



Kansas State University
Agricultural Experiment Station
and Cooperative Extension Service

YOUTH VIOLENCE: BEGINNING WITH BULLYING

Teaching and Information Guide

Session is approximately one hour, including discussion and stretch break

Materials: Fact sheet MF-2412, teaching/information guide MF-2413, newsprint and markers, other resources as selected by the leader.

Purpose

The “Youth Violence: Beginning With Bullying” lesson is the third in a series dealing with youth violence. Primarily based on findings by Dr. Dan Olweus, professor of psychology, Bergen University, Norway, an international researcher on bullying and its prevention, the publication:

- a. defines bullying;
- b. lists factors that contribute to bullying;
- c. illustrates various forms of bullying, and how the bully-victim-bystander connect to the bullying behavior;
- d. provides youth, parents and involved adults with practical beginning steps to reduce and prevent bullying;
- e. encourages follow-up and community action.

Leader’s Message

“Beginning With Bullying” is best co-taught with a representative from a youth-serving organization (e.g., school, 4-H club, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, SADD, YMCA, etc.) so the material connects to the community. As with any co-teaching experience, it must be planned and practiced so leaders are comfortable with content, group interaction, and with the likelihood that personal examples of bullying may be shared. A topic such as bullying can elicit emotion and strong memories, so leaders should know where in the community to refer participants for additional information, support or resources. Don’t allow judgments or blaming to consume discussion time; it is during the group’s discussion that most of the learning will occur.

To lead this session it is useful to:

- Adapt the material to the needs of the group and to the leader’s own interactive teaching style. Make it relevant to the situation, and bring in additional resources from schools, youth organizations, service clubs, law enforcement, etc.
- Involve youth in preparing for the session. Get their perspective. There is no better way to build bridges with youth than to involve and learn from them.
- Consider the personal attitudes and experiences that everyone brings to the bullying discussion. If the topic “hits too close to home” for the leader, maybe it should be taught by someone else.
- Be prepared for some in the group to reveal personal bullying experiences— as victim or bully. Be prepared for the group to want to take definitive steps toward community awareness and bullying prevention.

Bullying, once accepted as mere schoolyard horseplay, can become a serious problem when it escalates to physical violence, sometimes becoming lethal. The bully and victim are often entangled in a hurtful relationship that parents might be at a loss to stop.

This intervention program provides parents and caring adults with information on the connection between bullying and youth violence, its possible origins and how it can be effectively decreased, stopped and prevented. References about quality anti-bullying programs are given for those who wish to help develop a comprehensive bullying prevention effort.

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Youth Violence: Beginning With Bullying

Are name-calling, intentional tripping, telling jokes that humiliate, shunning an outcast from a group, and shouting threats just part of growing up? Are they innocent, youthful pranks that everyone experiences and gets over? Talk to any adult, ask any teen, and you'll discover that wounds from childhood bullying create emotional scars that aren't easily forgotten. Those scars can shape the friends we have, the activities we choose, the way we approach new experiences, or the dreams we have given up. Few memories are as vivid as the school bully demeaning his/her victim in front of a crowd of bystanders who contribute to the abuse by their neutrality and indifference. One might wonder what ever became of the bully. Did the victim ever "get back" at him/her? Why didn't somebody do something to stop it?

(Teaching Tip: Request participants to think about bullying experiences they have had. Do they remember the fear of seeing a bully? Do they remember the bystanders who witnessed the bullying? Did they ever wonder why something wasn't done to stop the bully? Is bullying happening in the community now?)

Bullying in the Community

How Much of a Problem?

Young bullies tend to grow up to become adult bullies. Aggression, frustration and intimidation can become so ingrained that once the pattern is set it is difficult to change.

- A 22-year University of Illinois-Chicago study found that young bullies had a one-in-four chance of having a criminal record by age 30. Other children have about a one-in-20 chance of becoming adult criminals.
- A University of Michigan study spanning 35 years found that children who, at age 8, were named by their schoolmates as bullies were often bullies throughout their lives.
- Dr. Dan Olweus, an international leader in the study of bullying and victimization, found that 60 percent of Norwegian boys characterized as bullies in sixth through ninth grades had been convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24, compared to 23 percent of boys who were not characterized as bullies.
- Olweus estimates that, across most nations, 15 percent of children are involved in bully-victim problems, either as bully or victim.
- It is estimated that about 9 percent of children are victims and between 6 and 7 percent bully repeatedly.
- Children at younger ages are more often victimized by bullying. The number of victims decreases with age, but the number of bullies usually remains constant.

(Teaching Tip: Encourage reflection on these statistics and studies. Is there comment or surprise related to this information? How do these numbers relate to what is happening now in the community?)

It's Just Not a School Problem

Though most schools have active anti-bullying programs and teach conflict-resolution skills, communities are slow to recognize that bullying can—and does—happen off school grounds. Unfortunately, even some adult behavior may discount all the positive anti-bullying work done in schools. A quick observation during some community sporting events, company picnics and block parties might reveal adults bullying co-workers, humiliating spouses, and modeling bullying by demeaning a child's performance on the ball field. Organizations, volunteers, citizens and families must become informed and active in bullying awareness and prevention to help schools and communities succeed in providing a safe place for children to learn, grow and thrive. As members of communities, we must understand the price we all pay for youth violence.

(Teaching Tip: Some of the session's participants may believe common myths about bullying. Consider creating a simple game or true/false quiz to involve participants in the learning about the myths and facts of bullying.)



The Bullying Triangle: Bully, Victim and Bystanders

The Bully:

Bullies tend to be confident, aggressive, have a strong need to dominate others, and lack empathy for their victim. Bullies often come from homes where there is poor adult supervision, and either active or subtle encouragement of aggressive behavior (e.g., “If someone shoves you, you shove back—only harder.”) In the early development of the bully-prone child, their home life probably lacked emotional warmth and involvement, permitted aggressive behavior, and included physical punishment and violent emotional outbursts from adults. As the child bully grows to adolescence, parents are likely to be uninvolved. During the teen years, bullying within youth organizations becomes less frequent, but what takes its place is more serious. By high school, the bully has developed a group or gang alliance. Followers or “henchmen” of lead bullies usually do not initiate bullying, but do participate in it. Unless new behaviors are learned and adopted, bullies continue their actions throughout their lives. They bully their mates, their children and possibly their co-workers.

The Victim:

Bullies usually are not popular with their peers, but they seldom reach the low level of popularity that characterizes victims. Victims of bullying are typically unhappy children who are fearful, anxious and have lower self-esteem. They often see themselves as failures, stupid or unattractive. Some victims may try to avoid school to escape the bullying. Others become so distressed they attempt suicide.

Victims tend to be quiet, timid children with limited skills to make and keep friends. When attacked by other children, they commonly cry and withdraw. They either do not report the bullying, or they wait a very long time before doing so. They are seen as “safe” targets. The reasons for not reporting incidents include feelings of shame, fear of retaliation, or fear that adults will not protect them. Victims are usually passive and submissive. But at times they may purposely behave in ways that create tension. Sometimes this behavior may look like hyperactivity and, if it aggravates the bully in class or a group, others may believe that the victim “asked for it.”

Olweus found that bullying victimization decreases with age, from second through ninth grade. However, even at age 23, victims of childhood bullying were more likely to be depressed and have poorer self-esteem than their non-bullied friends.

Bystanders:

Though bullying incidents usually last less than 60 seconds, and most are neither seen nor reported, bullying may still cause anxiety and fear for the bystander who knows it is happening. In one study, bystanders were involved (e.g. watching or intervening) in 85 percent of the incidents. Children who observe aggressive behavior and see no negative consequences for the bully might be more likely to use aggression in the future. Some bystanders even look up to bullies because they are powerful and do what they want to get their way. This could also be related to the fear of retaliation bystanders feel, or their lack of understanding about bullying and the pain it creates.

Olweus’ research has confirmed the “enabling” role the passive supporter of bullying plays by failing to take a stand. Although children may recognize the negative effects of physical violence, they may not understand the damage caused by rejecting, ignoring, isolating, terrorizing or corrupting—five forms of emotional abuse, according to Dr. James Garbarino of Cornell University. When children come to understand that these actions are a part of bullying, young people might be kinder or might even stop some abuse.

(Teaching Tip: Take a break. Have participants stretch before the final portion of “Beginning with Bullying.” Discussions of serious and potentially dangerous issues can be emotionally and physically draining. Let participants know that solutions and prevention will be discussed next.)

Working Together to Stop Bullying: Community, Bystander, Family, Victim and Bully

Before bullying is stopped, three elements are necessary:

1. The environment, setting, community where the bullying is taking place (e.g., school, youth club, home, etc.) must be positive and non-hostile.
2. Adults must be positive role models, monitor child behaviors, and establish and maintain firm limits on aggressive behavior.
3. When rules are violated, immediate, nonaggressive, nonphysical sanctions (not merely punishment) must be consistently applied.

The Community

Bullying doesn't "just happen" when a child enters the school building or joins a youth group. Effective prevention requires a whole community approach. Communities can provide "sails" or "jails" for children (Fried & Fried, 1996). There can be recreation centers, youth groups, religious activities, community service opportunities and caring neighborhoods in lieu of building more jail cells for youthful violent offenders. First, communities and youth organizations must recognize bullying as a potential problem and then determine how serious it is. Conversations with children and youth organization leaders, notice of children's behavior, checking out hunches and a simple (anonymous) survey of youth can determine the scope of the bullying problem.

If bullying is found to be a problem, communities must mobilize. Establishing a steering committee with a specific organization or the entire community might be the next step. Steering committees can: collect data and information, identify individuals who should join the effort, engage other groups (e.g., PTO, Scout Councils, 4-H clubs, religious groups, etc.), organize and provide information and materials, involve the media, bring up the subject at social gatherings, identify successes, encourage others to join the cause, and help set nonviolent expectations for behavior. Keep in mind that one-shot campaigns, though useful at increasing attention about bullying, do little or nothing to help stop and prevent bullying. Efforts must be continuous and long-term, since children and families are always joining the community.

The Bystanders

Involving other children or youth in anti-bullying efforts requires discussion, use of conflict-resolution and peace-making skills, and their assumption of responsibility for indifference toward or support of bullying. Positive peer pressure can be used to help set and maintain a caring environment, apply rules, teach and sustain appropriate behaviors and support the victim.

Positive discussions that give bullies insight into their harmful behavior can be effective, but discussions without follow-through are not enough. Bullying behavior can be monitored, corrected and converted with the help of peers.

One of the most effective ways to draw attention to and reduce bullying is to help children and youth commit to anti-bullying rules. Declaring "no-bullying" zones, mentoring younger children in conflict-resolution skills, and encouraging youth to develop and sign "no-taunting/no bullying" pledges adds to the personal commitment against aggression and cruelty.

(Teaching Tip: Review the "No Taunting/No Bullying" pledge. Remind participants that it is included in their handout to use at home and youth groups.)

"No-Taunting/No-Bullying" pledges can include simple statements such as:

1. I will not bully others.
2. I will try to help others who are bullied.
3. I will make it a point to include ALL children who are easily left out.
4. I will set an example as a caring person, will not let my words and actions hurt others, will encourage others do to the same.
5. When I know somebody is being bullied, we will tell an adult.*

* This rule also applies to victims of bullying.

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The Families of Victims and Bullies

The families of both the victim and the bully can do a great deal to correct, and prevent, bullying.

Victims' Families Can:

1. Search for talents and skills to develop in their child.
2. Help the child meet new friends in new environments.
3. Encourage the child to contact calm and friendly children in the classroom, youth group, sports team. Due to earlier failures, this may take support and patience.
4. Encourage the child to participate in physical activities to improve physical coordination and increase self-control.
5. Have the child think about the role they play in (or how they contribute to) the bullying. How would they do things differently next time?
6. Help the child develop nonaggressive assertiveness skills. Talk to parents of the child's friends, and set up a network of friends who will support each other. If the bully is told "no" by the victim, and is clearly supported by friends, the bully's power soon disappears.

Bullies' Families Can:

1. Stop and think before taking action. Bullying is a learned behavior. Watch how siblings and adults in the family act toward the child.
2. Help the bully learn how to handle anger. Help children understand why they bully and pledge to stop "picking" on someone one day at a time.
3. Make it clear to the child they take bullying seriously and will not tolerate it.
4. Develop family rules that include frequent praise and recognition when their child chooses not to use aggression.
5. Spend more time with the child and monitor activities. Find out who the child's friends are and how they spend their time. Is the child in "bad company"?
6. Teach their child how to resolve conflicts without aggression. Use opportunities to discuss how a person in a movie or favorite TV show feels about things happening to them. Help them understand that we are all responsible for the effect our words and actions have on others.
7. Build on and recognize the child's talents and skills—this is the foundation for more positive and less aggressive behavior.
Remember to celebrate victories and support failures, and help the child grow to be a responsible and respectful adult.

(Teaching Tip: Conclude "Beginning with Bullying" with a call for action. Encourage participants to develop a list of things that would be useful in stopping bullying before it starts. Help participants identify steps they can take to make bullying prevention a reality. Encourage participants to become committed through an action plan.)

Pure Prevention: Barrier to Bullying

Communities, families, schools and individuals can build a barrier to bullying through pure prevention by:

- strengthening families through parent education, parent networks, and parent information accessible in convenient locations;
- intervening early in the life of an aggressive child through violence/conflict prevention education in early grades, pre-school, and through home-visits that teach parenting, child development and basic health practices to new parents;
- teaching pro-social skills, problem-solving, empathy, conflict resolution, friend-making, self-responsibility and self-respect in the early years of children's lives.



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