

Defining Bullying: Teacher's Guide



Why define it?

You may have a gut feeling about what bullying is, but to facilitate classroom discussion, it can help to have a more concrete definition. Further, if students have a commonly understood definition of bullying, and have experience applying it, they can also differentiate bullying more easily from other behaviours, such as a disagreement or argument between equals. If students can clearly identify the behaviour and understand what they are seeing, they may be more likely to report the behaviour or intervene.

What is bullying?

Bullying is a pattern of behaviour. The behaviour is repeated and persistent. Bullying is about power, domination and control which is not legitimate. Bullying is abusive behaviour that is intended to hurt or harm the target physically, verbally or socially. The abusive actions may target the victim directly or indirectly.

Let's have a closer look at the various elements of this definition.

Bullying is a pattern of behaviour.

Bullying is a behaviour, not a specific action. If one student punches another student, it may not be right or appropriate behaviour, but it is not necessarily bullying. However, punching someone might be an action that a bully might take. What must be examined is the pattern of behaviour.

The behaviour is repeated and persistent.

Bullying is not a one-off event. It is a series of actions, repeated over time. The individual bullying behaviours may be very short in duration from a few seconds to a few minutes. The bully may even target his victim at irregular intervals. The bully may need to wait for an opportunity where it is safe to act against his victim. Different events may trigger the bully's need to bully. While it may not be continuous, or regular, the behaviour is recurring and persistent.

Bullying is about power, domination and control which is not legitimate.

Bullying is not about actions between equals. The bully does not choose just anyone to bully. The bully chooses targets that show a weakness or vulnerability. The bully may also target someone she sees as a threat, or someone she envies.

Regardless, the bully emphasizes and takes advantages of differences. The bully may choose someone who looks different, behaves differently, particularly someone who may be unable to respond effectively. For example, the bully may choose someone physically smaller or weaker, in order to physically dominate him. The bully may also choose someone who is physically bigger or stronger, but who has weaker verbal or social skills, and use his stronger skills to manipulate, dominate, or tease his target. The victim may be unable to respond effectively, or he may respond inappropriately, in a way that the bully can capitalize on. In each case, the bully takes advantage of differences in power to dominate, control or harm his target.

Some individuals may have legitimate power, which they use to exert control over others, such as a group leader, team captain, teacher, or parent. They may use their power differences for legitimate purposes, such as to keep individuals safe, to facilitate and promote learning, or to maintain a positive learning environment. However, this power may also be used illegitimately to unfairly dominate or control. A bully may try to legitimize her behaviour through rationalization, saying that her victim “deserves it” or “she asked for it”, even though the bully’s response may be inappropriate. Challenge your students to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of power.

Bullying is abusive behaviour that is intended to hurt or harm the target physically, emotionally or socially.

The bully is acting with intent to harm. The harm he causes may be physical, verbal or social. Physical harm may be easier to identify, such as hitting, pushing, shoving, or making rude gestures. Verbal harm can be very direct or more subtle, ranging from insults, swearing, and name calling, to teasing about sensitive issues, interrupting, or using language to intimidate and undermine. The bully may also socially harm his target with gossip and rumours, or by excluding his victim from group activities. The bully may often use a combination of physical, verbal and social techniques to harm his targets.

The abusive actions may target the victim directly or indirectly.

The bully may offer direct abuse to her targets by pushing them or swearing at them, but she may also target her victim indirectly through gossip, rumours, email, web pages, graffiti or damage to property.

The Challenge: “What is Bullying?” Activity

Can your students identify the characteristics of bullying? Ask the question “What is bullying?” Use the handout as a discussion guide, but challenge students to create their own definition. Use the “What is Bullying?” student worksheet to help students develop their ideas individually and in groups. Have each group present, record, share, and compare their definitions - use a chalk/white board, smart

board, wiki or chart paper. Have each group find similarities and differences among the group definitions. Write a class definition of bullying and post it in the class.

From the "What is Bullying?" student worksheet:

Individual

What is bullying? List as many characteristics of bullying as you can and write your personal definition in the space below

Group

With your group, look for common characteristics in your lists and definitions. Discuss and develop a common group definition. Record your group definition in the space below.

Share and Compare

You will be asked to share your definition with the class. Use the space below to identify similarities and differences between your definitions and others.

Follow-up and extension:

- 1) Have students make posters, PowerPoint or multimedia presentations conveying the message of their definition in a novel way.
- 2) Use the definition to identify characters in literature that are bullies or are being bullied (see the **Bullying in Books** student worksheet).
- 3) Incorporate your definition into the class rules or see how it is addressed by the existing rules. Revise the class rules, post the definition next to the existing rules or have students insert their definition into their handbook.

The Test: "Bullying: Case Studies" Activity

The following test cases will enable you to check your student's understanding of the definition you have worked on in class. Students should identify why each case may or may not be bullying, what action they could take as a bystander and what action they could take if they were the target of the bullying. To be used with the **Bullying: Case Studies** student worksheets.

Case: Ryan and Joel

Ryan and Joel are caught fighting on the school grounds during a "friendly" intramural soccer game.

[There is limited information here. Students would need to know more about the fight and the relationship between the students to classify it as bullying. Regardless, what should the bystander do? How can a teacher intervene to determine if this is an isolated event of a case of bullying? i.e. Speaking to each student individually, look at the factors surrounding the conflict, consider previous interactions between the two student and their relationship, and consider/record any history of conflict between the two students.]

- 1) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying
- 2) Explain what you could do if you observed this situation.
- 3) Describe what you would do in this situation if you were either Ryan or Joel.

Additional questions: How would your school address this issue? The problem may not go away overnight even as teachers intervene: how could this situation be managed and monitored over time?

Case: Ryan and Joel (continued)

Incident 1 – Ryan, and Joel are in different classes and do not usually interact with each other, have different groups of friends but also do not have any history of not getting along with each other. When a teacher talks to each student, they both indicate they were just upset about the rough play and that they went too far. They both apologized to each other, there were no further complaints, and they continued to play soccer on the same and opposing teams in the future without incident.

[On the surface, this does not appear to be a case of bullying, although the fighting is not acceptable and would need to be dealt with. Some students may say that there is still not enough evidence here because the student being bullied may not want to tell for fear of reprisal. They might also be bullied in other ways out of sight of the teacher.]

- 4) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying
- 5) Explain what you could do if you observed this situation.
- 6) Describe what you would do in this situation if you were either Ryan or Joel.

Additional questions: How would your school address this issue? The problem may not go away overnight even as teachers intervene: how could this situation be managed and monitored over time?

Case: Ryan and Joel (continued)

Incident 2 – The teacher has noticed Ryan and Joel exchanging words on the field on a number of occasions. Usually Joel complains about how Ryan is playing, especially when they play on the same team. Ryan complains about Joel playing too rough, excessively crowding him and pushing. Joel attacks rather aggressively especially when Ryan is on the opposing team and has the ball, even more than he does with other players. Joel has been playing in the city league for a number of years and is fairly popular among the other kids while Ryan only plays soccer during break times at school. Joel plays to win. Ryan plays soccer during breaks because that is what all the other kids do. Some students find Ryan's comments on the field annoying, especially the excuses he makes when he makes a mistake. Someone saw Ryan punch Joel first.

[This is likely a case of bullying, but further investigation may be required. Have students identify which characteristics of bullying are evident in the student behaviour. Interventions may be necessary to protect both of the students if staff is unable to determine who is bullying who.

Regardless, both students need to be supported to address their individual needs rather than simply dealing with the outcome; Ryan punching Joel first. With additional information, it may emerge that Joel has been bullying Ryan for some time and that other incidents have been occurring off the soccer field.]

- 7) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying.
- 8) Explain what you could do if you observed this situation.
- 9) Describe what you would do in this situation if you were either Ryan or Joel.

Additional questions: How would your school address this issue? The problem may not go away overnight even as teachers intervene: how could this situation be managed and monitored over time?

Case: Ashley, Jessica, Sarah and Samantha

Ashley and Jessica were friends when they were younger and have always ridden the bus to school together. Since they have moved up to the next grade, they have started hanging around with Sarah and Samantha. Ashley still gets along with Jessica and they visit at each other's house sometimes, but at school, Jessica tells Sarah and Samantha private things about Ashley's family and embarrassing stories about when they were younger. Sarah and Samantha tease Ashley about how she is in love with Matthew and make crude remarks about the two of them being together. Jessica didn't invite Ashley to her recent birthday party because Sara and Samantha say she is bad for their reputation particularly because of the things she says, the way she acts and because of how she dresses. Ashley has started eating lunch with Hannah and Emily because of the hard time the other girls have been giving her. Now they tease Hannah and Emily for sitting with her, and even Hannah and Emily have been avoiding her at lunch. Ashley has been finding notes in her locker and rude things written about her in the washroom. Recently, Christopher and Joshua called her a rude name when they walked past her in the hallway and tried to grab her. This has been building up for half the year and now Ashley feels sick every morning when she walks to the bus stop.

[This is clearly a case of bullying. Much of the bullying involves social exclusion and indirect verbal bullying. The gossip and rumour spreading are not direct but they still affect Ashley in a harmful and negative manner.]

- 10) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying.
- 11) Explain what you would do in this situation if you were Hannah or Emily?
- 12) Explain what you would do in this situation if you were Christopher or Joshua?
- 13) Describe what you would do in this situation if you were Ashley?

Additional questions: How would your school address this issue? The problem may not go away overnight even as teachers intervene: how could this situation be managed and monitored over time?

Case: Elizabeth's Dilemma

Hi. I'm Elizabeth. I'm in the office again, this time for fighting. It all began a few years ago when I moved to this school for a fresh start. At first everything was OK. My marks were average and I wasn't having any problems.

Then one day another girl said something about me in the gym changing room. Everyone looked and I was so embarrassed. I thought that was the end of it, but it wasn't. The girl and some of her friends began to whisper to each other in the hallway and snicker when I walked past at lunch. The next time, I asked them what their problem was, and they just laughed out loud so I told them to shut up.

Then there was writing on my locker and notes stuffed between the cracks. Other kids would stare and make faces at me in the hallways. The group of girls from the changing room would visit me at my locker in between classes and tease me with rude stories, knock my books onto the floor or slide my lock down the hallway. When I pushed one of the girls out of the way so that I could close my locker door, I got in trouble because a teacher saw me push her. They called my parents and they got mad at me too. They are always yelling at me.

Then someone started to send me rude emails and I got a lot of junk mail from some disgusting websites. The notes continued, I would get pushed in the halls by kids I hardly knew, and people would spill their drinks or leave gum on my seat in class. The girls kept telling rude stories in the halls just close enough so that I could hear them. It was all lies about me and my family and other disgusting stuff. I tried to ignore them but it was really hard.

One day I decided I'd had enough and chased after the main girl, swearing and yelling. I grabbed her by the hair and pulled her to the ground. I started to punch her. She just laughed and her friends cheered her on until a teacher came and broke it up. I kept screaming at her as the teacher pulled me into the office. Now I am going to get kicked out of school for a week. It's all my fault.

[Most people would agree this is a case of bullying. The reason why Elizabeth is being bullied has been deliberately left out of her statement. This is done to emphasize the effect the bullying has on her, and to prevent the discussion from becoming side-tracked in finding fault with Elizabeth (she is overweight, too skinny, looks different, wears different clothes, etc.). A bully will sometimes look for a way to get their target to react. In this case the bullies use Elizabeth's reaction as an excuse to continue their bullying. They may even use it as justification for their behaviour: "It's OK to pick on her because

she's a freak", "look what she does", "she deserves it", "she's asking for it". Elizabeth is facing a combination of direct and indirect bullying that is physical, verbal and social. In this case there seem to be multiple bullies, but a few key individuals are involved in perpetuating the bullying. It also appears that Elizabeth may not be seeking help from teachers. This may be because she gets in trouble when she tries to deal with the problem on her own, so she may feel the teachers are not supporting her in her efforts. The other girls' bullying doesn't seem to be addressed by the teachers.]

- 14) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying
- 15) Explain what you would do if you if Elizabeth was in your class.
- 16) Describe what you would do in this situation if you were Elizabeth.

Additional questions: How would your school address this issue? The problem may not go away overnight even as teachers intervene: how could this situation be managed and monitored over time?

External Resources

You may find the following resources useful to reinforce the concepts presented here, or to introduce, follow-up or support the activities.

Bully Free Alberta

www.bullyfreealberta.ca

This Government of Alberta website has a variety of resources for teachers, parents and youth including the following links to projects directed towards youth.

B-Free

b-free.ca

This bullying website targeted at youth contains information, an online quiz, and stories by youth.

S-Team Heroes

www.teamheroes.ca

Children can practise dealing with bullying in a variety of contexts through this online game.

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Bullying in Books

1) Identify and describe a character in the book you are reading who is either is a bully or is the target of bullying.

1) Character's Name:

2) Describe their character traits: (Include physical and behavioural characteristics)

2) Describe in your own words what they are doing to bully or how they are being bullied. Provide two examples to support your description.

- General description of the bullying:

- Specific Example #1:

- Specific Example #2:

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15) Explain what you would do if you if Elizabeth was in your class.

16) Describe what you would do in this situation if you were Elizabeth.



Defining Bullying

- **Bullying is a pattern of behaviour.**
- **The behaviour is repeated and persistent.**
- **Bullying is about power, domination and control which is not legitimate.**
- **Bullying is abusive behaviour that is intended to hurt or harm the target physically, verbally or socially.**
- **The abusive actions may target the victim directly or indirectly.**
- **Bullying episodes are short in duration ...**
 - ... and frequently takes place in unstructured periods of time ...
 - ... and often occurs out of the sight of authority.
- **Bullying is isolating.**
- **The effects of bullying can last a lifetime ...**
 - ... for the victim ...
 - ... and for the bully.
- **The problem of bullying extends beyond the bully and the victim ...**
 - ... throughout the school ...
 - ... into the home ...
 - ... and into the community.



Stopping Bullying

Students

Agree to tell

Tell someone if you are being bullied. If they do not listen, then tell someone else.

Agree to say stop

If you are being bullied, tell the bully to stop and walk away.

Agree to say no

If you see someone bullying another person, tell them that is not OK and they should stop. Stay with the person being bullied and go with them to tell someone. If they won't go along with you to tell someone, go on your own.

Teachers

Agree to intervene

When you suspect someone is bullying or being bullied, intervene in the situation. Follow-up and monitor the situation over an extended period of time.

Agree to respond to help change the behaviour

Work together with your administration, parents and support professionals to make a plan to address the problem and make a school wide plan.



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