In a 2018 survey of 9,000 people ages 12 to 20, 10 percent said they were bullied each day and more than 50 percent said they were bullied at least once a month. Graphic by: Newsela staff

A bully is a person who uses strength or power to harm or intimidate those who are weaker, according to the Google Dictionary. Bullies, as we know them, are continuing to increase their strength. As multiple recent movies and TV shows have brought to light, bullies continue to rule schools. Adults need to start taking it more seriously.

Adults tend to say that bullying is "just a part of growing up," but it can actually lead to serious mental health issues. This is not part of growing up. It is undermining confidence and health, and bullying is not getting any better.
In the United Kingdom, there's an annual survey by Ditch the Label, that in 2018 surveyed 9,000 people ages 12-20 about bullying. The research found that 10 percent of the respondents were bullied daily and more than 50 percent were bullied at least once a month. In 2013, 43 percent of surveyors said they were bullied frequently.

Bullying hasn't gotten better; in fact, it's gotten worse. This kind of data must make us stop and think about how we treat others. But here's the thing: It's hard when adults don't punish you or make you feel ashamed for bullying another person. Bullies aren't disciplined enough in schools, even with zero-tolerance policies. Evidently, bullies don't take a second to think about it before they hurt others, because they most likely won't face the consequences. This is where the system is flawed.

I've seen physical, verbal and cyberbullying firsthand. When there's physical bullying at my school, the kid gets suspended for 3 days and then comes back and does what he or she did again. When verbal bullying occurs, the faculty usually pretends not to hear or do anything about it. Once, I was called a name and my friend told a teacher who was standing right next to us. That teacher said that wasn't very nice and then walked away. I understand sometimes that it's not a school's place to step in when cyberbullying takes place. However, occasionally it is; when they get the chance to step in, they don't.

The effects of bullying are extensive, leading to problems that young people shouldn’t have to deal with. The confidence of students is continuing to deteriorate, and mental health issues continue to develop. A study conducted by the JAMA Network shows that children who were bullied persistently when they were 8 years old were more likely to develop a mental illness that needed treatment as an adult, compared to kids who were not bullied in their childhood. Not only can bullying create severe mental health problems in children, but it can also have loads of negative physical consequences as well. According to Pathstone Mental Health, bullying can induce anxiety and flu-like symptoms. If bullying isn't stopped, innocent school children will continue to be physically and mentally hurt.

It is clear that bullying has many negative impacts. What we need is a way to make it stop. Bullies need to be brought to justice. The first step is to make bullies realize that taking down peers is not the way to go. Teachers and parents need to help children understand why it's wrong. This can only make the issue better.

In the study, "Authoritative School Discipline: High School Practices Associated With Lower Bullying and Victimization" from the University of Virginia, it was found that schools are safer when rules are enforced and adults are available to support students. "Structure and support" were proved to be related to a decline in bullying and victimization. It's important that staff at schools emphasize anti-bullying efforts in order to create safe school communities.
As a victim of bullying myself, harsher punishments for bullies would make me feel safer at school. Bullying can make school a negative experience, which jeopardizes students’ education. Applying stricter punishments and rules can help create a safer school environment and make students feel more welcomed at their schools.

Bullying is cruel and should not be tolerated. It is not part of growing up and certainly should not take place in schools. Giving bullies firmer punishments and taking bullying victims more seriously is a start to creating safer, bully-free schools.

*Do you have an opinion to share on an issue affecting your school or community? Students may submit their original opinion piece to editorial@newsela.com*