

Children who are depressed, anxious or aggressive in first grade risk being victimized later on

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Children entering first grade with signs of depression and anxiety or excessive aggression are at risk of being chronically victimized by their classmates by third grade. That's the finding of a new longitudinal study that appears in the May/June 2009 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The study, conducted by researchers at the University of Victoria, looked at more than 400 Canadian children beginning in the autumn of first grade. The children were asked about their experiences being bullied (such as being hit, pushed, and shoved, or being teased and excluded from play). Their teachers were asked to report on the children's symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as on their displays of physical [aggression](#). The researchers returned at the end of first, second, and third grades, at which time they asked the children and their teachers to report on the same issues.

Most children (73 percent) showed few symptoms of depression and anxiety over the three years. But 7 percent of the children showed continuously high levels. The remaining 20 percent showed moderate symptoms at first, but these increased over time. Victimization by depressed and [anxious children](#) wasn't evident until third grade.

Children with more depressed and anxious symptoms in first and second grade were more likely to be victimized by third grade. Surprisingly,

children who were more aggressive at the start of first grade also were prone to [depression](#) and anxiety by third grade. These children also were more likely to be victimized by their peers, perhaps in retaliation for their own acts of aggression.

"Children's early mental [health problems](#) can set the stage for abuse by their peers," according to Bonnie J. Leadbeater, professor of psychology at the University of Victoria, who led the study. "Just as some children learn to read with greater difficulty than others and require extra assistance when they begin to lag behind their peers, young [children](#) with mental health problems show signs that they cannot manage the complex social world of elementary school. Treating children's mental health problems may go a long way toward reducing bullying."

Source: Society for Research in Child Development ([news](#) : [web](#))

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