The Link Between Bullying and Substance Use

There are numerous reasons why someone chooses to use drugs, and the root cause of a substance use disorder is unique to the individual. However, the foundation of any effective rehabilitation and prevention is addressing the reason why or the root cause; for many, this root cause can be bullying.

Being bullied, whether verbal, physical, social, or cyberbullying, can lead to substance use. This pamphlet aims to raise awareness of this fact and highlight how early intervention can help.

www.learnwithsupe.org

What is Bullying?

The four most common types of bullying include verbal, social, physical, and cyberbullying.

Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean or offensive things to another individual.

Social bullying is often referred to as relational bullying and may involve hurting someone's reputation or relationships.

Physical bullying involves doing physical harm to a person's body or possessions.

Cyberbullying occurs over digital devices and involves sending, posting, or sharing negative, false, harmful, or mean content about someone else.

Resources for Help

stopbullying.gov

KIDS AGAINST BULLYING — PACER CENTER'S

Committee for Children

How Does Bullying Lead to Substance Use?

The painful experiences associated with bullying lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms. The mental health impact becomes challenging to manage, and drugs or alcohol become a means of coping. In addition to this, there is also peer pressure to use drugs or alcohol to numb physical or mental discomfort, such as bullying. It begins a cycle where the drugs or alcohol are associated with temporary relief of the physical or emotional pain associated with bullying.

> *Adolescents involved in either school bullying or cyberbullying were **THREE TIMES** more likely to use alcohol or drugs.*
>
> SOURCE: *Children and Youth Services Review* 2022

Studies have shown that alcohol was the most consumed substance, followed by tobacco and cannabis, among people who were bullied. Adolescents involved in either school bullying or cyberbullying are three times more likely to use alcohol or drugs.

Additionally, children or adults who bully others also have an increased risk of substance misuse. Bullies tend to use drugs because of self-isolation, their peer group, and antisocial behavior.