



Creating a **Safe and Respectful Environment** in Our Nation's Classrooms

Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior

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Choose Three

Choose three of the following sentence stems and complete them. You will be sharing your responses within a small group.

1. My three all-time favorite movies are...
2. In high school, I was considered...
3. Outside of my role in education, I am good at...
4. My favorite food is...
5. My favorite fiction book is...
6. My favorite nonfiction book is...
7. The best part of being an educator is...
8. The worst part of being an educator is...
9. My favorite TV show is/was...
10. The best vacation I ever took was...
11. If I could change one thing about myself, it would be...
12. What I like best about myself is...
13. The perfect party would include...
14. The greatest strength I bring to my role as an educator is...



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Workshop Agenda

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Objectives

Participants in the workshop will:

- Understand what bullying behavior is and is not.
- Understand what bullying behavior may look like in the classroom.
- Explore ideas for responding to bullying behavior.
- Become equipped with specific strategies for addressing and reporting bullying behavior when it occurs.

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions (20 minutes)
- What Is Bullying? (15 minutes)
- What Might Bullying Behavior Look Like? (30 minutes)
- Addressing Bullying Behavior (30 minutes)
- De-escalating Bullying Behavior (20 minutes)
- Reporting Bullying Behavior and Follow-up (20 minutes)
- Review and Evaluation (10 minutes)
- Adjourn



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Facts About Bullying Behavior

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both children who are bullied and children who bully others may have serious, lasting problems.

In order to be considered bullying, the behavior must be *unwanted* and *aggressive* and include:

Imbalance of power. Children who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.

Repetition. Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.

Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

Types of Bullying

There are four types of bullying:

1. **Verbal bullying** is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes:
 - Teasing
 - Name calling
 - Inappropriate sexual comments
 - Taunting
 - Threatening to cause harm
2. **Social bullying**, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes:
 - Leaving someone out on purpose
 - Telling other children not to be friends with someone
 - Spreading rumors about someone
 - Embarrassing someone in public

3. **Physical bullying** involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes:
 - Hitting, kicking, or pinching
 - Spitting
 - Tripping or pushing
 - Taking or breaking someone's things
 - Making mean or rude hand gestures
4. **Cyberbullying** involves the use of e-mail, social network sites, cell phones, webcams, text messages, Internet sites, etc., to send mean messages, spread rumors, and post embarrassing pictures or videos and fake websites or profiles. Cyberbullying messages can:
 - Happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
 - Be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a wide audience
 - Be extremely difficult to delete

Where and When Bullying Happens

Bullying can occur during or after school hours. Although most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places such as the school playground or the school bus. It can also happen traveling to or from school, in the youth's neighborhood, or on the Internet.

Frequency of Bullying

There are two sources of federally collected data on youth bullying:

- The 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that, nationwide, 20 percent of students in Grades 9–12 experienced bullying.
- The 2008–2009 School Crime Supplement (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics) indicates that, nationwide, 28 percent of students in Grades 6–12 experienced bullying.

Source: www.stopbullying.gov



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**Warning Signs of Students Who Bully
and Those Who Are Being Bullied**

There are many warning signs that may indicate that someone is affected by bullying—either being bullied or bullying others. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying.

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It is important to talk with children who show signs of being bullied or bullying others. These warning signs can also point to other issues or problems, such as depression or substance abuse. Talking to the child can help identify the root of the problem.

Signs That a Child Is Bullying Others

Children may be bullying others if they:

- Get into physical or verbal fights.
- Have friends who bully others.
- Are increasingly aggressive.
- Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently.
- Have unexplained extra money or new belongings.
- Blame others for their problems.
- Do not accept responsibility for their actions.
- Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity.

Signs That a Child Is Being Bullied

Look for changes in the child. Be aware, however, that not all children who are bullied exhibit warning signs or will ask for help. Some signs that may point to a bullying problem are:

- Unexplainable injuries.
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or other personal items.
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches, feeling sick or faking illness.
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating, or may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares.
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school.
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations.
- Feeling of helplessness or decreased self-esteem.
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide.

If you know someone in serious distress or danger, do not ignore the problem. Get help right away.

Why Children Do Not Ask for Help

Statistics from the 2008–2009 School Crime Supplement show that an adult was notified in only about one third of bullying cases. Children do not tell adults for many reasons:

- Bullying can make a child feel helpless. Children may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or a tattletale.
- Children may fear backlash from the child or children who bullied them.
- Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Children may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether it is true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak.
- Children who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or understands.
- Children may fear being rejected by their peers. Friends can help protect children from bullying, and children can fear losing this support.

Parents, school staff, and other adults have a role to play in preventing bullying. Tips for how to talk with young people about bullying can be found at <http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/talking-about-it/index.html>.

Sources: www.stopbullying.gov and *Right to Be Safe* (Meehan)



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Strategies for Addressing Bullying Behavior at School

How you respond can make an impact on bullying behavior immediately and over time. When responding to bullying, it is important to use the most effective strategies.

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Note: Numbers within parentheses refer to the source of the information presented in the handout. See the citation list at the end of the Trainer's Outline for this module.

What Does NOT Work

Four commonly used strategies to reduce or prevent bullying have been proved to be ineffective against bullying behavior (6).

1. Group treatment for children who bully does not work because:
 - The group becomes an audience for students who bully to brag about their exploits.
 - Other group members can serve as negative role models for one another, in some cases even learning from one another who to bully.
2. Simple, short-term solutions have been proved ineffective because:
 - Bullying is a long-term, often-repeated problem.
 - A workshop or assembly can help identify what bullying looks like and ways to respond, but teachers and students also need support and time to practice and master these skills.
 - Bullying is primarily a relationship problem, and longer term strategies are needed to help students and teachers experience supportive and affirming relationships within a caring school climate.
3. Conflict resolution and peer mediation strategies send the wrong message because:
 - Bullying is a form of peer abuse—not conflict between peers of equal power and control.
 - The strategies may further victimize the student who has been bullied.
 - Such strategies incorrectly expect the student who has been bullied or abused to solve his or her own abuse.
 - Sessions and meetings become other opportunities for the bullying behavior to be repeated.

4. Zero tolerance policies do not help solve bullying because:
 - Although bullying behavior is *never* tolerated, this strategy fails to recognize that bullying behavior is not a permanent characteristic of the student who did the bullying.
 - Bullying is a behavior that can be changed and replaced with more positive prosocial behavior.
 - Nearly 20 percent of students are involved in bullying other students, so it is not realistic to suspend or expel 20 percent of any student body.
 - Students who are involved in bullying behavior are suspended or expelled when they may benefit most from continued exposure to positive prosocial role models and a caring school climate.

What DOES Work

There are simple steps that adults can take to keep children safe.

1. Stop bullying on the spot.

Take these steps:

- Intervene immediately. It is okay to get another adult to help.
- Separate the children involved.
- Make sure that everyone is safe.
- Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
- Stay calm. Reassure the children involved, including bystanders.
- Model respectful behavior when you intervene.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Do not ignore it. Do not think children can work it out without adult help.
- Do not immediately try to sort out the facts.
- Do not force other children to say publicly what they saw.
- Do not question the children involved in front of other children.
- Do not talk to the children involved together—talk to them only separately.
- Do not make the children involved apologize or patch up relations on the spot.

Get police help or medical attention immediately if:

- A weapon is involved.
- There are threats of serious physical injury.
- There are threats of hate-motivated violence, such as racism or homophobia.
- There is serious bodily harm.
- There is sexual abuse.
- Anyone is accused of an illegal act, such as robbery or extortion—using force to get money, property, or services.

2. Find out what happened.

Get the facts:

- Separate all of the involved students.
- Get the story from several sources, both adults and students.
- Listen without blaming.
- Do not call the act “bullying” while you are trying to understand what happened.

Determine if it is bullying:

- What is the history between the students involved? Have there been past conflicts?
- Is there a power imbalance? Remember that imbalance is not limited to physical strength. It is sometimes not easily recognized. If the targeted student feels like there is a power imbalance, there probably is.
- Has this happened before? Is the student worried that it will happen again?
- Have the students dated? There are special responses for teen dating violence.
- Are any of the students involved in a gang? Gang violence has different interventions.

3. Support the students involved.

Support the students who are bullied:

- Listen to and focus on the student.
- Assure the student that bullying is not his or her fault.
- Know that students who are bullied may struggle with talking about it.
- Give advice about what to do.
- Work together to resolve the situation and protect the bullied student.
- Be persistent.
- Follow up.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Never tell the student to ignore the bullying.
- Do not blame the student for being bullied. Even if he or she provoked the bullying, no one deserves to be bullied.
- Do not tell the student to physically fight back against the student who is bullying. It could get the student hurt, suspended, or expelled.
- Parents should resist the urge to contact the other parents involved. It may make matters worse.

Address bullying behavior:

- Make sure the student knows what the problem behavior is.
- Show students that bullying is taken seriously.
- Work with the student to understand some of the reasons why he or she is bullied.
- Use consequences to teach.
- Involve the student who bullied in making amends or repairing the situation.
- Avoid strategies that do not work or have negative consequences.
- Follow up.

Support bystanders who witness bullying:

- Spend time with the students being bullied at school. Talk with them, sit with them at lunch, or play with them at recess.
- Listen to them.
- Call, at home, the student being bullied to offer encouragement and give advice.
- Tell an adult who you trust, like your teacher or coach. You can tell him or her in person or leave a note.
- Set a good example. Do not bully others.
- Send a text message or at a later time go up to the student who was being bullied and say, “That wasn’t cool” and “I’m here for you.”
- Help the student being bullied get away from the situation.
- Help the student being bullied tell an adult.
- Take away the audience by choosing not to watch and walk away.
- Be kind at another time to the student being bullied.
- Tell the student being bullied that you do not like the bullying and ask if you can do anything to help.

Respond to the student doing the bullying:

- Tell the student doing the bullying that you do not like it and to stop doing it (but only if it feels safe to do so).
- Distract the student doing the bullying or offer an escape for the student being bullied by saying something like, “Mr. Smith needs to see you right now” or “Come on, we need you for our game” (but only if it feels safe to do so).
- Do not combat violence with violence. It takes a lot of courage for someone to step up on behalf of a bullied student. Do not, however, use insults or physical violence to defend the student being bullied. Now is not the time to show off. You will most likely only make it more difficult for the student.
- Do not get discouraged if you have already talked to the teachers and nothing happened. Keep trying. Teachers and other school authorities will respond if they find out that the bullying is becoming a recurring problem. Try talking to other teachers and counselors so that you can get more people involved in trying to stop the situation.
- If you feel that this is none of your business, put yourself in the shoes of the student being bullied. Bullying can cause severe anxiety, depression, anger, and frustration and can turn the bullied student’s life into a nightmare. You would not want to feel that way.
- Look for opportunities to contribute to the anti-bullying culture of your school through creating posters, stories, or films.

Sources: www.stopbullying.gov and *Right to Be Safe* (Meehan)



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Techniques for De-escalating Student Behavior*

Verbal de-escalation techniques are appropriate when no weapon is present and should be used in ways that are consistent with your school's policies regarding addressing student behaviors. Reasoning with an enraged person is not possible. The first and only objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level of arousal so that discussion becomes possible.

It is important to appear centered and calm even when we do not feel that way. It will help to practice these techniques before they are needed so they become "second nature."

Maintain control of yourself and your emotions:

- Appear calm, centered, and self-assured. This will help everyone stay calmer, too.
- Use a modulated, low tone of voice.
- Do not be defensive—even if the comments or insults are directed at you, they are not about you. Do not defend yourself or anyone else from insults, curses, or misconceptions about their roles.
- Call on a colleague, an administrator, security, or the police if you need more help.
- Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help. The agitated student is very sensitive to feeling shamed and disrespected. We want the student to know that it is not necessary to show us that he or she should be respected. We automatically treat the student with dignity and respect.

Communicate effectively nonverbally:

- Allow extra physical space between you and the student—about four times your usual distance. Anger and agitation can fill the extra space between you and the student.
- Get at the same eye level (kneel, sit, or stoop as needed) and maintain constant eye contact. Allow the student to break his or her gaze and look away if need be.
- Do not point or shake your finger.
- Do not touch the student—even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. Physical contact could easily be misinterpreted as hostile or threatening.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets, up and available to protect yourself, and stand at an angle to the student.

The de-escalation discussion:

- Remember that there is no content except trying to calmly bring the level of arousal down to a safer place.
- Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming student. Wait until he or she takes a breath; then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.
- Respond selectively; answer only informational questions no matter how rudely asked, (e.g., “Why do I have to do what you say?”). *Do not* answer abusive questions (e.g., “Why are all teachers jerks?”). This question should get no response whatsoever.
- Explain limits and rules in an authoritative, firm, but always respectful tone. Give choices where possible in which both alternatives are safe ones (e.g., “Would you like to continue our meeting calmly or would you prefer to stop now and come back tomorrow when things can be more relaxed?”).
- Empathize with feelings but not with the behavior (e.g., “I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to threaten me or other students.”).
- Do not solicit how the student is feeling or interpret feelings in an analytic way.
- Do not argue or try to convince.
- Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate (e.g., “Would you like to change seats?”).
- Give the consequences of inappropriate behavior without threats or anger.
- Represent external controls as institutional rather than personal.

Trust your instincts. There is nothing magic about talking someone down. You are transferring your sense of calm, respectful, clear limit setting to the agitated student in the hope that he or she actually wishes to respond positively to your respectful attention. Do not be a hero, and do not try de-escalation if a student has a weapon. In that case, simply cooperate.

*Used by permission. Adapted from Skolnik-Acker, E. (2008). *Verbal de-escalation techniques for defusing or talking down an explosive situation*. Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers, Massachusetts Chapter, Committee for the Study and Prevention of Violence Against Social Workers.



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Responding to and Reporting Bullying Behavior

School staff is bound ethically and in many cases legally to respond to reports of bullying behavior. It is important to respond to reports of bullying whether you witness the behavior or a student reports it to you. It is also important to respond appropriately to a situation. In some cases, it is possible that what occurred is not bullying, but in order to respond appropriately you need to carefully research and document allegations.

To help ensure a safe and orderly environment while responding to and then following up on incidents, your school's Student Code of Conduct should always guide you. Whether a bullying incident is witnessed or reported by a student, you can follow these simple guidelines called **The Five Rs**.*

Respond—When bullying is reported to you or witnessed by you, you must respond and intervene immediately, making sure that everyone is safe. You want to model respectful behavior when you intervene and reassure the student who has been bullied that what has happened is not his or her fault. Always ask the student, “What do you need from me?” This may help you determine some of your next steps, including what kind of follow-up is needed.

Research—It is important to document what the allegations are and to try to capture information from as many sources as possible, including bystanders, about what happened. Using their exact language, write down exactly what students say happened. It may also be helpful to try to find out whether anything happened that might have led to the incident. An important part of your research is to determine whether the incident was indeed bullying or another kind of negative or aggressive interaction.

Record—Good documentation will provide what is needed to write a thorough, accurate, and helpful report. Collect and save everything in a folder. In some cases, like cyberbullying, there may be things like text messages, pictures, or e-mails that should be copied and saved for attachment to a report.

Report—Just like responding to the incident itself, writing and filing a formal report of a bullying incident should always be guided by your school's policies and Student Code of Conduct. Your school will probably have its own forms for writing and filing a report. After thorough research and while reviewing your school's Student Code of Conduct, this report is where you would make a determination as to whether an incident is bullying or some other form of behavior.

Revisit—After a plan has been developed for both the student who was bullied and the student who engaged in bullying behavior, it will be important for you to follow up with each student to check and see how things are going. You want to find out if anything has changed, if the plans put into place are working (or not), and if anything else needs to be done. Follow-up gives you a chance to gather more information, and it lets all of the students involved know that there is continued adult support for them.

Guidelines for a Good Report

Your school's policies probably require you to file a report or discipline referral on any bullying incidents that occur. If your school does not have an incident form, visit <http://www.bjparis.org/educators.html> for samples.

Note: Numbers within parentheses refer to the source of the information presented in the handout. See the citation list at the end of the Trainer's Outline for this module.

When developing your reports, here are some general guidelines (3):

- Fill out reports completely and legibly.
- Use referrals judiciously and properly.
- If you witness an incident, report what occurred along with what else you learned in your investigation.
- Report what you observed as accurately and specifically as possible.
- If you did not witness the incident, in your investigation, report on what all of the young people told you they saw and heard.
- Unless school policy expressly forbids, it is best to write down the actual language a student said (including curse words) so that administrators, parents, and others who may be involved understand exactly what was said and what happened.
- Avoid editorial comments (e.g., "Suzy is just like her brother! In fact, the whole family is a problem.>").
- If relevant, briefly explain how a student's behavior was dangerous to himself or herself or other students—stress the "S-word" (safety).
- Your school may also have a system for documenting issues to help manage student behavior or use in preparing for letters or meetings with parents, students, and other school officials.

* The Five Rs are used by permission of Barbara-Jane Paris, principal at Canyon Vista Middle School, Round Rock Independent School District, Austin, Texas (www.bjparis.org). Some of this material has been combined with content from www.stopbullying.gov.



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Evaluation Form

Date: _____

Trainer: _____

Thank you for participating in the workshop. Your answers to the questions on this brief form will help us improve the workshop for others.

Choose only *one* answer for each question.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
This workshop effectively...					
1. Provided a clear definition of bullying and what it might look like.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Introduced warning signs to help me better identify students who bully and those students who are being bullied.	5	4	3	2	1
3. Provided clear ideas and strategies for addressing a range of bullying behaviors.	5	4	3	2	1
4. Equipped me to de-escalate student behaviors that may become hostile and aggressive.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Provided helpful guidelines for completing an effective referral or report.	5	4	3	2	1
The presenter...					
6. Possessed a solid knowledge of the subject matter.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Helped me understand the importance of my role in addressing bullying behavior.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Encouraged me try something new in dealing with or preventing bullying behavior.	5	4	3	2	1
Overall...					
9. The quality of this presentation was excellent.	5	4	3	2	1
10. After attending this workshop, I feel better prepared to deal with bullying behavior.	5	4	3	2	1

Additional comments:

I have worked in schools for:

- 0–5 years 6–10 years 11–20 years More than 20 years

Thank you! Please return your completed form to the trainer.

