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1 in 6 students is regularly bullied, survey shows

Many say it's been going on a year or more, according to new report of 500,000 kids

By **Linda Carroll**

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updated 10/20/2010 12:16:09 PM ET

Hearing about a **child** being hounded to despair — or even death — by bullies has become a tragically regular occurrence. Just last month, 18-year-old **Tyler Clementi jumped off a bridge** after his college roommate spread secretly shot video of the Rutgers freshman throughout the web. Earlier this year, 15-year-old **Phoebe Prince hung herself after months of harassment from teens** at her Massachusetts high school.



TODAY
Phoebe Prince hung herself after months of harassment from other students at her Massachusetts high school. A new survey found that the older kids were, the less likely they were to talk to parents or teachers about being bullied.

Far from being isolated events, bullying is frighteningly commonplace across the

country, according to a Clemson University study released Wednesday. In the largest survey of its kind to look at the issue, researchers surveyed 524,054 students at 1,593 schools across the nation over the last two years to get a better picture of bullying in grades three through 12.

They found that 17 percent of **kids** reported on anonymous questionnaires that they are being bullied two to three times a month or more. Of those bullied, nearly 40 percent of the girls and 45 percent of boys say it's been going on in some form — verbally, physically or online — for more than a year.

“Kids voices are so important for us as adults to hear,” says study co-author Susan Limber, a professor at the Institute on Family and

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Neighborhood Life at Clemson University, Clemson S.C. "We think we know what is going on, but when kids can express their honest opinions we are often caught off guard."

The survey found that while the number of kids being bullied went down as kids got older, the ones who were bullied in high school were the ones who had been tormented for years on end.

Older kids more likely to join in bullying

One unsettling finding from the survey showed that kids become more tolerant of bullying as they grow older. While fewer than 10 percent of boys in grades three through five say they would join in bullying a kid they don't like, almost 35 percent of the older kids say they would.

Another worrisome finding: Many kids don't believe there's a system in place to protect them, especially as they get older. For example, 30 percent of boys in grades three through five said their teacher had done little or nothing to reduce bullying, as compared to almost 60 percent of boys in grades nine through 12.

More disturbing, much of the bullying takes place in classrooms even when a teacher is present.

The result seems to be that kids become increasingly reticent to discuss bullying as they get older. The survey found that the older

kids were, the less likely they were to talk to **parents** or teachers about the bullying.

That doesn't surprise William Pollack, associate clinical professor in the department of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School and senior consultant at the National Center for Safe School Climates.

Kids can't take the lead in the fight against bullying, Pollack said. They're too vulnerable to stand up on their own.

In his own studies, Pollack has found that while many youthful bystanders would like to step in and help bullied kids, they don't feel safe doing so.

"It's not like they stood by because they were uncaring," Pollack explained. "They just didn't feel there was an adult at the school who they could come forward to who would be capable of making a change or who could protect them

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Cyber bullying not as common as thought

While cyber bullying gets a lot of attention, the survey shows that this is one of the least common forms of harassment. Fewer than 6 percent of kids said they’d experienced cyber bullying as opposed to almost 20 percent who had experienced verbal harassment

Limber hopes the study findings will spur more communities to take action against bullying. “For each one of those horrific suicides there are so, so many other kids suffering in silence with the bullying they experience every day,” she said.

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