

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**STOP BULLYING BEFORE IT STARTS:
GIVING KIDS A VOICE**

**A Cartoon Network Survey of
9- to 11-Year-Olds About Kindness and Caring**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	03
Rick Weissbourd, Making Caring Common Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education	
INTRODUCTION	05
Christina Miller, President and General Manager, Cartoon Network	
KEY FINDINGS	06
CONCLUSION	14
METHODOLOGY	16

FOREWORD

These days what divides us often seems thick and what unites us seems thin. We are quick to lash out and slow to understand. Basic decency and respect often seem in short supply.

That's why this report, "Stop Bullying Before It Starts," is so important. Based on a nationwide survey of 9- to 11-year-old children, this report offers a kind of map of where we are succeeding and failing in raising caring, community-minded children. It sheds light both on why so many Americans are growing up to be self-occupied and self-protective, and on what we need to do to reverse this trend, to raise children who don't bully or degrade others and who are respectful, constructive citizens.

The good news is that, as the report suggests, children have many strengths that we can build on. Substantial majorities of children report that kindness is "very important" or "important" to them, and similar majorities report they've gone out of their way to help others—they've reached out, for example, to a new kid at school or to a peer having a problem. Almost two-thirds convey that they've tried to stop bullying in some way—no small feat, given that intervening carries the risk of becoming a target oneself. There's good news about parents and educators, too. Almost 70% of 9- to 11-year-olds report having "good role models" at home and 54% report having them at school.

But these findings also suggest that far too often kindness is trumped by other values such as happiness and achievement. When asked to rank a short list of values, less than a quarter of children ranked caring as most important to them, while a total of 77% selected some other priority such as being happy (35%), getting good grades (23%), having good friends (17%), or being popular (2%). Only 14% of children thought that caring was most important to their parents in relation to these other values. These findings square with national surveys by Making Caring Common, a project I direct at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, of almost 50,000 diverse middle and high school students. No society can stay humane and prosper without raising children who prioritize leading an ethical life, including caring for others and their communities.

The data on bullying are also sobering. Unlike many other bullying studies, this survey used a clear, stringent standard for bullying so it wouldn't be confused with other types of cruel comments or hostile acts, and researchers conducted field testing to assure that 9- to 11-year-olds understood the definition. Yet even with this more stringent definition, and despite the bullying prevention programs that have proliferated around the country, a troubling percent of students report witnessing bullying (77%) or being a bullying victim (62%). And while respondents tended to respect their parents as role models, they are cynical about people leading the country. Only 14% strongly agreed that our leaders model how to treat people with kindness, with 32% "somewhat agreeing" and the rest disagreeing. There's a message here about the qualities we should weigh when we go to the polls.

FOREWORD

Children also instruct us in this report quite specifically on how we can help them become their best selves. Poignantly, most children report both wanting to be more effective in stopping bullying and cruelty and specifically wanting more guidance from us on how to be more effective. The issue is not a lack of will; it's a lack of knowledge about how to intervene constructively in the face of cruelty, something almost all of us struggle with. More generally, a large majority (83%) of respondents said kids their age would be kinder to one another if every kid had someone who really cared about and listened to them. As adults, we need to answer this call.

I strongly encourage you to read and sit with this report. Consider what it means for preventing bullying. Consider what it means for raising children who are decent, responsible family members, friends and co-workers. And please consider—no matter what your role is in our society—what it means for how we exercise our fundamental responsibility to assure that the next generation of children will protect our brave, beautiful experiment in democracy and build a more just world.

Rick Weissbourd
Making Caring Common Project at the
Harvard Graduate School of Education

INTRODUCTION

Our mission at Cartoon Network is to provide fun and entertainment with humor and heart, but we also have a long-standing commitment to use our platform responsibly.

That's why, in 2009, we launched Stop Bullying: Speak Up (SBSU), an award-winning, multi-platform pro-social initiative to address bullying among kids. Today, the need to engage young people on the topic of bullying is perhaps greater than ever.

Children today negotiate a complicated and challenging environment as they confront the realities of the wider world, forge relationships, and develop their own set of values. As we work to expand the SBSU initiative, we wanted to surface children's own perspectives about the barriers and incentives to becoming more kind and caring.

So, we commissioned a survey of 9- to 11-year-olds to put their voices front and center in the national discussion about preventing bullying and promoting kindness. This report presents the findings of a nationally-representative, probability-based survey of more than 1,000 9- to 11-year-olds. Our purpose is to put a spotlight on how children experience the world; and to offer insights to parents, educators, and non-profits who are doing the hard daily work of understanding the complex space our kids live in and teaching them to be their natural, confident, kind and compassionate selves.

Christina Miller
President and General Manager
Cartoon Network



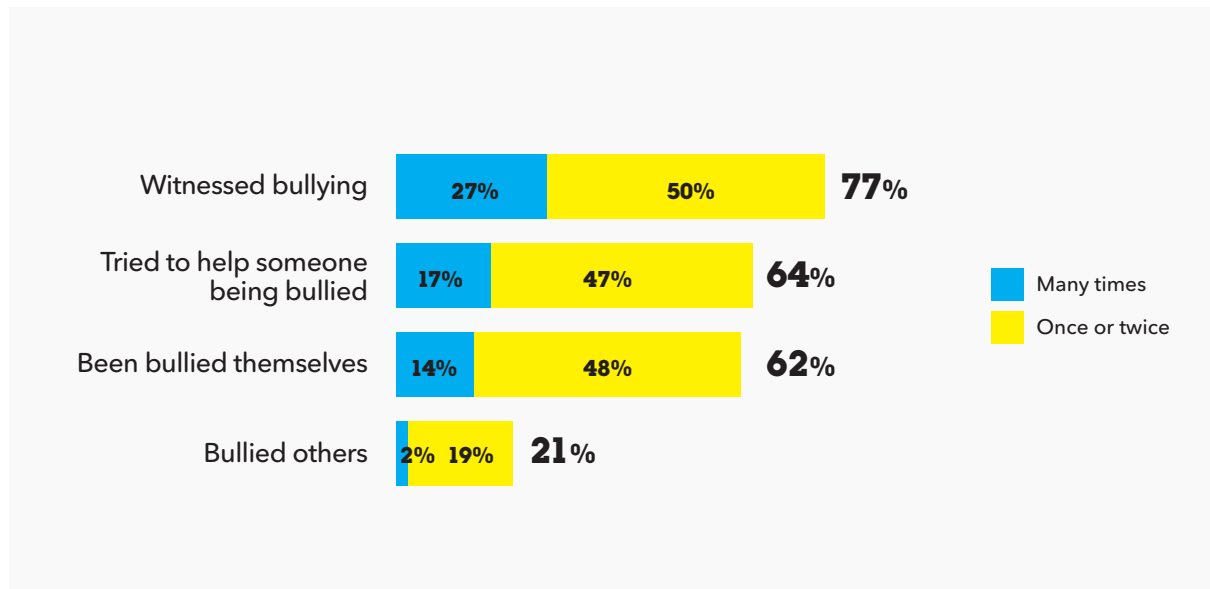
KEY FINDINGS

1. The vast majority of 9-, 10-, and 11-year-olds report having experienced bullying in some manner, whether as a witness, a perpetrator, a victim, or someone who has tried to help.

Three out of four kids (77%) say they have witnessed bullying, including 27% who say they've done so "many times." Sixty-four percent of children report having tried to help a kid who was being bullied, including 17% who say they've done so "many times." Nearly two out of three (62%) kids say they've "ever" been bullied, including 14% who say it's happened "many times." And one in five kids (21%) say they've ever bullied other kids, although only 2% say they've done so "many times."

EXPERIENCE WITH BULLYING

PERCENT OF 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS WHO SAY THEY HAVE EVER:



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“There’s been so many times I have been bullied and there’s a girl who make[s] me laugh and is so sweet, she[’s] just like my sister. She makes me feel like I can be me again.”

“There was once a kid who picked on another kid. The bully would always hide the other kid’s backpack during breakfast. The kid would always cry because he couldn’t find it. I helped the kid find it and talked him into telling the teacher. The bully got detention and left the kid alone.”

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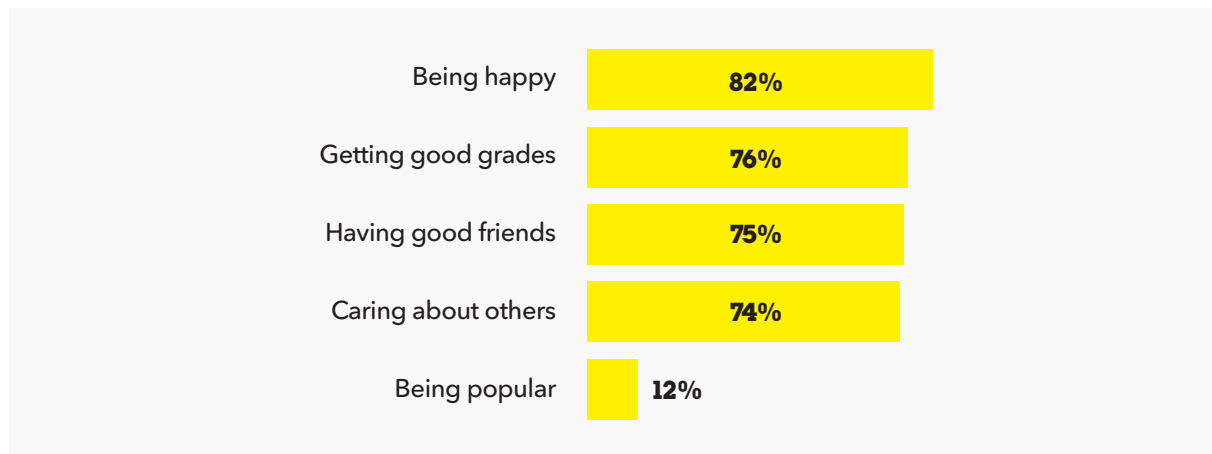
KEY FINDINGS

2. Most 9- to 11-year-olds say caring about others is “very” important to them; but one in four say it is not very important, and most put other priorities ahead of caring.

Three out of four kids (74%) say caring about other people is “very” important to them; but one in four (26%) say it is only “somewhat” (22%), “not too” (3%) or “not at all” (1%) important to them. When asked to pick which is “most” important to them, just under one in four (23%) choose caring about others, while a total of 77% select some other priority such as being happy (35%), getting good grades (23%), having good friends (17%) or being popular (2%).

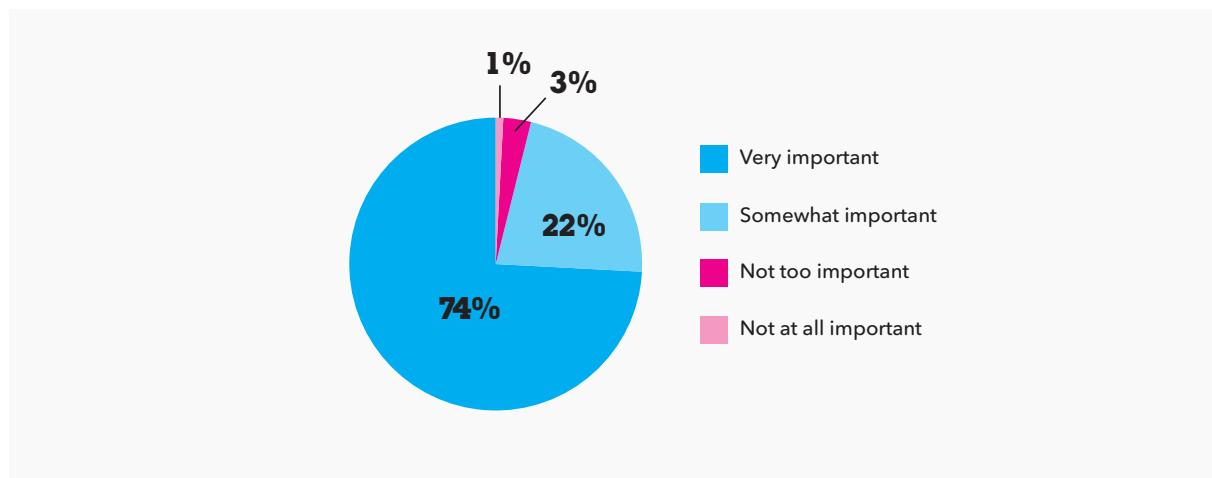
WHAT KIDS VALUE

PERCENT OF 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS WHO SAY EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IS “VERY IMPORTANT” TO THEM:



IMPORTANCE OF CARING ABOUT OTHERS

HOW IMPORTANT 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS SAY “CARING ABOUT OTHERS” IS TO THEM:



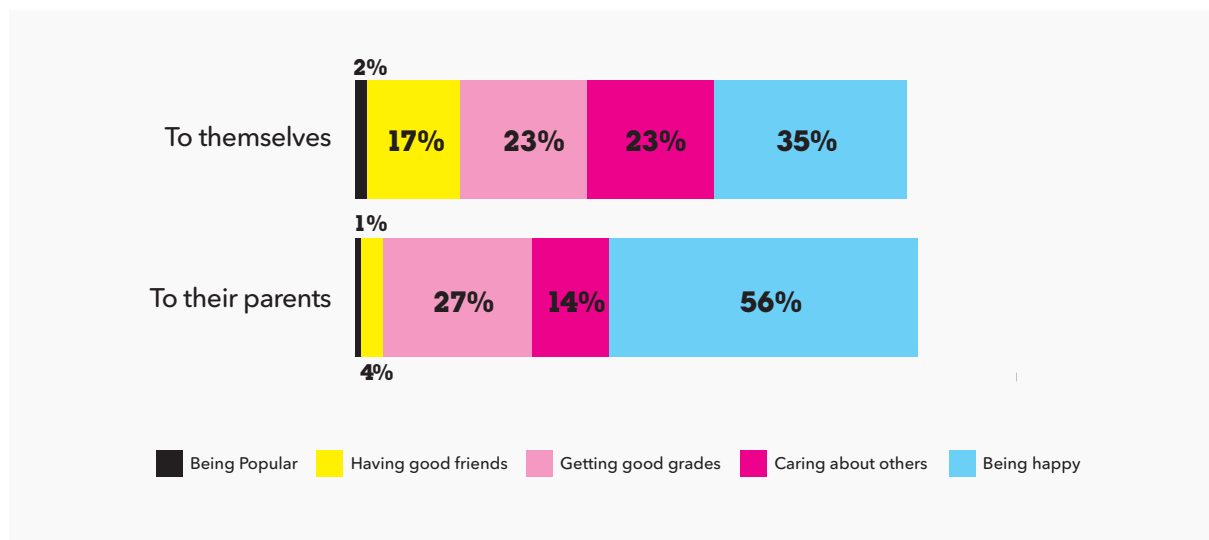
KEY FINDINGS

3. More 9- to 11-year-olds say caring about others is a priority to themselves than say it is a priority for their parents.

The vast majority of children say it is “very” important to their parents that the child cares about others (79%). However, when asked to choose what is “most” important to them, 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds are more likely to say “caring about others” is the most important to *them* than to say it is most important to their *parents* (23% say this is the most important thing to them, while only 14% think it is the most important to their parents). Most kids think their parents place the highest value on their child being happy (56%), followed by 27% who say getting good grades is their parents’ priority.

PRIORITIZING CARING

PERCENT OF 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS WHO SAY EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IS “THE MOST IMPORTANT” TO THEMSELVES AND THEIR PARENTS:



“

“A new kid came to my school and was on my bus, she was crying so I went up to her with my mom’s ok and asked her if she would like to sit with me and be a friend!”

“If kids’ parents would teach them to be kind at home then they would be kinder at school.”

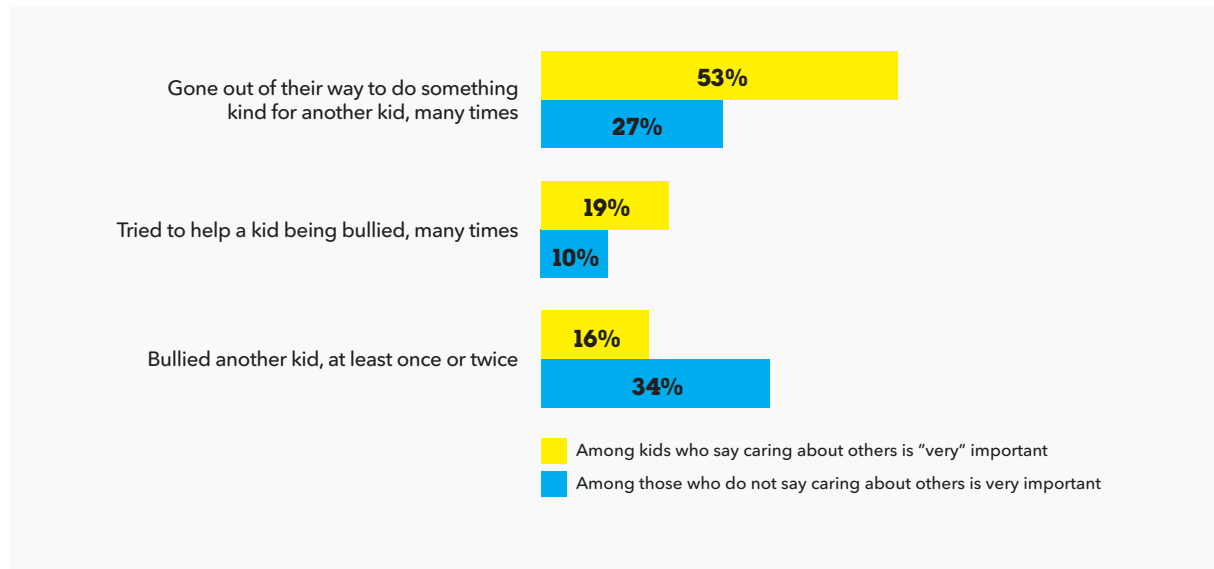
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KEY FINDINGS

4. Values matter. Those who consider “caring about others” to be “very” important are far more likely to do kind things for other kids, and far less likely to be bullies.

Kids who say caring about others is very important are *twice as likely* as other kids to say they have gone out of their way to do something kind for another kid, such as someone who was new to their school, having a problem, or being picked on or left out (53% vs. 27%). They are nearly twice as likely to say they have tried to help a kid who was being bullied (19% vs. 10%). And they are *half* as likely to report having ever bullied another kid (16% vs. 34%, including those who say they have done so only once or twice).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VALUES AND BEHAVIORS AMONG 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS, PERCENT WHO SAY THEY HAVE:



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“Last year there was a kid in my class that was in a wheelchair. He hated reading time but I love reading. None of the kids in our class ever wanted to be his reading partner so I would always ask if I could be his partner. He started not hating reading time so much.”

“Once a kid dropped his lunch. Every[one] was laughing. I walked up and ask[ed] him if would like to share my lunch. I have been friends with him ever since.”

“There is a kid who has ADHD and can be a little overwhelming. I try to be patient and listen to him because a lot of people tell him he’s annoying and to be quiet. He’s pretty cool to know once you get past all the chatter.”

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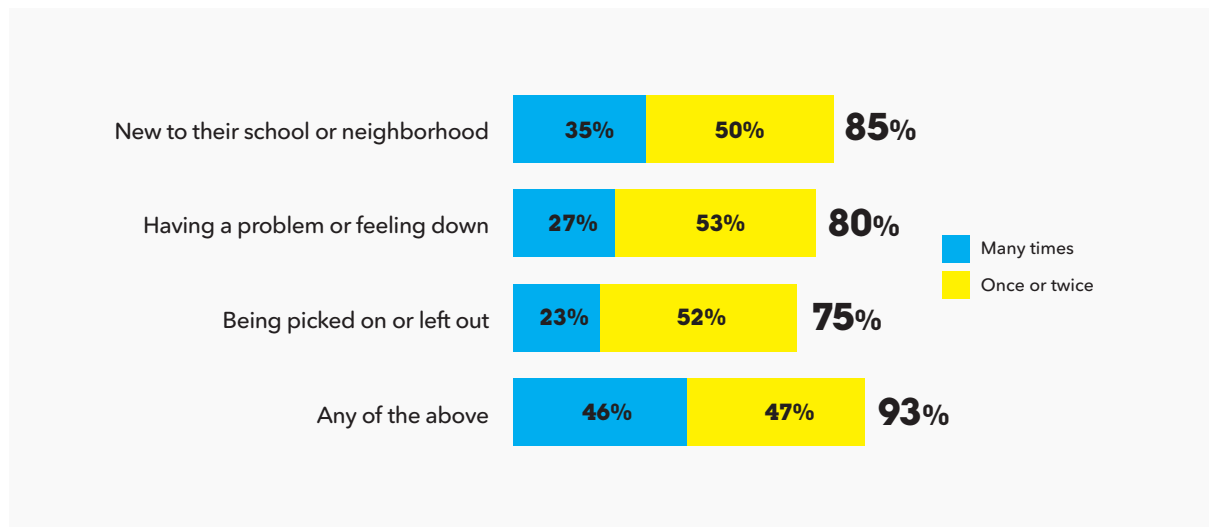
KEY FINDINGS

5. More than eight in ten 9- to 11-year-olds say they have gone out of their way to do something kind for another kid who was having a tough time, and nearly half (46%) say they have done so “many times.”

For example, 85% of children say they have reached out to kids who were new to their school or neighborhood, including 35% who say they have done so “many times,” such as making a point of talking to them, or asking them to sit or play with them. Eighty percent say they’ve gone out of their way to do something kind for a kid who was having a problem or feeling down (including 27% who’ve done so “many times”), and 75% say they have done so for a kid who was being picked on or left out (23% say they have done this “many times”). *All told, 46% of 9- to 11-year-olds report having gone out of their way to do something kind for another kid in at least one of these situations “many times.”*

ACTS OF KINDNESS

PERCENT OF 9-TO 11-YEAR-OLDS WHO SAY THEY HAVE GONE OUT OF THEIR WAY TO DO SOMETHING KIND FOR ANOTHER KID WHO WAS:



“[There was a] new kid to school from another country who was having trouble with the language and new school. I helped by talking to him and becoming his friend while others would laugh at him. I became the person he would look to when he was having a tough time and teachers would come get me to help calm him down.”

“There was a new girl at school and the kids were making fun of her because she had a lazy eye. No one wanted to sit with her at lunch. I went on the lunch line and then sat next to her and became her friend.”

“There was a girl in my class who had on dirty clothes. The other kids laughed at her but I played with her during recess.”

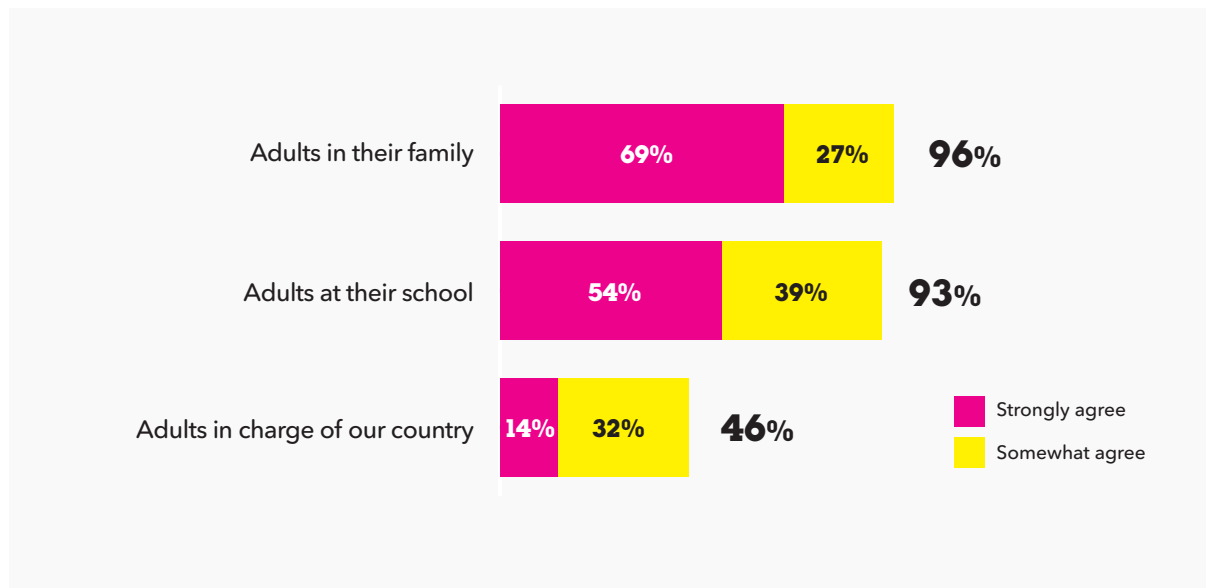
KEY FINDINGS

6. Most 9- to 11-year-olds say that when it comes to learning how to treat people with kindness, they have good adult role models close to home, but not in our nation's leadership.

Ninety-six percent of children say the adults in their family set a good example for how to treat people with kindness (69% "strongly" agree), and 93% say the same about the adults at their school (54% "strongly"). But only 46% say that the adults in our government do (including just 14% who "strongly" agree). Indeed, when asked what would help kids their age be kinder to one another, 70% said it would help if the adults in charge of our country set a better example of treating people kindly.

ADULT ROLE MODELS

PERCENT OF 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS WHO AGREE THAT EACH TYPE OF ADULT SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE FOR TREATING OTHER PEOPLE WITH KINDNESS



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“I talked to them (*kid getting picked on*) and told them ignore the person who was talking about them. Mrs. Obama says ‘when they go low, you go high.’”

“If the President was nice, maybe the kids would be nice.”

“One of my friends was depressed and I got some advice from my mom and I helped her enough to climb out of depression.”

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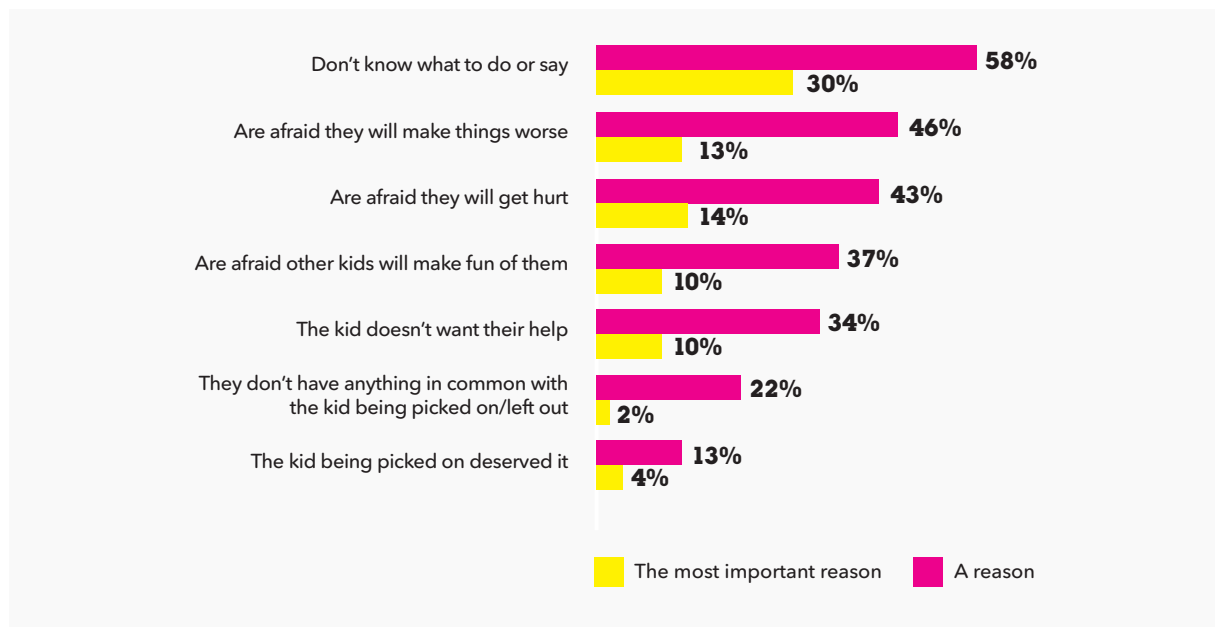
KEY FINDINGS

7. The main thing stopping children from reaching out to other kids is not knowing what to do or say.

More than half (58%) of kids who have seen someone getting picked on or being left out say one of the reasons they sometimes *don't* help those kids is that they don't know what to do or say. Thirty percent of kids say this is the "most important" reason they sometimes don't help, far more than choose any other reason offered in the survey. Many kids are also worried that they'll make things worse (46% say this is a reason) or that they themselves will get hurt (43%). More than a third of kids (37%) say they sometimes don't help because they are afraid other kids will make fun of them, and 22% say they sometimes don't do something kind in that situation because they don't have anything in common with the kid who was getting left out or picked on.

REASONS KIDS SOMETIMES DON'T HELP OTHERS

AMONG 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS WHO HAVE SEEN KIDS BEING PICKED ON OR LEFT OUT, REASONS THEY SOMETIMES DON'T HELP:



"I'm not sure of myself sometimes."

"I'm not sure what to do."

"I feel shy sometimes."



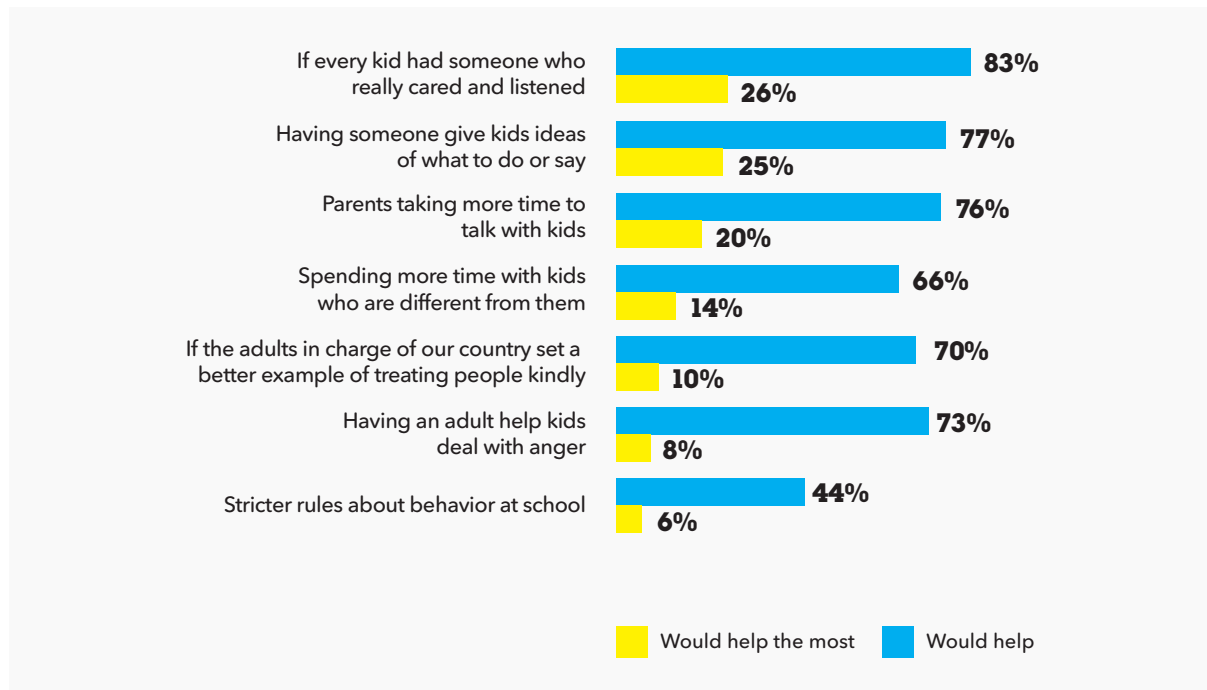
KEY FINDINGS

8. Children say there is a big role for adults to play in helping kids be kinder to one another.

The vast majority of 9- to 11-year-olds (83%) said it would help kids their age be kinder to one another if every kid had someone who really cared about and listened to them. Seventy-seven percent said it would help if there was someone who could give kids ideas about what to do or say in tough situations – a finding that resonates with the fact that so many kids say the reason they sometimes *don't* help others is because they don't know what to do or say. Seventy-six percent of children said it would help if parents took more time to talk with kids, and 70% said it would help if the adults in charge of our country set a better example of treating people kindly. Two out of three kids (66%) said it would help if they could spend more time with kids who are different from them.

WHAT WOULD HELP KIDS BE KINDER

PERCENT OF 9- TO 11-YEAR-OLDS WHO SAY EACH IDEA WOULD HELP KIDS THEIR AGE BE KINDER:



"One thing that I can think of that would make it easier for kids my age to be kinder to each other is if kids my age had more opportunities to bond and get to know each other without an adult helping."

"I think it's important for kids to learn about everyone's cultures and families. If we know more about each other, we won't judge based on our differences."

"If racism wasn't still around."



CONCLUSION

There is no question that bullying is a very real problem for children today, even those in elementary school.

While national rates of bullying appear to be trending downward, the reality is that the vast majority of 9-, 10-, and 11-year-olds still have had to grapple with the challenges bullying creates, whether as witnesses or victims. Even using a strict definition of bullying, this survey found that many young people witnessed or experienced bullying many times. We can't let up on our concern or our support for children who are confronting these issues in their daily lives.

And yet there is also another reality happening every day in elementary schools, playgrounds, and neighborhoods across this country: millions of kids report summoning the courage to go outside their comfort zones, reach out to one another, and act in kind and caring ways. The vast majority of 9- to 11-year-olds say they place a high value on caring about others; in fact, some report that "caring about others" is even more important to them than they perceive it to be to their parents. And many kids report acting on their concern for others: reaching out to help kids who've been bullied, or going out of their way to do something kind for kids who are new to their schools or neighborhoods, who are having a problem or feeling down, or who are being picked on or left out. This reality is important too.

This survey indicates that children's values matter: those who say that caring about others is very important to them are also far more likely to report having reached out to other kids. And it is perhaps the reverse of that that we need to be most concerned about: the one in four kids in this age group who don't consider caring about others to be very important, and who are far *less* likely to report engaging in acts of kindness toward others and far *more* likely to say they have bullied other kids themselves. For too many children, caring about others is subordinated to academic achieve-

ment or personal happiness. These children need our attention and our guidance.

The survey also offers important insights that can help inform adults' efforts to stop bullying before it starts. Children cite several reasons why they sometimes don't act compassionately toward others who are getting picked on or being left out. Many say they sometimes don't reach out to other kids because they aren't sure what to do or say, or are worried they'll actually make things worse. Others say it would help if adults could give kids more ideas about what to do or say in tough situations, or show kids good ways of dealing with their anger. Adults can help provide practical advice and examples on a regular basis.

One in five children say they sometimes don't reach out to other kids because they feel they don't have anything in common with the kids who are getting left out or being picked on; adults can help children bridge those divides, to see what they do have in common with one another, and to understand each other's diverse experiences.

While kids say the adults in their families and schools mostly provide good examples of how to treat people with kindness, most say the leaders of our country do not; and 70% of them say it would help kids if the adults in charge of our country set a better example. Perhaps we adults can take this to heart, both in the behavior we model, the values we embody, and the decisions we make that affect the world our kids are growing up in.

Many children say there are other important things we grown-ups can do that would help kids their age be kinder to one another. One sentiment that comes

CONCLUSION

through in this survey so clearly is that children need and want caring adults in their lives. The vast majority of kids say that if every child felt they had someone who really cared about and listened to them, they would in turn act kinder toward others. Many also said it would help kids be kinder to one another if they had more opportunities to spend time with kids who are different from them. And contrary to what we may assume, they want their parents to spend more time talking with them about the important stuff.

In sum, nurturing the values, skills, and inspiration to stop bullying before it starts is critically important. We hope this survey has helped give voice to the experiences, challenges, insights, and needs of the kids who are grappling with these challenges every day, and that it helps shed light on the ways parents, teachers, and citizens can provide a helping hand.



METHODOLOGY

This report presents the results of a nationally representative survey of 1,054 children between the ages of 9 and 11 years old. The survey was conducted online in September 2017, and was fielded by the GfK Group, using their probability-based KnowledgePanel®.

KnowledgePanel members are randomly recruited through probability-based sampling, and households are provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed. Panel members are randomly selected so that survey results can properly represent the U.S. population with a measurable level of accuracy, features that are not obtainable from nonprobability panels. GfK currently recruits panel members by using address-based sampling methods (the firm previously relied on random-digit dialing for recruitment). Households without Internet connection are provided with a web-enabled device and free Internet service. In contrast, "convenience" or "opt-in" surveys recruit participants through emails, word-of-mouth, pop-up ads online, or other non-scientific methods.

The sample for this survey includes 9-, 10-, and 11-year-olds who attend public or private schools. Home schooled children were excluded from the sample. For each child, parental permission was obtained; once the parent had consented, child consent was obtained as well. The survey was offered in English or Spanish. The final dataset is weighted to reflect benchmark distributions of children 9- to 11-years old from the March 2017 CPS Supplement Data for gender by age, race/ethnicity, school type, household income, geographic region and metro status, and language proficiency. The margin of error due to design effect at the 95% confidence level is +/- 3.7% for the full sample.

Where relevant, differences among demographic and socio-economic groups have been tested for statistical significance. Unless otherwise noted, findings are described in the text in a comparative manner (e.g.,

"more than," "less than") only if the differences are statistically significant at the level of $p < .05$. Superscripts (using letters such as *a*, *b*, or *c*) are used in tables to indicate when a result is higher than another result in that demographic category (e.g., gender) at a statistically significant level ($p < .05$). For example, findings with the superscript "c" are significantly higher than the findings in the column labeled "c" in the table.

Only children ages 9 to 11 were included in the survey. Throughout the report, we occasionally use the terms "children" or "kids" for shorthand; these terms should be understood to refer to 9- to 11-year-olds for the purposes of this report. All quotes throughout the report are from open-ended responses in the survey. The questionnaire and topline results are provided at the end of this report.

The definition of bullying used in the survey is as follows:

"Bullying is when someone repeatedly hurts someone else on purpose, such as pushing, hitting, kicking, or holding them down. It can also be when someone calls people mean names, spreads rumors about them, takes or breaks something that belongs to them, or leaves them out of activities on purpose, over and over again. Bullies are usually stronger, or have more friends or more money, or some other power over the person being bullied. Bullying can happen in person or can happen online, including cyberbullying."

This definition, based on extensive academic research and government recommendations, emphasizes the repetitive, intentional nature of bullying and the power dynamics that are often at play in bullying situations. In order to ensure that children did not skip over the

METHODOLOGY

definition, respondents were required to listen to the definition read aloud in voice-over, and the written definition remained on screen for all questions concerning bullying.

Focus groups were held to test comprehension of the survey among the youngest survey respondents. Separate groups of 9-year-old girls and 9-year-old boys were held in Phoenix, Arizona, under the direction of R. Bradley Snyder, M.P.A., Ed. M.. Participants read critical portions of the proposed survey, circled any words they didn't understand, and discussed their comprehension of the questionnaire.

The survey was designed and analyzed by Vicky Rideout of VJR Consulting, and the report was written by Ms. Rideout. The project was overseen by Tessie Topol of Topol Consulting, under the direction of Jill King, SVP of Marketing and Partnerships for Cartoon Network, and Lisa Lowy, VP of Research at the network, and in consultation with the Making Caring Common Project of the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

