WHAT IS WEIGHT BIAS?

Weight bias occurs when students are teased or bullied because of their body weight. This is especially common among students with overweight or obesity.

Examples of weight bias include:
- Being the target of derogatory jokes and name-calling from peers
- Having peers spread negative rumors about you
- Being excluded from social activities
- Being verbally or physically threatened or harassed
- Receiving harassing phone calls, emails, or text messages

HOW COMMON IS WEIGHT BIAS AT SCHOOL?

- One in every three youths is now with overweight or obesity. This means that many students are at risk for weight-based teasing and bullying at school. The more obesity rates climb, the more bullying increases.
- Students with overweight and obesity are more likely to be victims of bullying (including teasing and other types of verbal and physical aggression) compared to their average-weight peers, and their chances of being bullied increase with body weight.
- Adolescents (of all different weights) report that they see weight-based teasing happening at school more often than other types of teasing. (See figure at right).

HOW DOES WEIGHT BIAS AFFECT STUDENTS?

- Students who are teased or bullied because of their weight may experience problems that are harmful to their emotional and physical well-being, such as:
  - Depression
  - Social isolation
  - Anxiety
  - Suicidal thoughts and behaviors
  - Poor body image
  - Unhealthy eating (binge-eating & eating disorders)
  - Low self-esteem
  - Avoidance of physical activity

Types of Teasing Observed by Peers at School

![Graph showing types of teasing observed by peers at school.](image-url)
HOW DOES WEIGHT BIAS AFFECT STUDENTS’ FUNCTIONING IN SCHOOL?

- Students of higher weight who are teased or bullied
  - may perform more poorly in school;
  - may be more likely to skip school if they are teased about their weight;
  - report that being bullied at school harms their grades.

- Students with overweight report that school bullying policies are not being enforced when it comes to weight-based teasing and bullying. Schools show little awareness or recognition of this problem.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS AND PARENTS DO TO REDUCE WEIGHT BIAS AT SCHOOL?

- Address the issue of weight-based bullying in anti-bullying trainings for school personnel.
- Ask Boards of Education to include body weight as an example of bullying in anti-bullying policies.
- Treat weight bias as a legitimate form of bias – it is just as serious as other forms of teasing and bullying.
- Be on the lookout for weight bias, and intervene when students are teased about their weight.

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