Approximately 10% to 30% of children experience chronic episodes of peer bullying in the school context (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001). In episodes of bullying, children may participate in one or more roles, including being the perpetrator of the peer aggression, the recipient of the aggression, or a bystander who passively observes or actively participates in the bullying. Children who are the aggressor or bystander in one instance may also become the target in the next instance.

One of the primary goals of many anti-bullying programs is to change the behaviours of the bystanders. When children observe bullying and do nothing to intervene they are supporting the aggressor and reinforcing that this behaviour is okay. When bystanders defend the victim, there are fewer episodes of bullying in the classroom (Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). Studies show that when schools and communities take active steps to prevent bullying and teach children the skills to intervene, children’s risk for being bullied can be reduced (Hoglund, Hosan, & Leadbeater, 2012; Waasdorp, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2012).

What is Bullying?

Aggressive behaviours that are enacted by one or more children and that are directed at one or more children. The defining characteristics of bullying include:

- **Purposeful** negative actions or behaviours enacted by one or more children.
- **Intent** to harm another child or group of children.
- Occurs **repeatedly** over time.
- Occurs **without provocation**.
- Imbalance of **social or physical power**, such as when the aggressor is stronger, older or more popular than the recipient of the aggression.

Types of Bullying:

- **Physical**: involves direct instances of physical harm, such as spitting, throwing objects, tripping, hitting or kicking.
- **Relational or Social**: targets children’s relationships and social status either directly or indirectly, often through threats of friendship withdrawal, exclusion from group activities, or rumour spreading.
- **Verbal**: includes overt threats of harm or demeaning comments.
- **Racial or Ethnic**: can be physical, relational or verbal but specifically targets a child because of her or his race or ethnicity, often through slurs about racial or ethnic features or cultural practices.
- **Cyber**: involves the use of electronic media such as e-mail, facebook or texting to spread rumors or other humiliating comments or images.

Gender Differences

- **BOYS** are more likely to engage in and be the recipient of physical than relational bullying.
- **GIRLS** are more likely to engage in and be the recipient of relational than physical bullying.
- Contrary to media images, boys and girls are equally likely to engage in relational aggression.
Consequences of Bullying

Experiencing episodes of bullying can negatively affect children’s social, emotional and academic adjustment. Children who are often bullied show higher risks for retaliatory aggression, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and poorer social skills (Leadbeater & Hoglund, 2009). Conversely, children who cry easily and children who are more likely to retaliate with aggression when teased are easy and rewarding targets for peer aggression. Children who are bullied also tend to like school less, participate in class activities less, and show poorer academic skills (Bus, Ladd, & Herald, 2006).

What can schools do to prevent bullying?

1. Take a whole-school approach to bullying. Develop an anti-bulling policy that is relevant to your school and that is a collaborative effort among all school personnel. Address the following in your policy:
   - What is bullying, including the forms of bullying?
   - How can staff and children prevent bullying?
   - How should staff respond to episodes of bullying?
   - Revisit your anti-bully policy regularly.

2. Help children and adults in your school recognize bullying behaviours. Help children and adults appreciate that bullying is NOT a rite of passage that children need to experience and to not dismiss bullying as just harmless teasing.

3. Create a plan to support children who have been bullied. While an isolated incident of bullying can cause children distress, chronic bullying is often associated with more significant emotional distress.

4. Use the PEERS curriculum to address bullying. PEERS is designed specifically to promote school values that run counter to bullying behaviours, to nurture skills in children that can help them resist bullying, and to support positive peer relationships.

5. Reinforce the PEERS problem solving strategies. Encourage children to solve problems peacefully (e.g., take a break and calm down, talk it out, report the problem to an adult). Recognize children with praise when they use these strategies. Teach children to identify the problem, possible strategies to resolve the conflict, and possible consequences. Role plays can help children generate effective solutions to deal with bullying.

6. Incorporate group work into lesson plans. Working on projects in small groups or pairs can help children develop listening and cooperation skills and an appreciation for their classmates’ ideas.

7. Help children stand up against bullying. When bystanders speak up against the bullying behaviours and support the recipient of the peer abuse their actions can help stop the bullying and the negative effects of bullying on the target of the abuse.

8. Involve parents. Inform parents of your school’s anti-bully policy and what your school is doing to teach children about how to stop bullying. Provide parents with clear ideas on how they can reinforce these strategies at home.

PEERS Storybooks:
- *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henke
- *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O’Neill
- *My Secret Bully* by Trudy Ludwig
- *Say Something* by Peggy Moss
- *A Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes

Resources:
- Government of Alberta Bullying Prevention:
  - [http://education.alberta.ca/media/616481/c09.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/616481/c09.pdf)
  - [http://www.bullyfreealberta.ca/](http://www.bullyfreealberta.ca/)