



Addressing Bullying Prevention in the Classroom: Tips for Educators

To reduce and prevent bullying, research shows that a school-wide approach, including intervention in the classroom, is considered best practice. This Tip Sheet is designed to help educators include bullying prevention and intervention in their classrooms.

Intervention in classrooms is crucial

Regularly scheduled class meetings where students discuss positive peer relationships help to reduce social problems such as bullying. These class meetings can help to create a positive learning and social climate so that bullying is less likely to occur. Class meetings also make it easier for teachers to address behavior problems that may interfere with students' learning because there is a weekly time for students to interact and talk together.

Intervening in the classroom is effective because it reaches all students—many of whom are bystanders to bullying behaviors. Addressing the group as a whole creates the sense of a school-wide community in which everyone is held responsible for their behavior and bullying prevention. Class meetings have other benefits beyond the topic of group dynamics: the meetings have been shown to improve the attitudes, behaviors, and academic achievements of students.

Class meetings provide a stepping stone to integrate bullying prevention into the whole school community. Here are some tips for implementing class meetings at your school:

- *Dedicate a regular time (preferably weekly) for class meetings.* These weekly meetings, about the length of a class period, are most successful at reducing bullying when they occur on a regular

basis rather than intermittently or for only a few weeks at a time. These meetings can consist of either student-led or teacher-guided discussions and include more structured concepts and lessons about bullying

- *Allow time for students to discuss peer relationships.* Emphasize the importance of students' relationships to each other: everyone should feel welcome and be treated with dignity and respect. This promotes a more positive class climate and can promote a sense of empathy and responsibility among students, so they are more likely to step in to assist their peers.
- *Ensure that school-wide policies and procedures are in place* to protect vulnerable students, to reward those who stand up for others in positive (not aggressive) ways, and to discipline those students who bully.
- *Simple, clear rules communicate expectations:* students should not bully, students should help students who are bullied, and students need to tell an adult about bullying situations. Post school rules and policies and discuss them with students, parents and all school personnel. Enforce the rules: students need to know there are consequences for bullying others.
- *Emphasize the positive roles that bystanders can play.* Students may need incentives and social supports to be active bystanders, or to speak up in support of a bullied peer. Be sure students have opportunities to practice possible solutions to bullying situations and to evaluate the pros and cons of different responses.

- *Encourage students to reflect on their own behavior, to envision choices, and to understand how their actions affect consequences and outcomes.* This helps them to see possible solutions to bullying situations, practice actions in safe settings, and apply those actions when they are needed.
- Write a poem or essay about personal experiences with bullying. (English/Language Arts/Literacy)
- Use literature and videos to discuss a character's responses to bullying or difficulties with peer relationships. Focus on how they responded and evaluate the choices they made. (English/Language Arts/Literacy)

Beyond the basics: Include bullying content within existing curriculum

Although class meetings are an important tool in any bullying prevention effort, incorporating discussions about bullying prevention themes into multiple subject areas helps reinforce the message. Most students are motivated to talk about broader social issues when they can relate concepts to their own experiences. That personal connection can also help students stay engaged in academic activities. In addition, when social topics are carried into daily classroom work, students see that dealing with these issues is not limited to a certain time or place, and it helps facilitate changes in attitude that contribute to an improved school climate.

Including bullying in academic subjects does not need to be either difficult or time-consuming for educators. Teachers may want to consult curriculum support materials such as those listed below, but there are many opportunities to incorporate bullying content into all subject areas—in ways that naturally align with academic curriculum standards.

Bullying-specific content includes topics such as: definition and types of bullying, its effects and motivation, hot spots where bullying is likely to occur, roles of participants (including bystanders), school rules and policies about bullying, strategies for intervening, and how courage plays a role in student involvement, to name just a few. Here are a few easy-to-implement ideas (see e.g., Flerx et al., 2009a, 2009b):

- Gather information about people who demonstrate the traits of active bystanders; discuss how they showed courage to overcome challenges they faced. (Social Studies, Sciences, Literature, Arts)
- Investigate and document specific types of bullying, hot spots, myths or perceptions about bullying, or bystander behavior in different settings. (Math, Science, Health, Psychology)
- Examine the roles that gender and gender stereotypes play in bullying. (Health/Human Growth and Development, Social Science)
- Create new rules for choosing teams or groups that promote inclusiveness and prevent students from being marginalized. (Physical Education and all subjects)
- Use bullying prevention as a theme to inspire artwork, posters, plays, public service announcements, or music. (Fine Arts/Music/Drama/Visual Arts)
- Maximize the advantages of group work. Structure each group project to help students get to know each other better, set guidelines for working together effectively, and establish contingencies for dealing with conflicts. Assign roles that make the most of diverse individual talents (rather than reinforcing social hierarchies). (Multiple subject areas)

Taking a broader approach: Next steps to integrating bullying prevention

Bullying prevention efforts with students should include content focused on team-building, communication, feelings, peer relationships, stereotypes and prejudice, social responsibility, and gender issues, as well as bullying. Using the points of connection between this broader bullying prevention content and academic curricula being taught provides many advantages for students and educators. Bullying prevention in the broadest sense is about creating a positive school climate.

Here are some examples of broader bullying prevention themes and sample questions that connect them to academic content:

- **Team-Building:** How do groups like families, athletic teams, the military, businesses, or governments build cooperation and teamwork among themselves? Compare and contrast ways different leadership styles affect performance, relationships, and social climate.
- **Communities:** How do privilege, class, and other factors affect how different groups are treated within different societies?
- **Feelings:** What are the challenges of being a teen or tween today? How does the experience of today's youth compare with those from another generation?
- **Communication:** What policies do social networking sites have about cyberbullying and behavior that crosses the line to illegal acts? How do these policies affect users' Constitutional rights?
- **Peer Relationships:** Is it better in the long run to be "popular" or "nice?" What personal qualities are needed to succeed at work and in social relationships?

- **Respecting Differences:** What are examples of individuals who have used their personal differences to become agents for social change?
- **Social Norms and Values:** How do traditions and groups at our school reflect social norms and values in our culture? What are ways that other cultures define what it means to be "different"?
- **Stereotypes/Privilege/Prejudice:** How do media stereotypes about gender and appearance affect student attitudes about each other?
- **Problem-Solving/Critical Thinking:** What are the short- and long-term advantages or disadvantages of standing up for others? What are some examples in society when actions have had positive or negative effects?
- **Tolerance/Acceptance:** How have our views about the roles of women, people of other races and religions changed over the last generation? What are examples of students your age being more accepting—or less tolerant—of differences?

This approach has three advantages. First, many topics and themes are embedded within each of these broad bullying prevention concepts, providing virtually endless opportunities to enrich learning about both bullying prevention and academic content. This allows educators a greater breadth of material from which to draw and reinforce concepts through multiple learning modalities.

Second, when bullying prevention concepts are woven throughout the curriculum, students sense being part of a caring community where relationships are important—everyone is engaged and available to help address social and emotional problems, including bullying.

Finally, when bullying prevention content is seamlessly incorporated into academics, it is easier to sustain over time because it is not an “add on.”

When teachers communicate and coordinate their plans across disciplines, students have a more cohesive learning experience.

References and Resources

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www.adl.com/education. See (Anti Defamation League) World of Difference Institute and Curriculum Connections.

www.TeachingTolerance.org. See Classroom Activities, Teaching Kits, and Resources.