

# ImprovBoston

## ImprovBoston Anti-Bullying Information/Curriculum

- In recent years, the problem of bullying in schools has become widely recognised, especially by teachers. The task of countering bullying is everybody's business. Before a child starts school, bullying behaviour is largely the responsibility of parents. Later that responsibility is shared with teachers.

### The Stages of Bullying

In order to help with bully/victim problems, it is useful for educators to identify how bullying begins, who are commonly targeted and what the outcomes may be.

#### Beginnings

A child or a group of children is targeted by peers more powerful than they are. They may be bigger, stronger, more able to hurt another verbally, more popular or well supported and more able to exclude others.

#### The Target

Although any child may become a victim of bullying, children are more likely to be bullied if they are physically weak, introverted, timid, anxious and unassertive, or if they belong to a group against which there is such prejudice that they can be isolated. This could include belonging to a racial or religious minority or being disabled.

#### Outcomes

How or whether the bullying continues depends on a number of factors. These include:

- The degree of imbalance between the person doing the bullying and the victim. It is especially difficult for a child to resist a group or a more powerful individual. Even so, with appropriate advice and support for vulnerable children the imbalance can often be reduced.
- The strategies available to the victim:
  - being able to respond assertively or (if appropriate) nonchalantly
  - being able to avoid threatening situations
  - seeking (and receiving) effective help from others.
- The way bystanders behave in the situation,
  - by encouraging the bullying

- by passively standing by and seemingly condoning the bullying
- by actively helping the victim.
- Whether staff recognise what is happening and intervene appropriately.
- The actions subsequently taken by teachers with those who have been involved in the bullying.

### **The Impact of Bullying**

Bullying can have serious consequences for children who are repeatedly bullied and for those who persist in bullying others. Those not directly involved in bully/victim problems at school can also be affected.

Those children experiencing frequent bullying can suffer these effects:

- loss of self-esteem which can persist for years after the bullying stops
- increasing isolation, without friends, alienation and distrust of others
- depression and, in extreme cases, thoughts of suicide
- absenteeism commonly increases; the ability to concentrate may be reduced and school work may deteriorate
- families may be affected; they may become distraught, hostile towards the school or centre that their child attends, and desperate to find a solution
- in some cases, the bullied child may contemplate revenge and feel justified in attacking others.

Those who bully others:

- unless helped to change, may persist in abusing their power over others in their adolescent and adult years and become a danger to others in the workplace and in their homes
- are deprived of the satisfaction and happiness that comes from cooperating with others on an equal basis.

Other Children:

- Children who neither bully nor are victimised often feel threatened and insecure when they observe bullying occurring.
- Their freedom is limited as they must be on their guard from being attacked themselves, and they may feel saddened or upset by what they see going on around them. Verbal bullying such as name-calling and indirect bullying, such as exclusion, can be at least as harmful as physical bullying.

We can identify skills that are helpful to:

- prevent children from being bullied
- enable children to help others who are being bullied or have been bullied
- make it less likely that children will turn to bullying to get their own way.

### **Skills to prevent children from being bullied:**

No one can be completely 'bully-proofed' but risk can be reduced by becoming more skillful in the following ways:

- acting assertively when necessary
- reacting nonchalantly when it is appropriate to do so

- making friends who will give support
- cooperating effectively with others.

Skills to help others:

Possessing these skills can be useful, especially for the older elementary school child:

- making good judgments regarding when and how to help children who are being victimised
- standing up for children who are being victimised
- being perceptive, and understanding how others are feeling
- offering support by being a good listener.

Skills to avoid bullying others:

Children bully for many reasons, sometimes because they lack the following skills:

- being able to handle feelings of anger when they arise
- thinking before they act
- getting what they need from others by using cooperative means rather than by resorting to force or threats.

Some children who bully others may not be inclined to get angry, act impulsively or lack social skills, just as some socially skilled children may get bullied. But in many cases improvements in these areas do help to reduce bullying

### **Promoting positive behavior**

Such rules can have considerable force, coming from the children themselves, and they greatly encourage children to behave positively. An educator's influence with parents is commonly less powerful. Nonetheless, discussions with parents or parent groups can lead to their recognising the need to encourage their children to act to counter bullying.

### **Teachers should therefore ask themselves the following question:**

How can we best ensure that the knowledge, attitudes and skills that have been developed through class activities actually result in children behaving so that bullying is reduced?

Some suggestions:

Children are more likely to stop their bullying behaviour or to act to reduce bullying when they experience social and moral pressure to do so from people who most matter in their lives and whose opinions they respect. These normally include other children, parents and teachers.

The influence of teachers on social behaviour is commonly greatest in the early years. The teacher can often encourage and assist children, especially in the early primary school years, to formulate rules about how they would like each other to behave.

These rules sometimes emerge:

- We will not bully other children.
- We will help children who are being bullied.
- We will include children who are left out of our games.

Most bullying goes on when others are around, and the role of bystanders may be crucial in determining whether the bullying continues or stops.

Suggestion:

Discuss with children the kinds of things that bystanders typically do when they see bullying taking place. Describe the roles that bystanders play and the effects they have upon the bullying behaviour.

These roles can be listed as:

- the supporters of the victim
- the supporters of the bully
- passive observers
- those who go to get help
- those who leave the scene.

Examine with the children why each of the above acts as they do, and then explore ways in which bystanders can discourage, and help stop the bullying without taking unreasonable and unacceptable risks. Expressing displeasure at what is happening may be less dangerous than physically intruding and is often very effective. Different kinds of bullying – verbal, physical and indirect – occurring in different situations can be described, and children can explore in discussion or through role play how bystanders could behave – and with what outcomes.

### **Why is this education important?**

Bullying, one of the most underrated and serious problems in schools today, affects 1 in 7 school children.

Bullying intensifies during the middle school years. In many American high schools, bullying is a rite of passage connected to hazing and gang activities. Addressing this issue in the early childhood and elementary years has proven to be an effective intervention.

### **Both bullies and their victims suffer emotional, behavioral, and underachievement problems.**

- 22% of 4th through 8th graders report lower grades due to bullying.
- 160,000 students miss school daily due to fear of bullies.
- Boys are more likely to bully physically; girls typically taunt and spread rumors.
- Bullying victims face increased mental health risks, some for life.
- By age 24, 60% of children who bully will have had a criminal conviction.

### **Tips for Educators of victims and "bullies"**

- Make your classroom an environment that values self-respect and nurtures confidence.
- Help your student learn appropriate ways to express anger, especially to you or a counselor. Letting your students express anger appropriately will help him/her stand up to a bully.

- Practice with your students showing confident body language including making frequent eye contact and using deep breathing to bolster assertive words.
- Talk with your students about the consequences of casual violence seen on television, in video games, and possibly in the neighborhood. Extend the discussion into purposeful violence such as the recent terrorist attacks on America.
- Encourage friendships since both victims and bullies tend to be loners.
- Teach your students how to solve problems, using praise when he/ she follows through.
- Help your students express himself/herself clearly, using “I” statements. Children who express themselves without putting others on the defensive tend to gain friends.
- Note any disturbing behaviors in your students (frequent angry outbursts, excessive fighting and bullying of other children, cruelty to animals, fire setting, frequent behavior problems at school, lack of friends, and alcohol or drug use can be signs of serious problems) and contact appropriate resources (counselors, parents, etc.)
- Listen to your students if he or she shares concerns about friends who may be exhibiting troubling behaviors. Share this information with a trusted professional, such as a school psychologist, principal, or teacher.
- Watch a video of a movie that explores intolerance (Mask, The Elephant Man, Disney’s The Hunchback of Notre Dame, My Bodyguard, The Man Without A Face.)
- Hold up the mirror to yourself. Adults who demean, talk down to and constantly demand unquestioning obedience from children foster both bullying and being victimized. The choices you make in your words and posture can make a difference.

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## Anti-Bullying Curriculum

### HOW NOT TO BE A BULLY

Sometimes it is difficult to know what is or is not bullying. Often, actions start out just being fun, but may at some point actually turn into bullying. If you are not sure whether something has become bullying, stop and think and ask yourself these questions:

- Are my actions or words hurting someone else's feelings?
- Are my actions or words hurting someone else physically or making that person feel afraid?
- Would I want someone else to do this to me?
- Am I unfairly taking my anger out on someone?
- Am I trying to control someone against his or her will?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For these questions ask the students and repeat answers

1. What is a bully?
2. Can someone be a bully without meaning to be?  
(Actors will demonstrate)
3. What's the difference between bullying and just fooling around?  
(Actors will demonstrate the difference)
4. Which of these is bullying (and why)?  
(Actors will act out some of these scenarios in a way that is effective but not scary or inappropriate)

- Making fun of somebody's looks.
- Chasing away younger kids when they want to play on the swings.
- Accidentally bumping into someone in the hall.
- Calling people names because of the color of their skin.
- Making the other kids play the game your way.
- Teasing someone about the clothes he/she wears.
- Telling someone that the hat he's wearing doesn't look good on him.

- A group of kids won't let you sit with them at lunch even though there's room.
- Telling someone that he or she is not being nice.
- Joking with people by "putting them down".

#### 6. When does something become bullying?

A student is selected to come up on stage to be an active observer. Actors will perform a scene. The student will stop the action when they see bullying.

#### 7. What can be done to stop bullying at school

(Discussion. Actors will take two suggestions and apply them and demonstrate how those suggestions will work.)

#### **Support:**

Bullying grows in environments where people do not feel supported. The foundation of improvisation is support - how do you create an environment where support is the norm? By saying "yes" and listening. Certainly not every idea can be acted upon, it's not about saying "yes" to everything and letting the students run the show. But every idea can be supported. Creating a classroom where students and teachers truly listen to ideas, accept them, and build on them ensures that every student feels supported and valued.

How do you build an environment of support?

#### Activity:

Select 5 students from the audience for this interactive activity:

- **Ice Cream Inventor** – Students are told they are part of a new committee to help invent a new ice cream flavor. Then they must create a new flavor, and put together an ad campaign for the new flavor. Using inspirations given by each team member, the team will determine the "Target Audience", "Product name", "Jingle", "Spokesperson", "Packaging", etc...

**Take-away:** Focuses on support above all else, how great does it feel when your ideas are accepted? All of us have the ability to control our environment to a certain extent but when it doesn't go our way, we should be willing to roll with the punches. Often we imagine the way something "should go" but our team mates have other ideas, we need to be open to hearing them. This exercise takes what we have learned in the hour and reinforces it. Establish an environment of *Support* so that you develop *Trust* among your team. That environment allows your students to *take Risks* (like standing up for themselves, or telling an adult about behavior they've seen or experienced), and find their voice. When those risks are accepted and praised (as they are in the exercise) your students gain *Confidence*. Once they have gained that confidence they are having *Fun*, and students can thrive!

The idea here is to establish that it is more fun and more cool to support your classmates than it is to get caught up in bullying behavior.

Recap: (Discussion points for the students)

- Preventing bullying starts with each one of you
- One person can make a difference, change can start with one person
- Being a part of a team, like your classroom, and working with your teammates is much more fun than working against them
- Listen to your classmates, encourage each other to do the right thing
- Support one another by telling an adult if you see things that worry you, and telling your classmates that bullying is not cool

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