

HOT TOPICS

BEHAVIOUR: It's all about power and in one recent case a gun was the equalizer

Experts say every child is vulnerable to bullying

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TORONTO -- A 12-year-old boy accused of bringing a cache of weapons to school is a glaring example of why bullying must be taken seriously, experts say.

"If it's allowed to continue, for whatever reason, it's like the building of a volcano -- at some point it's going to erupt," Stuart Auty, president of the Canadian Safe School Network, said yesterday.

"The nightmare is when somebody like that has access to a weapon."

The breaking point for a bullied child can depend on several circumstances: How long the bullying has continued, whether there's been a solution, whether a kid "has been let down" by an adult, Auty said.

"It's all about power. Whoever's doing the bullying has got more power than the other person and so guess what, a weapon's an equalizer."

"There are so many ways in which children acquire power over others and that's what bullying is," said Debra Pepler, co-founder of PREVNet, a national network of researchers, non-governmental organizations and governments committed to stopping bullying.

"It's a relationship problem that needs relationship solutions."

"Any child can be vulnerable, but once the relationship gets

established, the power differential increases and it becomes virtually impossible for the child who's being victimized to extricate himself or herself because they become so powerless," Pepler said.

"It needs an outside force -- the teacher or principal or other peers -- to come in and shift the power."

It's a problem that requires immediate intervention by both school officials and parents, Auty and Pepler agreed.

"If you're being bullied every single day and school is a horrific place for you every day, that's a very different experience than if you're being bullied once a month or once every two months because you enter a hostile environment every single day," Pepler said. "That's so destabilizing for a child."

"Imagine if we went into work everyday for years and were victimized and taunted and hurt. It would be awful for us as adults."

"Why is it that we protect the adults in our society to a greater extent than we protect the children?"