

Adolescent Bullying and Family Therapy¹

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As much as parents like to think that bullying is something that's outgrown in childhood, unfortunately it's actually on the increase in adolescence. There are various individual and school-based approaches to dealing with bullying, but a new intervention that you might find surprising is none other than family therapy.

Dr. Marius Nickel and his colleagues conducted research on bullying adolescent males being treated in family therapy and

a comparison group who did not receive any therapy. The therapy emphasizes family communication, family rules, and examining family dynamics that contribute to aggressive behavior. They found that six months of outpatient family therapy significantly reduced the boys' bullying behavior and their expression of anger as compared to the boys who did not receive family therapy. Additionally, the boys who received family therapy lessened their smoking, drug use, binge drinking, unsafe sexual behaviors, and excessive reliance on the media. The boys also became more accepting of others, less likely to try to change or control others, and had fewer interpersonal problems than they did before receiving family therapy. Moreover, the boys' own views of their overall health, social functioning, energy levels, and mental health improved significantly after receiving family therapy (Nickel et al., 2005).

From this research we find that teen males who bully have a lot more problems than just anger to work on, yet can make significant positive changes in their lives with family therapy.

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Reference

Nickel, M.K., Krawczyk, J., Nickel, C., Forthuber, P., Kettler, C., Leiberich, P., Muehlbacher, M., Tritt, K., Mitterlehner, F.O., Lahmann, C., Rother, W.K., and Loew, T.H. (2005). Anger, interpersonal relationships, and health-related quality of life in bullying boys who are treated with outpatient family therapy: A randomized, prospective controlled trial with 1 year of follow-up. *Pediatrics*, 116, e247-e254.