

6 in 10 Americans Say They or Someone They Know Have Been Bullied

Vast majority of Americans believe that technology has made it easier to bully someone

NEW YORK, N.Y. – February 19, 2014 – School bullying, unfortunately, continues to make regular appearances in both local and national headlines. While several prominent bullying incidents in recent years have led to an increase in efforts to combat the issue, it seems to persevere; use of social media and texting to bully peers adds to the complexity which communities face when trying to address the matter. And with six in ten U.S. adults (61%) feeling that bullying in schools today is more common than when they were in school, we as a society still clearly have our work cut out for us.

These are some of the results of **The Harris Poll®** of 2,250 adults surveyed online between November 13 and 18, 2013.

“This is an issue affecting a great many Americans, and there’s a very real perception that it’s getting worse,” says Jen Loukes, vice president of the Harris Poll School Pulse, Harris Interactive’s longstanding School Satisfaction study. “In our continued research into the many relationships and experiences which affect the scholastic ‘ecosystem’ – which we first examined in our recent study on [respect](#) between teachers, students and other K-12 ‘stakeholders’ – we feel it’s essential to discuss bullying and related issues which can so negatively impact the school experience.”

School bullying hits home

Six in ten (60%) say that either they or someone they know have experienced (or are currently experiencing) bullying in school. This includes saying they personally recall being bullied when they were in school (44%), knowing someone else who either was (36%) or is currently being (6%) bullied in school, or having/being at least partly responsible for a child who has been or is being bullied in school (9%; 19% among those with school aged children).

What’s more, among U.S. adults with children in school at the K-12 grade levels, over a third (35%) believe that bullying is a problem at their child’s school.

Technology makes it easier – to make someone else’s life harder

As several recent cases have demonstrated, bullying by proxy – whether via texting, social media or other methods – can be devastatingly effective without bullies even being in the same room as their targets. As such, it’s perhaps not surprising that three-fourths of Americans (76%) believe that bullying in schools today is more emotional than physical. What’s more, an overwhelming majority of U.S. adults (85%) agree – 65% strongly so – that technology has made it easier to bully someone.

But while students may be using tech to bully their peers while outside of school, and there are complex legal implications to consider when it comes to policing student activity off school grounds, a majority of Americans (59%) nonetheless believe that if a child is bullied outside of school, it is still the school’s responsibility to address the situation.

Whose responsibility is it?

This leads to one of the issue's biggest challenges: whose responsibility is it, ultimately, to prevent or combat bullying? And does the answer to this question change based on whether it's bullying in schools or bullying via texts or social media that's under discussion?

When Americans are asked to identify the party or parties they feel should be most responsible for opposing bullying in these ways, the top response for both types of bullying is parents of children who bully (46%).

Perceptions of the most responsible parties diverge from there:

- When discussing bullying in schools, teachers (41%) and school administrators (34%) are the next most prevalent responses, followed by all students in the school (31%), students who bully (25%), all parents in the community (22%) and the parents of children being bullied (19%)
- For bullying via social media or text, the next most common perspective is that social media sites (34%) should be among those most responsible for preventing or combating this type of bullying, followed by students who bully (25%), all parents in the community (24%), parents of children being bullied ((24%) and all students in the school (20%).

Taking a stand

A majority of Americans (59%) agree that there is more adult intervention for bullying in schools today than when they were in school, but whether this is perceived as a positive or a negative is unclear. In fact, just over half of U.S. adults (53%) believe that over-protecting school aged children could be bad for their ability to stand up for themselves.

But while exactly how to address the situation may still be under discussion, there are a few things Americans seem to consider off the table in this regard.

Few Americans seem to believe that bullying, particularly in schools, is a problem best addressed by attempting to legislate it away. When choosing up to three parties they see as most responsible for preventing or combating bullying in schools, local government (4%) state government (3%) and the federal government (3%) are the parties with the fewest finger pointing their way.

And while many bullying victims over the years have heard the old refrain that they should simply try to ignore their tormentors, there appears to be a consensus that this is not the right approach, with only 26% agreeing that a good strategy for handling bullying is to ignore it and nearly two-thirds (65%) disagreeing (46% strongly so).

For information regarding Harris Interactive's Harris Poll School Pulse satisfaction management tool, please contact info@harrisinteractive.com.

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TABLE 1
EXPERIENCES WITH BULLYING
By School Aged Child(ren), Generation & Gender

“Now we’d like you to think about bullying in schools, specifically within grades K-12. Which of the following, if any, describe experiences you have had with bullying? Please select all that apply.”

Base: U.S. Adults

	Total	Have School Aged Child(ren)	Generation				Gender	
			Echo Boomers (18-36)	Gen Xers (37-48)	Baby Boomers (49-67)	Matures (68+)	Male	Female
			%	%	%	%	%	%
I or someone I know was bullied or is being bullied in school (NET)	60	61	65	60	59	47	61	58
I recall being bullied when I was in school.	44	42	48	46	43	30	48	40
I know someone else who was bullied when they were in school.	36	34	43	37	33	25	39	34
My child or a child I am at least partly responsible for has been or is currently being bullied in school.	9	19	7	12	10	8	8	10
I know someone else who is currently being bullied in school.	6	11	9	6	3	2	4	7
I witnessed bullying when I was in school.	48	47	55	53	43	35	53	43
I helped someone who was being bullied when I was in school.	26	31	33	28	23	14	28	24
I bullied someone else when I was in school.	10	11	14	9	8	4	12	8
My child or a child I am at least partly responsible for has been accused of bullying in school.	2	5	4	2	1	1	3	2
None of these	28	24	22	23	31	45	25	31

Note: Multiple responses allowed

TABLE 2a
PARTIES SEEN AS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR PREVENTING/COMBATING BULLYING IN SCHOOLS
By Generation, Gender & Political Party

“Among the following, who do you believe should be most responsible for preventing or combating each of these types of bullying? Please select up to three for each.” [BULLYING IN SCHOOLS]

Base: U.S. Adults

	Total	Generation				Gender		Political Party		
		Echo Boomers (18-36)	Gen Xers (37-48)	Baby Boomers (49-67)	Matures (68+)	Male	Female	Republican	Democrat	Independent
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parents of children who bully	46	41	49	50	48	42	51	49	43	46
Teachers	41	40	37	42	50	41	41	43	40	45
School administrators	34	30	38	35	36	29	39	35	37	32
All students in the school	31	29	29	35	31	32	31	28	30	39
Students who bully	25	28	26	25	16	25	25	25	27	24
All parents in the community	22	21	19	22	26	23	21	21	21	26
Parents of children being bullied	19	18	17	20	19	19	18	23	17	15
School boards	13	13	13	14	15	12	15	11	16	13
Students who are being bullied	10	12	7	8	14	10	9	10	10	8
A community at large	10	8	10	10	14	9	10	7	11	11
Social media sites	5	7	3	5	2	5	4	5	3	5
Local government	4	7	4	2	3	5	3	2	6	3
State government	3	4	3	3	2	4	2	1	5	3
Federal government	3	5	3	1	2	3	3	1	5	1

Note: Multiple responses allowed

TABLE 2b
PARTIES SEEN AS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR PREVENTING/COMBATING BULLYING IN SCHOOLS
By School Aged Child(ren) & Experiences with Bullying

“Among the following, who do you believe should be most responsible for preventing or combating each of these types of bullying? Please select up to three for each.” [BULLYING IN SCHOOLS]

Base: U.S. Adults

	Total	Have School Aged Child(ren)	Was Bullied When in School		Have a Child that Has Been or Is Being Bullied	
			Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parents of children who bully	46	42	49	44	46	46
Teachers	41	37	46	38	45	41
School administrators	34	35	35	33	35	34
All students in the school	31	31	29	33	35	31
Students who bully	25	25	26	24	26	25
All parents in the community	22	18	24	21	16	22
Parents of children being bullied	19	19	18	19	19	19
School boards	13	13	14	13	14	13
Students who are being bullied	10	8	10	10	6	10
A community at large	10	8	9	10	9	10
Social media sites	5	3	4	5	5	5
Local government	4	4	5	4	5	4
State government	3	5	3	4	4	3
Federal government	3	5	2	4	3	3

Note: Multiple responses allowed

TABLE 3a

**PARTIES SEEN AS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR PREVENTING/COMBATING BULLYING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA OR TEXT
By Generation, Gender & Political Party**

“Among the following, who do you believe should be most responsible for preventing or combating each of these types of bullying? Please select up to three for each.” [BULLYING ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES OR VIA TEXT]

Base: U.S. Adults

	Total	Generation				Gender		Political Party		
		Echo Boomers (18-36)	Gen Xers (37-48)	Baby Boomers (49-67)	Matures (68+)	Male	Female	Republican	Democrat	Independent
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parents of children who bully	46	42	47	50	45	43	49	50	41	49
Social media sites	34	34	31	34	40	30	38	35	34	33
Students who bully	25	27	25	26	14	24	25	23	25	24
All parents in the community	24	23	23	24	28	25	23	24	21	29
Parents of children being bullied	24	22	21	27	25	23	24	31	21	20
All students in the school	20	21	19	21	18	21	19	18	21	20
A community at large	15	15	17	12	19	13	17	15	18	13
Students who are being bullied	11	13	10	9	12	11	11	12	9	10
School administrators	10	12	13	9	7	12	10	10	12	10
Federal government	10	10	11	10	11	9	11	8	13	10
Teachers	9	10	10	9	8	11	8	9	9	12
State government	9	11	10	9	6	9	10	6	13	8
Local government	9	9	7	7	13	7	10	4	12	9
School boards	6	8	2	6	5	7	5	3	7	4

Note: Multiple responses allowed

TABLE 3b

**PARTIES SEEN AS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR PREVENTING/COMBATING BULLYING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA OR TEXT
By School Aged Child(ren) & Experiences with Bullying**

“Among the following, who do you believe should be most responsible for preventing or combating each of these types of bullying? Please select up to three for each.” [BULLYING ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES OR VIA TEXT]

Base: U.S. Adults

	Total	Have School Aged Child(ren)	Was Bullied When in School		Have a Child that Has Been or Is Being Bullied	
			Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parents of children who bully	46	41	52	42	48	46
Social media sites	34	34	33	35	39	34
Students who bully	25	25	27	23	30	24
All parents in the community	24	24	24	24	20	24
Parents of children being bullied	24	22	23	24	23	24
All students in the school	20	22	20	20	21	20
A community at large	15	13	15	15	16	15
Students who are being bullied	11	10	11	11	8	11
School administrators	10	11	10	11	7	11
Federal government	10	10	11	10	12	10
Teachers	9	10	9	10	8	10
State government	9	8	10	9	9	9
Local government	9	7	9	9	8	9
School boards	6	7	6	5	10	5

Note: Multiple responses allowed

TABLE 4a
AGREE/DISAGREE WITH BULLYING STATEMENTS
Summary Table

“Still thinking about bullying within grades K-12, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

Base: U.S. adults

		Agree (NET)	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree (NET)	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Not at all sure
Technology has made it easier to bully someone.	%	85	65	20	5	3	2	10
Bullying in schools today is more emotional than physical.	%	76	39	36	12	8	3	13
Bullying in schools today is more common than when I was in school.	%	61	38	24	25	16	9	14
There is more adult intervention for bullying in schools today than when I was in school.	%	59	28	31	25	15	10	17
If a child is bullied outside of school, but by other kids from their school, it is still the school’s responsibility to address the situation.	%	59	28	30	31	21	10	11
Over-protecting school-age children from bullying could be bad for their ability to stand up for themselves.	%	53	16	36	37	23	14	10
Bullying occurs more often outside of school than it does inside school.	%	47	14	33	32	26	6	21
Girls are more likely than boys to be bullied by their fellow students.	%	45	16	29	35	25	10	20
Boys are more likely than girls to bully their fellow students.	%	35	12	23	48	32	16	17
A good strategy for handling bullying is to ignore it.	%	26	8	17	65	20	46	9

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 4b
AGREE WITH BULLYING STATEMENTS
By Generation & Gender

“Still thinking about bullying within grades K-12, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

Base: U.S. Adults

	Total	Generation				Gender	
		Echo Boomers (18-36)	Gen Xers (37-48)	Baby Boomers (49-67)	Matures (68+)	Male	Female
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Technology has made it easier to bully someone.	85	81	87	87	86	84	86
Bullying in schools today is more emotional than physical.	76	75	83	73	72	75	76
Bullying in schools today is more common than when I was in school.	61	56	61	63	71	55	67
There is more adult intervention for bullying in schools today than when I was in school.	59	57	64	59	52	59	59
If a child is bullied outside of school, but by other kids from their school, it is still the school’s responsibility to address the situation.	59	54	59	61	64	54	63
Over-protecting school-age children from bullying could be bad for their ability to stand up for themselves.	53	57	54	50	46	58	47
Bullying occurs more often outside of school than it does inside school.	47	50	49	43	45	47	47
Girls are more likely than boys to be bullied by their fellow students.	45	48	49	42	41	41	49
Boys are more likely than girls to bully their fellow students.	35	35	33	33	40	40	29
A good strategy for handling bullying is to ignore it.	26	32	26	21	20	28	23

TABLE 4c
AGREE WITH BULLYING STATEMENTS
By School Aged Child(ren) & Experiences with Bullying

“Still thinking about bullying within grades K-12, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

Base: U.S. Adults

	Total	Have School Aged Child(ren)	Was Bullied When in School		Have a Child that Has Been or Is Being Bullied	
			Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Technology has made it easier to bully someone.	85	85	88	83	84	85
Bullying in schools today is more emotional than physical.	76	78	74	77	72	76
Bullying in schools today is more common than when I was in school.	61	64	49	71	63	61
There is more adult intervention for bullying in schools today than when I was in school.	59	61	60	58	55	59
If a child is bullied outside of school, but by other kids from their school, it is still the school’s responsibility to address the situation.	59	60	62	56	64	58
Over-protecting school-age children from bullying could be bad for their ability to stand up for themselves.	53	56	52	53	53	53
Bullying occurs more often outside of school than it does inside school.	47	50	47	47	48	47
Girls are more likely than boys to be bullied by their fellow students.	45	51	46	45	45	45
Boys are more likely than girls to bully their fellow students.	35	34	33	36	33	35
A good strategy for handling bullying is to ignore it.	26	33	23	28	34	25

TABLE 5
IS BULLYING A PROBLEM AT YOUR CHILD’S SCHOOL?

“Thinking of your child in [GRADE], is bullying a problem in your child’s school?”

Base: U.S. Adults with one or more school aged children

	Have School Aged Child(ren)
	%
Yes	35
No	65

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between November 13 and 18, 2013 among 2,250 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Poll surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in our panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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The Harris Poll® #17, February 19, 2014

By Larry Shannon-Missal, Harris Poll Research Manager

About Nielsen & The Harris Poll

On February 3, 2014, Nielsen acquired Harris Interactive and The Harris Poll. Nielsen Holdings N.V. (NYSE: NLSN) is a global information and measurement company with leading market positions in marketing and consumer information, television and other media measurement, online intelligence and mobile measurement. Nielsen has a presence in approximately 100 countries, with headquarters in New York, USA and Diemen, the Netherlands. For more information, visit www.nielsen.com.