotional baggage, such as what the person might have done to deserve the mistreatment. Targets are students on the receiving end of mistreatment who may have done little or nothing to bring it on. Targets can be individuals and groups.

- *Bystanders* are the people who watch mistreatment happen. At times they actively encourage the situation, egging on the aggressor or mocking the target. At other times, they simply watch, often hoping that the aggressors won't turn on them. As Chapter Seven explores in greater depth, although the bystanders are not directly involved in the mistreatment, they play a significant role in allowing it to happen and in getting it to stop.

Mistreatment No Matter How It's Sliced

We have chosen to use *mistreatment* as an overarching term that encompasses the many ways young people hurt one another. However, it is difficult to comprehend, much less do anything about, until the types of mistreatment are differentiated. Once adults and teens develop a common language and define mistreatment in the same way, a new awareness emerges and new solutions present themselves. There are many possible ways to categorize the broad spectrum of mistreatment that students experience:

- By the issue or topic of the mistreatment (clothes or race, for example)
- By the way it is delivered (verbally, electronically, or physically, for example)
- By its effect on the target (he or she feels bad or afraid, for example)

Since we can't tame what we can't name, the choice of categories has far-reaching implications for how the problem ultimately gets addressed.

Acts of mistreatment can be grouped by topic. Teens exclude, tease, bully, and fight each other over an astonishingly wide array of subjects: hair styles, clothing styles, body size and shape, ethnic and racial background, perceived or actual sexual orientation, and still others. In addition, there are sexual harassment, hazing, and all the girl-boy interactions that generally erupt in middle school and continue through high school. The list can seem endless.

Mistreatment can also be categorized by the manner in which it is delivered. Students say and do mean and hurtful things directly to each other. They exclude, ignore, insult, taunt, threaten, blackmail, push, and fight. They talk

about a person or people who are not present and start rumors that spread like a virus and can be difficult to contain and squelch. As the rise of cyberbullying demonstrates, today's teens also make full use of technology to deliver mistreatment in ways that their parents never dreamed of: e-mail, Web sites, instant messaging, cell phones, and blogs. They send text messages of hate, they post or circulate "slam books" that are repositories of a whole school's hurtful comments about one particular person, and they use their camera phones to take pictures of peers undressed in a locker room and post them on the Internet for the world to see.

Based on our extensive work with students and educators, we have found it far more fruitful to categorize mistreatment in a way that helps students respond to it effectively: by its effect on the target:

- Exclusion: The target feels left out.
- Put-downs: The target feels bad or hurt.
- Bullying: The target feels afraid.
- Unwanted physical contact: The target's personal boundaries are violated.
- Acts against everyone: The entire campus or large portions of it are affected.

Hundreds of students have told us that this framework has helped them take previously abstract and impersonal terms and make them concrete and personal. It has helped them see that they have (at times unknowingly) been aggressors themselves. And with that awareness, they have been able to begin to improve their own behavior.

Exclusion

Exclusion is a type of mistreatment in which the target is left out. He or she is ignored, shunned, rejected, or "ditched." In a young person's world, belonging and fitting in are two very important needs. Being left out, especially intentionally, is a painful emotional experience that can leave lasting emotional scars on some students and can have tragic repercussions for others. The shooters at Columbine and Red Lake, Wisconsin, high schools were the targets of exclusion.

Eric Harris, one of the Columbine shooters, wrote in his journal, "I hate you people for leaving me out of so many fun things. You had my phone number, and I asked and all, but no no no no no don't let the weird-looking Eric kid come along."[22] Obviously not every target reacts like the perpetrators of these tragedies, but it is far too easy for adults to underestimate the impact of exclusion.

Here's what students say exclusion looks and sounds like:

"Some kids made up a wall-ball game and wouldn't tell other people how to play it, so they couldn't join in."

"Once my friends and I were playing tag, and a girl came over and asked to play. One of my friends just glared at her and said, 'Noooo, I don't think so!'"

"Not letting someone sit at your lunch table. Telling him to go away and sit with his friends."

"Saying to this group of people standing around, 'Everyone's invited to the movies except for so-and-so.'"

"Go away! Why don't you swim back to the country you came from?"

"Inviting everyone to come over to someone's house and then telling one person that she can't come."

"These girls tell other girls they can't hang out with them because they are not cool at school."

"People just ignore someone. A guy will come up to this group, and they won't even turn around and say anything to him. They just keep talking and act like he's not there, even when he says something. It happens with girls too."

"Four girls were talking at lunch in the quad, and another girl came over. They stopped talking and stared at her when she sat down. They acted like they didn't want her to be part of the conversation."

"One day, these girls called me and invited me to go to the movies with them. They said to meet them there at 3:00 cause the movie started at 3:15. I got a ride down there from my brother. I was there at 3:00, but they weren't. I waited and waited. It was cold and raining. They never showed. Then I got it, and I just felt sick inside. Next day at school, they saw me and said like, 'So, have fun at the movies?' and laughed."

Put-Downs

Put-downs make the target feel bad inside: embarrassed, emotionally hurt, or inferior to others. This type of mistreatment includes rumors, malicious gossip, teasing, taunting, insulting, and pointing out someone's faults or mistakes. Put-downs are one of the most common types of cruelty teens encounter, and they are especially painful when they are done in front of others. Put-downs may take the form of a one-time, offhanded comment, or they may be repeated over and over again.

Here's what students say put-downs look and sound like:

"Did you hear that Chianna's parents are getting divorced?"

"Josh was looking at me in the locker room. I think he's gay."

"Your hair looks stupid."

"You're so gay."

"You're an idiot."

"There's way too many niggers around here."

"People laugh when someone asks a question in class."

"When the teacher made groups for a project, this girl raised her hand and asked the teacher if she could put this one kid in another group because he was too stupid."

"Kids outside the special ed class would see a kid walking into the room, and they'd say, 'Retard!' loud enough for him to hear."

"In PE, we were playing the championship game, and this other girl was saying things like 'You guys suck.'"

"People spread a rumor about this girl being a slut or that she is pregnant."

"A boy wrote a pretend love letter to this girl in the special ed class."

"One person will IM [instant message] her friend, 'Did you hear what so-and-so said?' They start this rumor, and the next day everyone is talking about it."

"There was a guy that read books a lot. Whenever these eighth graders saw him without a book, they would say, 'Hey, where's your book, school boy?' And they'd all laugh. You're not cool in our school if you get good grades."

"When someone has a different accent, other people will imitate it and laugh."

"These girls would call this other girl a bitch when she would walk by. She never did anything to them. Maybe it was because she dressed different."

"Girls will be best friends with another girl and then talk bad about her behind her back at school. They laugh about her clothes and her hair and the way she walks."

Bullying

In this type of mistreatment, the aggressor makes the target feel afraid. Bullying comes in the form of verbal threats and can also be carried out through an aggressor's body language: a look or a tilt of the head, for example. There is a power imbalance: the aggressor holds power over the target. The aggressor might be physically larger or stronger than the target, or might be part of a clique that is higher on the school's pecking order. The aggressor usually gets satisfaction or pleasure out of the encounter, and the target feels fear. The encounters between the aggressor and the target often continue over a period of time.

Here's what students say bullying looks and sounds like:

"I'm going to kick your butt after school."

"Three girls surround another girl at her locker. One girl says, 'I heard you were hitting on my guy. You better watch your back, bitch!' Then they just walk away and stare her down."

"Everyone in his group does what he says because they're afraid of him."

"These girls walk down the hall a certain way, and if they come toward you that way, you know to get out of their way. And of course, they make it so you kinda have to squeeze past them. Some guys do it too."

"These guys will just say, 'Move, punk,' and you know to move."

"My friend had her locker covered in deodorant because some people didn't like her. Everyone knew, and her books and stuff smelled for months."

"People cut in the lunch line in front of younger or weaker people who won't say anything or do anything about it."

"These guys will walk up to certain people and say how hungry they are and how they have no money, and they'll just kinda stand there around the other

person until he gives them some money. They're not exactly stealing it, but he knows they'll beat him up later if he doesn't give them some money."

"This girl went around singing, 'If you're happy and you know it, kill Leanne.'"

"Groups of guys make sexual comments to girls walking by like, 'I'm gonna get me some of *that* later!' or, 'You know she wants it!'"

"These boys would like stick their feet out so I couldn't get back to my desk."

"'Bucking,' when older students make a sudden move into the face of some freshman walking by to get them to flinch or scare them."

Unwanted Physical Contact

As the term implies, in unwanted physical contact the aggressor makes some form of physical contact with a target or the target's possessions, and the target does not want the contact. In other words, it's not a game or just fooling around because at least one of the people involved doesn't like what's happening. The key element of this type of mistreatment is the violation of personal space or boundaries, although the target often feels afraid (as with intimidation and bullying) and might feel bad (as with a put-down). It can include tripping or throwing things at the target, like spitballs, bottle caps, erasers, or trash. It also could be pushing or punching the target. Unwanted physical contact includes grabbing, defacing, or stealing the target's possessions, such as the target's backpack, clothing, cell phone, lunch, or money. Physical forms of sexual harassment are unwanted physical contact. This can range from an anonymous touch on the buttocks in the hallway to date rape.

Here's what students say unwanted physical contact looks and sounds like:

"During passing period, guys grab girls' butts, and it's so crowded you don't know who did it."

"Walking home my whole sixth-grade year, this eighth grader would push me into the fence and block me from walking."

"Eighth graders kick other kids' backpacks, and flip them up."

"People put gum in other people's hair because they've done it up nice or just gotten it cut."

"They will just walk by and push you into the wall and keep on walking. Sometimes it's because of what you wear or how you look. Sometimes it's for no reason at all."

"'Coking' by pouring Coke on someone's head right after school."

"When we line up for recess or lunch, this one boy always steps on this other boy's foot. Not by accident; just slowly. If the teacher sees it, he just says, 'Sorry,' to the boy."

"Boys touch girls' hair every day in class."

"I saw a guy 'pants' this other guy. He snuck up behind him in the lunch area while he was talking to his friends and just yanked his shorts down to his knees. Lots of people saw it. It happens all the time."

"I was walking with my friend, and this eighth grader punched her and knocked her to the ground. The girl just left and walked on with her friends."

"In PE, we were playing basketball, and this girl on my team threw the ball really hard at this other girl because she thought the other girl had made a mistake."

"Some eighth graders duct-taped this kid to a tree in front of the school."

"Boys in the locker room get a younger boy and dip his head in the toilet and flush it to give him a 'swirley.'"

"I was walking with my friend when a guy screamed at me. I turned around, and two guys grabbed me and pinned me down. Another guy ran over me with his bicycle."

Acts Against Everyone

In the four types of mistreatment described, the target is usually one person or a small group who are usually known personally by the aggressor. In acts against everyone, the target is the whole school or at least a large group of students. The targets of this type of mistreatment are more anonymous than in other types, although such acts are usually spawned by specific interactions between a couple of individuals.

These examples are typical of what students experience:

"People lit a trash can on fire."

"Carving swear words into the bathroom stalls."

"People kick bathroom doors so the locks won't work."

"Writing graffiti in bathrooms. Someone wrote, 'Niggers suck,' and then other people wrote things after it."

"Breaking school windows and trashing the science classroom."

"A bunch of guys came at night and spray-painted swastikas and 'white pride' on the school."

"One kid brought a gun to school. It was loaded too."

"Calling in a bomb threat. I know some kids who really did that."

"These kids were talking a lot about making bombs and blowing up the school. They had drawings and plans and were acting weird."

"People break into other students' PE lockers and spread deodorant all over them."

"One kid said, 'This place sucks. I just wanna blow it up.' And for all I know he was gonna do it."

"Someone pulled the fire alarm, but there wasn't any fire."

Categorizing Mistreatment

Thousands of students have used these types to help them categorize what they see and experience. Through that process, they have come to see that the five types of mistreatment can be piggybacked or blended. The comment, "You can't play on our team! You suck!" contains two types of mistreatment: exclusion and put-down. More than one type of mistreatment can be present even without being spoken overtly. For example, the statement, "You'd better not sit at our table," has elements of exclusion and bullying. The target knows based on his or her relationship with that particular group that there is danger of being attacked if he or she sits at that table, and feels excluded and intimidated.

These five types are also sufficiently robust to encompass other categories of mistreatment. For example, sexual harassment is a put-down when it demeans or degrades, as when students refer to a couple of girls whose breasts are not very developed as the "itty-bitty-titty committee." It would be malicious rumors or gossip when it takes the form of slandering someone's reputation (girls are

often demeaned sexually; boys are usually taunted as being too feminine or gay). It would be bullying when a boy (or group of boys) talks or badgers a girl into "going further" than she is comfortable going. And it would be unwanted physical contact if the boy touches the girl to get her to fulfill his wishes. In the same manner, racial harassment can fit into these five types of mistreatment. Saying that students of a certain racial group are dumb or lazy is a put-down. Saying to a student who appeared to be of Arab descent, "You'd better get the hell out of here you f***ing terrorist," is intimidation.

The beauty of this framework for categorizing mistreatment lies not just in its simplicity but in the way it helps students figure out how to respond to particular incidents in a helpful way. Each type of mistreatment may be best addressed by particular types of interventions, and it is important to give the students both the observation skills to recognize these types and the knowledge and intervention skills to respond most effectively.

A Culture of Cruelty

The bullying and cruelty that young people experience does not occur in isolation. What is happening in schools reflects what is happening in society in general: adults increasingly are quick to turn to anger and violence.

Consider, for example, the behavior of automobile drivers. They are generally more hurried (and harried), more impatient, and less willing to let someone merge in front of them when they are in a slow-moving line of cars. *Road rage* has become a common term, and the U.S. Congress has even held hearings on it. An automobile club study reported that incidents of aggressive driving increased by 51 percent from 1991 to 1997, and nearly 90 percent of all motorists have experienced an aggressive driving incident in the past year.[23]

Consider also mainstream media: children and youth witness a tremendous amount of violence on television. "By the time kids enter middle school, they have seen 8,000 murders and 100,000 more acts of violence on broadcast TV alone. Studies consistently show a link between media violence and violent behavior in kids."[24] This information is from Common Sense Media, an organization that reviews and rates popular media: television programs, movies, video games, music, Web sites, and books.

Beyond these explicitly violent behaviors, a casual session of channel surfing shows many other ways the mainstream media model negative behavior in a positive light. Examples of disrespectful and cruel humor abound. Many sitcoms are centered on characters who are generally snide and sarcastic with one another. Radio shock jocks enjoy record audiences and command top salaries. Their biting style has become less shocking and more accepted as the way people treat each other. Many reality shows feature individuals who score points or win for being dishonest, putting someone down, stabbing someone in the back, or demonstrating other cruel or callous behavior. Caring and compassionate acts are rarely shown on these popular programs. Consequently these negative behaviors can gain a level of acceptability by being showcased, and they become models for young people who act them out in school, at home, and in the community.

Television is not the only medium influencing the behavior of young people. Video games have become a mainstay of entertainment and social interaction for many. A recent study summed up the impact of this trend: "A meta-analytic review of the video-game research literature reveals that violent video games increase aggressive behavior in children and young adults. Experimental and non-experimental studies with both males and females in laboratory and field settings support this conclusion. Analysis also reveals that exposure to violent video games increases physiological arousal and aggression-related thoughts and feelings. Playing violent video games also decreases pro-social behavior."[25]

In an environment where it's cool to be cruel, students often gain social status and power not through compassion or strength of character but by putting down others or piling on insults. In one of our training sessions with youth, a girl at a California middle school pointed out how her school culture contributes to cruelty. In this young woman's school, being caring and kind is considered a weakness rather than a strength. She said, "If you show your emotions, if you're compassionate or kind in my school, you risk your popularity. If I'm kind to people, I can be put down for that. It's much more acceptable for me to put someone down. At my school, you'll be more popular if you're cruel."

Many young people find it difficult to stand up against this current of cruelty and are swept away by it. They are hungry for belonging, and in order to fit in and be liked, they do things they would not normally do. These otherwise normal students behave in astonishingly mean and callous ways to avoid being grouped with the "losers."

Conclusion

From 1997 to 2007, the focus of school safety expanded from school shootings, to school violence, to bullying. Many adults still have an incomplete picture of the scope and severity of bullying and violence because they do not see the extent of peer mistreatment that occurs every day in schools. Naming and defining the different types of mistreatment provide a common vocabulary that helps both youth and adults to discuss the problem and recognize hurtful behaviors. The statistics cited in this chapter illustrate national trends that shed light on the prevalence of this pervasive problem. Coupled with the stories from students, reports from staff, and perhaps even the results of any number of available school climate surveys (see the Materials and Tools in the Resources section at the end of this book), these figures can help local leaders understand the extent of mistreatment in their own schools.

However, knowledge of the problem is not enough. Only by understanding the overall effects of this bullying and violence can those involved feel some internal motivation to take action to stop it. The next chapter examines the emotional, physical, and financial costs of mistreatment for both students and adults.