

# Addressing Social and Personal Issues Facing Young Learners



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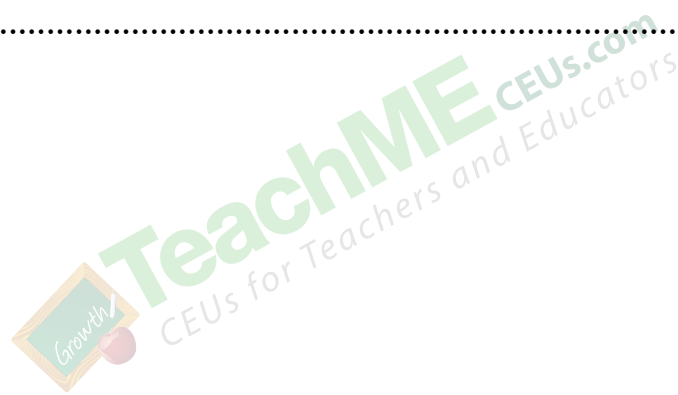
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## Introduction

The disparity in the accessibility, efficacy, availability and experience in education between the one available to a low-income student and the education more affluent students enjoy cannot be overstated. Children who experience poverty from a young age enter their school years, in many cases, with factors and experiences that will compromise their education; they have higher stressors and health conditions that will affect everything they do; and they may not have access to the same levels of quality education that higher-income families do - perpetuating the disparity between the educational experiences of the poor and the well-off.

Much of this disparity comes down to the cycle of poverty - systems that perpetuate impoverished families from generation to generation. While much of the power to break this cycle belongs to officials in government, there are steps that we as teachers can take to support the struggling students and families in our care. A good first step involves educating ourselves comprehensively on the current state of poverty in America - which is where this course will begin.

## Section 1: The Current State of Poverty in America

School-age children constitute one of the demographics most permanently affected by the experience of poverty. Their entire lives can be impacted by the consequences of being poor at an early age. Before we discuss how best to help school-age children suffering the impacts of poverty, it's best to attain a solid understanding of what poverty is, as well as the specific impacts that it imparts on young children.

### What is poverty?

The concept of 'poverty' goes far further than a discussion of dollar amounts earned or subsisted upon per day. When we talk about poverty, we talk about quality of life (or lack thereof); we talk about endless struggle and impactful deprivation. Children who live in poverty don't have access to resources to help them thrive - including a quality education. This lack of resources means that children grow up with a similar lack of resources - and are similarly unable to provide for their children. This concept is known as the generational cycle of poverty (Peer, 2020).

People who live in poverty may not be able to afford medical treatment; they may not have shelter, electricity, or adequate food. This lack of proper nutrition can also confer stunted growth or unhealthy outcomes for students living in poverty.

Many impoverished countries are the homes to people who, subsequently, do not have access to sanitary conditions or even clean water. This directly influences associated rampant strains of preventable diseases and unnecessary, premature death for affected children (Peer, 2020).

Poverty can be calculated simply by a person's income, but there are more nuanced ways to consider this metric. The quality of life that a person or family is able to easily afford with their income, as well as the time that they need to trade for a livable income, are both factors that contribute to the concept of poverty (Peer, 2020).

Regardless of nuances, details can be helpful. It is estimated that over 689 million people worldwide live in extreme poverty; these people survive on a budget of less than two dollars a day. Most (two-thirds) of these persons are children and youth. Extreme poverty rates tend to skyrocket surrounding political and war crises, and are often accompanied by high rates of violence.

The majority of people who survive extreme poverty will have little or no schooling. The Federal Poverty Line in America suggests that a family of four living on an income of \$494 a week is considered to be living in poverty (Peer, 2020).

### **How many children live in poverty?**

It's estimated that some 1.3 billion people (or 22% of the world's population) are in this plight, including 644 million children. In America, children represent the poorest age group. In 2018, nearly one in six American children lived in poverty. In addition, nearly 73% of poor children living in America are persons of color (Peer, 2020).

The impacts of childhood poverty are dramatically wide-ranging. Even if poor children have access to an education, they are more likely to drop out of school, be unemployed later, and even to experience involvement with the criminal justice system.

It's estimated that childhood poverty costs America about \$700 billion dollars per annum due to lost productivity, health crises, and increased crime rates that are associated with children living in poverty (Peer, 2020).

### **What are the personal impacts (both short- and long-term) of poverty?**

Unfortunately, children who live in poverty have documented impacts that last far longer than their formative years. Because they experience these hardships from an early age, there are many permanent personal ramifications. As there is such a large segment of

the population that suffers these hardships, as well, there are many institutional impacts that the entire nation feels keenly (Peer, 2020).

In 2017, the United States poverty rate was 12.3%, resulting in approximately 40 million Americans living in poverty at that time. Many of these are people who cannot work, including the elderly, the disabled, or young children. Poverty tends to contribute to social determinants of health, the places that people living in poverty are able to live, and their work status - as well as the type of recreation that they are able to pursue. Children living through poverty not only have to deal with food scarcity or low-quality living conditions, they also have to deal with toxic stress and the potential consequences of a lifetime of income and economic inequality (Peer, 2020).

Youth who are poor tend to have increased exposure to violence, escalated risks of self-harm, and poor health outcomes when compared to their more affluent peers.

### **What are the institutional impacts of systemic childhood poverty?**

Aside from the dramatic harmful personal effects of poverty on those who experience it - which we will explore in greater depth in the next section - the fact that childhood poverty exists results in many complex social issues at a cultural and economic level that ultimately impact all of us. Low-wage stagnation and financial instability have been issues that many governments have tried to tackle for decades; however, the fundamental issue persists. No one policy or organization can tackle it alone.

One of the most critical issues stemming from childhood poverty is the non-inclusive system that it creates. In a perfect world, everyone has the same opportunities; in the world in which we live, unequal prosperity tends to perpetuate itself through reduced opportunities as well as reduced health and personal outcomes (Mosesly, 2018).

There are many misconceptions and myths that encircle the fully-ingrained institution of poverty - some prevailing even into modernity, among many people. These myths include the idea of an American dream attainable only through merit as well as the less rosy-tinted ideas that poor people don't know how to manage their money well or are lazy, addicts, or simply coasting through life on government benefits. The fact that many people believe these myths to be true only reinforces their underlying issues. It also shifts the blame for systemic poverty from our shoulders to those experiencing it - an insidious form of victim-blaming which is more than unfair: It's unhelpful (Mosesly, 2018).

As a result of this general misunderstanding of rampant American poverty, the government often enables policies that perpetuate the problem instead of solving it. Since we, as a culture and community, do not understand the true, complex nature of poverty, we cannot take steps to give support where it is most needed (Mosesly, 2018).

Poverty is described by many as something personal and individual; the very isolated experience of someone who needs food, shelter, clothing or medical attention and is unable to do so with any ease or regularity. However, a more informed, all-encompassing definition of poverty would be this:

*Poverty is the social and economic exclusion of entire groups of people.*

Examined from this point of view, it is clear that there are at least six factors that help to perpetuate this prevailing system of inequity. Of course, as poverty is a very complex, multifaceted issue, and some of these issues also seem to stem from the institution of poverty - making it clear that poverty is often a circular issue (Mosesly, 2018).

The factors that are both perpetuating of poverty as well as direct symptoms of it on an institutional level include:

- **Unregulated Capitalism:** The system which feeds, successfully, off a wealthy class and a poorer class leads to sporadic concentrations of power, capital, and employment. Naturally, after a while, it becomes extremely difficult - or even impossible - to move from one class to another.
- **Hoarding of Resources:** When it is apparent that poverty is an issue, people react by wanting to protect themselves. This leads to people and corporations seeking to find, obtain, and hold (whether they are using them or not) vital resources - generally, in quantities that constitute more than a single person or corporation needs. This results in scarcity of resources and higher prices for other people, including people who may truly need those assets.
- **Decline in Labor Unions:** As it becomes clear that ours is a dual-class society, labor unions built to protect lower-income people (and their jobs) enjoy reduced power to bargain for better conditions. As a result, people who belong to labor unions - who tend to be from lower-income communities - have even lower wages and much-reduced benefits.
- **Social Oppression of the Poor:** There is a stigma associated with poverty, a stigma that causes many higher-income people to wish to distance themselves from the poor if at all possible. This results in systematic exclusion, mistreatment,



and exploitation of an entire group of people - people already underrepresented and underprivileged due to their income levels.

- **Institutional Racism:** Due to the fact that, many times, there are specific groups of people who bear an unfair share of the weight of poverty, many people will allocate privileges and resources unfairly to entire groups of people. This presents challenges to people with lower incomes that they wouldn't necessarily have had to otherwise face.
- **Rural Isolation:** People with lower incomes often cannot afford to live in larger cities. As a result, they tend to congregate in smaller, more rural communities. This likewise distances them from infrastructure, resources, and places with higher economic activity - disallowing them potential ways to create more revenue. Unfortunately, this is also associated with less power in decision-making, as places with more economic activity and larger populations generally have more power when it comes to crafting and influencing policy decisions.

As each of these factors both helps to cause and strengthen the experience of poverty and stems from it, it's clear that much needs to be done - by those suffering economic inequality as well as those benefiting from it - to confront this issue (Mosesly, 2018).

It also shows that poverty is a cycle; not a linear problem.

### **What is the cycle of poverty?**

The term 'cycle of poverty' refers to the concept of cyclic, intergenerational poverty that tends to - much like a line of cascading dominoes - perpetuate itself and continue easily, gaining more momentum with each generation until a family is so entrenched in poverty it is unthinkable that any progeny would be able to dig themselves out (Peer, 2020).

Essentially, it boils down to the idea that parents who are poor are forced to raise their children in a lifestyle affected by (and even dictated by) the constraints of poverty. Those children, unduly burdened with the downstream effects of an extremely low-income lifestyle, are very likely to grow up vulnerable to adulthood poverty; during which they are extremely likely to have children themselves who, as a result, grow up in an impoverished household (Peer, 2020).

Because children tend to be more vulnerable than adults to the negative impacts of poverty - as they are very impressionable and very much still developing during this early age - the cycle of poverty is an extremely hard one to break. The idealistic solution

is clear: Increase protections against poverty by providing low-income adults with more access to quality childcare, higher education, and adequate employment. However, as many people subscribe to the myth that poverty is the fault of those who fall victim to it and there are hardly economic and financial incentives to help poor people thrive, this solution largely remains out of reach (Peer, 2020).

## **What are the current prevailing strategies targeting the end of the cycle of poverty?**

Even though the incentives to helping end poverty remain largely unattractive (to the non-poor), there are nonprofits and charities, as well as some governmental organizations, who have dedicated themselves to strategizing ways to break the cycle of poverty.

Because it has been realized that it is not a simple problem, certainly not one to be erased with a simple (albeit helpful) influx of cash, experts who have studied the matter have come up with one leading strategy to break the cycle. Termed the 'two-generation approach,' this solution aims to help a family grow economically by, first, supporting each parent separately as both a parent and a worker; and, secondly, investing in the future of the children (All4Kids, 2019).

The idea is that if parents have the opportunity to invest in higher education and get better jobs, they will enjoy higher pay - which will allow them the opportunity to raise their children with a higher level of reliability and comfort. The strategy used by nonprofits also works to allocate favorable childcare resources to these parents, so parents feel safe leaving their children in a safe and healthy environment while they go to work (All4Kids, 2019).

The children themselves benefit from this situation, as, because they are being well-cared for during both the night and day, they can avoid the numerous pitfalls of chronic stress and poor nutrition that often coexist with poverty. By investing this type of care, education, and overall improvement into both generations suffering from poverty at the same time, it's possible to achieve enough economic growth within the family so that in order to escape the cycle of poverty (All4Kids, 2019).

This solution is dependent upon two protective factors against poverty - both dealing with education. Both parental education and childhood education can help families escape the cycle.

## Understanding the Benefits of Parental Education as a Way to Protect Against Poverty

Children whose parents have enjoyed the benefits of a higher education and who attend high-quality childcare generally have more positive developmental benefits than children who do not have these. The advantages usually seen in children who have these characteristics are multifaceted, and include:

- **A Quickly-Growing Vocabulary:** When researchers compared the relative size and ease-of-use of the vocabularies of a wide pool of eighteen-month-old children, they found that there was a significant difference in both factors between children whose parents were highly educated and had a more moderate income and children whose parents were not highly educated and had a lower income. This difference only became more marked with time. By the time a child reaches three years of age, the child of parents with college degrees will have a vocabulary that is two or three times as large as a child with parents who have a high school degree (All4Kids, 2019).
- **Someone To Help With Academic Problems:** Children who had the benefit of educated parents tended to struggle less severely with academic issues precisely because - when they did struggle - there was someone in the home who understood. With their parents on hand to assist with the obstacles of academics, children were less likely to become frustrated enough to act out - and more likely to succeed, even if their experience was harder than it needed to be (All4Kids, 2019).
- **A Naturally Higher Chance of Achieving:** The exact mechanisms have not yet been elucidated, but an analysis of wide-scale economic data has shown that maternal education has a substantive link to the intellectual outcomes of a woman's child - even if the child has other indicators of poverty. Higher education for parents (rather than income) is also linked with higher scores on standardized tests and higher grades for children, showing that - possibly - parents with higher education were able to implement achievement-fostering practices in their homes for their children, even if they didn't necessarily have more resources for doing so (All4Kids, 2019).

Investing in parents and their education as a proactive, protective practice against childhood poverty could be one way to nip childhood poverty in the bud, before a child even needs to feel the effects of poverty (All4Kids, 2019).

However, investing in parents is only one half of the current gold standard for fighting poverty with a two-generational approach.

A child's own education is also vital for that child to grow up with as many opportunities as possible - making access to a good school and reliable education for a child the other protection that a child has against the long-term effects of childhood poverty.

Researchers have found that even the simple ritual of attending school each day can combat many of the ill effects of traumatic childhood events and other chronic stressors that come hand in hand with poverty. Therefore, although it is by no means a comprehensive solution, simply prioritizing the accessibility of good schools with good academics, social opportunities, and more will go a long way toward breaking the cycle of poverty for many affected families (All4Kids, 2019).

### **What challenges do poor children face in school (especially when compared to their higher-income peers)?**

Once a child has gotten to school, their struggles are by no means over, unfortunately. Even if low-income children have access to a good education, they will still experience many unfortunate setbacks merely as side effects of their upbringing. Any solution that looks at eradicating the income gap and substantially improving the lives and educations of children facing poverty need to address the following challenges that many low-income children face when going through school:

- **Lack of adequate preparation for school:** As opposed to many of their higher-income peers, children with a low income may not have access to high-quality early childhood programs and education. Many of their classmates who had this type of access will enter kindergarten with several key skills already well-developed - such as the ability to recognize letters easily, or to count simple objects up to ten. While these may seem like easily-learnable skills, the fact that some children arrive in kindergarten on day one knowing how to do them and others don't is an early driver of income-based educational disparity (Convertino, 2017).
- **An inherently smaller beginning vocabulary:** While one of the points of schooling is to provide children with access to the tools to build a larger vocabulary, studies show that this is another area that low-income children come to school with a natural disadvantage: On balance, low-income children enroll in kindergarten having heard millions fewer words than a typical middle-class child. This lack of

familiarity with many words makes it much harder to learn how to read even once a child is in kindergarten (Convertino, 2017).

- **Poorer nutrition when compared to their peers:** Lower-income children are far likelier to go to school hungry. This can make it difficult to concentrate on one's studies (Convertino, 2017).
- **Inadequate access to medical care:** Poorer families may not be able to get their children to the doctor as often as is recommended. Far from simply being able to meet with a pediatric doctor or primary care physician with regularity, children often need to meet with specialists such as eye doctors and dentists. Lower-income families may not be able to engage with these doctors to realize that a problem exists or be able to afford corrections and interventions when they're prescribed. Sometimes, problems such as vision issues make it much more difficult to learn appropriately for children from low-income families (Convertino, 2017).
- **Lack of reliability when it comes to their home:** Children need a stable, trustworthy home environment. Unfortunately, low-income families tend to move around a lot, which can result in disrupted education and stressors for children. The lack of continuity with educators and fellow classmates can make learning rough for some children; also, a lack of standard curricula in many states (and across the country) could result in students missing entire subjects or concepts, depending on when they move (Convertino, 2017).
- **Coping with a dysfunctional family:** Low-income children tend to have to deal with a myriad of distracting or even harmful issues at home. Instead of being able to come home to a calm atmosphere, one conducive to rest, reading, learning and growing, poor children often come home and have to experience and navigate adult problems. On a more practical level, children may not have the space, time, or resources to complete their homework or other projects while they're at home with a family that is struggling - resulting in their falling even further behind their peers (Convertino, 2017).
- **Lack of familiarity with the English language:** Because of racial inequality problems in modern America, more and more impoverished children are naturally not fluent in the English language. As the majority of educational resources tend to be available solely in English, this places these children in an even more difficult situation (Convertino, 2017).

- **Lack of access to enriching social activities and extracurriculars:** Many middle-class students are able to afford and enjoy clubs and activities ranging from sports lessons, art, dance, and music after school and on the weekends. Even less formally, these students are often able to go on family trips to museums, shows, historical sites, and other places that can bring dry academic subjects to life - igniting passion and curiosity in this subset of students, leaving others far behind (Convertino, 2017).

## Section 1: Summary

When considering the intergenerational, cyclic problem of poverty, it's important to realize that it's very complex - and there are factors involved which both perpetuate and stem from systems of poverty. While there are protective factors - education for both parent and child being one - it's vital for many governments, charities, schools and individual people to realize the scale of the problem so that real change can happen.

The ways in which poverty affects families and young children are manifold and insidious. In the next section, we'll take a look at the ways that the reduced preparation for education, lowered access to good medical resources and nutrition, and increased presence of chronic stressors can affect children in long-lasting and extremely detrimental ways.

## Section 2: The Lasting Effects of Poverty

The co-founder and CEO of Stand for Children, a nonprofit that advocates for a high-quality education for all, notes that the impact that poverty has on a child's psyche, physiology, and ability to access and utilize a good education is significant - and that it starts early (Taylor, 2017).

As we have seen, children who grow up experiencing poverty tend to begin school behind their peers in many ways, and they often do not have the health or support required to truly thrive in an academic setting. The National Center for Education Statistics has even attributed the effects of an early childhood in poverty to lower levels of achievement in academia; they have noted that they can see this effect from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade, suggesting that a difficult childhood is extremely burdensome and difficult to overcome even for children who do make it to their high school graduations (Taylor, 2017).

That last is a salient point: Data does show that low-income students are far less likely to make it to the end of high school. One study showed that low-income students were five times more likely to leave high school early than their high-income peers. When they did make it to graduation, it tended to be delayed: Poor students were thirteen times less likely to graduate when initially planned, instead taking five or more years to get through their required high school courses (Taylor, 2017).

These effects can be traced both to an impoverished student's potentially less-than-desirable home situation as well as the likely under-resourced nature of the school that they are able to access. Many times, too, there is simply not an emphasis placed on the goal of going to college that is often very present in the homes of middle-class students. Students suffering from poverty from an early age have neither the foundation, the tools, or the motivation to complete high school and attend college - necessarily putting them at a huge disadvantage to their wealthier peers (Taylor, 2017).

One researcher noted that the common existing avenues to providing relief to students experiencing financial pressures fall far short of the mark. Academic grants and other forms of institutional aid do exist, at the collegiate level and for elementary school students. However, these relief packages rarely provide enough to cover the full needs required by a student suffering from poverty, and so do not provide much help (Taylor, 2017).

## **The Unequal Equation of Educating Poor Students**

It's been posited that the current education system exacerbates many of the issues experienced by children experiencing systemic poverty. While school can be a protective factor and a tool to help break the cycle of poverty, as noted above, it needs to be a first-rate school, providing a comprehensive education and extra support to help compensate for the lack of resources that poor children may naturally have (Taylor, 2017).

Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. For schools that see high rates of impoverished students, the current education system does not have the ability (or motivation) to help: students who come to school with less are often given less to work with, instead of more to compensate for their lack of initial support. Schools expect less of those students, spend less on those students, and even assign them less experienced and effective teachers (Kati Haycock, The Education Trust).

The U.S. Department of Education has confirmed through a report that 40% of schools that are identified as low-income do not get their fair share of funding from their states that is earmarked for investing in education. Former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan



has acknowledged this, saying, “in far too many places, policies for assigning extra support, resources, and teachers to low-income students in need perpetuated the problem rather than solving it” (Taylor, 2017).

As policies and government decisions haven’t been able to route funding to low-income schools and other places where it is most needed, some schools and nonprofits have turned to crowdfunding to connect teachers who work in low-income, high-need communities with donors able to provide them with the required resources. Sometimes, this works; however, this process has also been used to highlight the fact that, as a nation, we simply don’t allocate education funds remotely equitably (Taylor, 2017).

There have even been studies that have shown the logical rationale for investing more education funds in low-income districts. The National Bureau of Economic Research found in one study that increasing spending in impoverished communities was directly tied to increased student outcomes in many subjects. The students in those communities tended to stay in school longer, even if they had many of the risk factors for dropping out; additionally, many of those students were able to attend college, earn a higher income, and break the cycle of poverty for their particular family (Taylor, 2017).

Unfortunately, even with this success story, most academic funding in America still tends to go toward districts that already have the majority of the resources. This is particularly unfortunate, as there are some education experts and psychologists who believe that the very simple existence of a well-resourced classroom tends to send a positive message to the students who have access to it. If low-income students or members of an under-resourced community walk into a beautiful, well-equipped classroom every day, they are hearing a subliminal message that they are worth those resources - and that their teachers are there for them and have high expectations for their success (Taylor, 2017).

This is not the case; and the students who most need to hear this message often do not.

### **Factors Other than Money Which Contribute to Under-Resourced Schools and Poor Educational Outcomes for Impoverished Children**

Money can solve a world of problems - but many experts believe that while increased funding for low-income schools is indeed crucial the need for improvement goes far beyond an influx of capital in the right places.

Course rigor, teacher quality, and accountability on children to complete homework and participate in their classes are all contributors toward an excellent (and effective)



education. Right now, these types of positive attributes tend to be shunted towards higher-income communities. As many experts have pointed out, this allocates good initiatives and resources to those who already have a head start in education. Low-income students, according to many, need the highest amount of expertise and the most support when completing their education, as they are at the highest risk to drop out or have learning issues (Taylor, 2017).

Resources continue to flow to higher-income schools. The achievement gap continues to widen.

Non-financial initiatives strengthening downstream indicators of positive school environments - high expectations and accountability, course rigor, experienced and enthusiastic teachers - have led to some positive outcomes. One study showed that integrating rigorous coursework early on and, later, implementing programs that specifically readied students for college in low-income schools increased the number of poor students who graduated from both high school and college (Taylor, 2017).

Initiatives targeting an overall improvement in the atmosphere and conditions of low-income schools also see results. As one child education expert pointed out, a school that is set up to be engaging, exciting, and fun will help students be more interested in completing their programs, in excelling, and in continuing their education.

There is no single fix for the current link between poverty, access (or lack thereof) to a good education, and the lopsided funding in American education (Taylor, 2017).

### **What are ACEs and how can they impact a child as they grow?**

ACEs, or Adverse Child Experiences, are any events that a child undergoes which are interpreted or considered to be traumatic. Examples of common ACEs include experiencing the incarceration of a guardian, sibling, or parent; the divorce of their parents, or witnessing (or experiencing) domestic violence. Studies have shown that the more ACEs that children undergo as they develop, the more economic and health problems they will have when they are adults (CDC, 2020).

Unfortunately, the risk factors for many ACEs, including those listed above, tend to stack up when a family has a low or unreliable source of income. Therefore, children who already are disadvantaged due to chronic stress and lower health statistics tend to have even more stressors and traumatizing events to experience - further reinforcing the idea that childhood poverty has long-lasting and, in many cases, irreversible physiological and psychological effects (CDC, 2020).

## How does stress impact those who are living in poverty?

Before we discuss the specific ways that impoverished persons respond to high levels of chronic stress, let's talk about the way that stress impacts the human body - regardless of how affluent a person is. Our bodies are equipped to handle short-term stress. When stressors become constant or consistent, however, your body can have serious long-term effects or sicknesses as a result (American Psychological Association, 2018).

The adverse events associated with chronic stress can vary from person to person, but the most typical downstream effects of chronic stress include:

- **Musculoskeletal effects:** When you're stressed, you tense up. Human muscles aren't prepared to be tensed all (or even the majority of) the time; humans are not equipped to be in a state of guardedness twenty-four hours a day. When we are put in that scenario through constant stress, our muscles can be triggered to respond in painful and harmful ways. Headaches and migraines often start in this way, along with joint and muscle pain that can make normal life and regular movement very difficult (American Psychological Association, 2018).
- **Respiratory effects:** A normally-functioning respiratory system supplies necessary oxygen to every cell in the body. It also helps assist with the efficient removal of carbon dioxide from the body. When a person is stressed, breathing can be effected; for example, instead of taking long, slow, deep breaths, a stressed person tends to breathe rapidly and shallowly. This can be very dangerous for people who already have respiratory conditions - which people in low-income communities are predisposed to have - but can also increase the rate at which people experience panic attacks (American Psychological Association, 2018).
- **Cardiovascular effects:** A healthy cardiovascular system brings blood efficiently to all body systems. Stress tends to increase a person's heart rate and elevate a person's blood pressure. When stress is acute and a person's body is allowed to return to normalcy, this isn't harmful. When individuals experience stress constantly, over a long time, forcing the body to be in this elevated state, they become much more at risk for hypertension, heart attacks, or stroke (even at a young age) (American Psychological Association, 2018).
- **Endocrine effects:** The endocrine system refers to the carefully-woven web of hormones that fuels everyday moods, activities, and actions that take place in human bodies. When cortisol, the stress hormone, flushes through a person's body at a higher than normal rate for long periods of time, it can affect virtually

every mechanism in the human body - from the way that humans make energy, the way they store fat, their sleep behaviors and even their sexual maturation. Because of this, if a young person is exposed to more cortisol than is healthy, they can develop myriad conditions such as obesity, insomnia, stunted or delayed puberty, and chronic fatigue (American Psychological Association, 2018).

- **Gastrointestinal effects:** Stress impacts the brain-gut connection in many ways. Chronic stress can trigger discomfort, bloating, pain, and other symptoms that can make it very difficult to concentrate on one's studies - and also make it very difficult to get all of the nutrition that a growing body needs. This can in turn affect a young person's emotions, the ability to concentrate, and other parts of growing that could make the student a target for lower educational outcomes at school (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Evidence is growing that children who are exposed to the effects of poverty from a young age both have more chronic stressors and a reduced capability to manage their stress levels effectively. As a result, they're at a far higher risk for having harmful effects of stress. Neglect and hunger are common stressors that afflict impoverished children. Unfortunately, the downstream effects of these stressors mean that the typical experiences found with childhood poverty can manage to act like viruses or toxins - ultimately hijacking the normal, healthy development of a child's growing brain (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Studies have found that repeated exposure to adverse childhood experiences (or ACEs) can have the capability, even, to rebuild a child's brain, especially in the prefrontal cortex. As the prefrontal cortex is in charge of executive function, the ability to choose between good and bad, and other skills vital to becoming a productive member of society, this can wreak havoc on a young child's ability to be a good student. ACEs can also affect development of a child's hippocampus, which is the part of the brain that handles learning and retention of memories. In short, students who have undergone traumatic childhoods may be less able to retain new information - giving them a crucial handicap at school, in addition to everything else they may be going through (American Psychological Association, 2018).

As if this weren't enough, it turns out that the effects of chronic, toxic stress in poor children can mix or be compounded by other situations and conditions commonly found in low-income households. Stress can interact with air pollution, emotional disorders, and more to create and bolster cognitive deficits in affected children that only

strengthens the disadvantages they bring with them to school each and every day (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Fortunately, children are developmentally and neurologically resilient. Because their brains and bodies are in the process of growing through their teenage years, some studies have found that intervention during these formative years can have an ameliorative effect. However, in order to help the brain fully adapt or 'bounce back' from years of chronic stressors, it's vital to give low-income children as much support as possible, as early in their educations as possible (American Psychological Association, 2018).

As we have seen, this simply isn't happening on any scale that might have a mass positive effect.

### **What effect does poverty have on childhood cognitive development?**

The most important period for normal development for children is early childhood. During this time, a young human's brain is developing very rapidly. If a child is undergoing the conditions of poverty during this time, then there may be significant dramatic effects on the child's cognitive development.

During this formative time, children's physical bodies are developing, but also their social and emotional skills and even their aptitude for language and logical thinking. All of these factors - or lack of them - play a huge role in a child's wellbeing well into their adult lives (Stallen, 2017).

Completely apart from the physical conditions related to poverty, studies also show that simply being stressed can alter the way that a child's brain develops. Stress induced by poverty can lead to permanent changes in the future structure and function of the brain. As a result, a child who is affected in this way will likely experience negative consequences with reduced learning outcomes later in life, as well as health and behavioral issues (Stallen, 2017).

Researchers who have studied the effects of poverty on childhood brain development have found that growing up in poverty tends to be associated with smaller masses of cortical grey and white matter in the brain. Children who grew up in poverty also tended to have smaller volumes in the amygdala and hippocampus. The processes that these brain functions directly influence, such as stress regulation and emotional processing, are worsened as a result (Stallen, 2017).

The long-lasting repercussions of poverty on mental health include later chronic stress disorders, anxiety, impaired memory, and other adverse effects. As a result of the research performed on this phenomenon, analysts found that children who grew up in low-income communities had high amounts of cortisol, the stress hormone, in their systems at 7 and 15 months of age. These are crucial times for brain development; and cortisol's influence makes it much more difficult for young bodies to mature in a way conducive to later thriving (Stallen, 2017).

Children who live below the poverty line often have developmental delays which result in their behaving and performing between two and four years below their grade level. These delays tend to combine and escalate, resulting in uneducated adults who are likely to remain poor for much of their lives. Perhaps due to the difficulties associated with developmental delays, it's been found that nearly 30% of children who grow up in low-income neighborhoods do not graduate from high school (Stallen, 2017).

### **What effects does poverty have on the overall health of children?**

Aside from neurodevelopment effects, poverty does tend to result in adverse events for children's physical health. The effects of poverty on a child's health begin long before a child is born - and they will, most likely, last for the child's entire life.

A baby's environment in utero - before the child is born - affects the individual's future development. This uterine environment is affected by the psyche of the mother - which means that a mother who lives in a low-income or stress-ridden situation can slow her child's growth rate and possibly even increase the likelihood of premature birth. If the mother does not have access to adequate nutrition, the child will, likely, have a low birth weight - which can be associated with poor health outcomes later in life (All4Kids, 2019).

One study analyzed the relationship between low-income families and found that a low socioeconomic status was highly correlated with obesity and other chronic illnesses, such as asthma. The authors of the study theorized that children who grow up in poor communities may have limited opportunities for exercise, less access to healthy food and other options that make living healthily easier and more accessible. The downstream ramifications of poverty, therefore, can coincide with the effects of a poor diet and sedentary lifestyle - which include diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and more (All4Kids, 2019).

## **What are the effects of food insecurity on low-income children and their education?**

The fact that many children who grow up in poverty do not have steady, reliable access to food inevitably impacts their ability to enjoy an effective education. According to the US Department of Agriculture, 11.8% of American households experienced food insecurity over the course of 2017. Food insecurity may refer to a lack of food altogether or a lack of information or access to the nutritional food necessary for health and proper growth. That percentage translates to over twelve million American children undergoing food insecurity - which results in lower energy and poor developmental outcomes for those experiencing this condition (All4Kids, 2019).

Many of the most expensive and weighty problems that the United States faces today can be linked to the experience of food insecurity. The Food Research & Action Center reported that many conditions - from asthma to low birth weight and even birth defects - tend to happen more often when in families undergoing food insecurity. The report continues to say that children who do not have reliable access to good food are far more likely to have recurring illnesses, require frequent hospitalization, and as a result miss a lot more school than their well-fed classmates (All4Kids, 2019).

Specific deficiencies of key micronutrients conducive to health and growth while a child is still developing can result in many delays in proper maturation. These include reductions in attention spans and motor skills, poor memory abilities, and lower test scores. These are precisely the factors that can result in poor classroom presence and problematic relationships with teachers and classmates when the child is in school - perpetuating a lower-value educational experience for the suffering student (All4Kids, 2019).

If continued, this tendency toward sickness will manifest in adulthood as chronic diseases, such as arthritis, proclivity towards strokes, cancer, and coronary heart disease.

## **What are the effects of toxic stress on a child's development?**

When children live in poverty, they tend to have prolonged exposure to stress - whether it's from physical conditions caused by a lower income or from indirect effects, such as emotional turmoil from a dysfunctional family or constant bullying from peers because the child appears disadvantaged (The Children's Defense Fund, 2020).

Undergoing stress itself can be a harmful experience, but the effects go far further than the timed experience of that stress. If cortisol, the stress hormone, is found in excess in

the body of a developing child, this can make typical, healthy formation of that child's organs (including their heart and brain) very difficult (The Children's Defense Fund, 2020).

Cortisol is typically a very important hormone; it helps regulate a person's flight-or-fight response, and it can even help a person learn how to deal with stress effectively. However, in a young child's body, when a child hasn't learned these management techniques yet, being in a constant state of stress can make it impossible to rest and grow appropriately (The Children's Defense Fund, 2020).

### **What is the achievement gap between students in low-income schools and high-income schools?**

The correlation is unfortunate but clear: Students who grow up in less fortunate socioeconomic areas or under conditions of poverty tend to score lower on tests than their peers who may have more resources at their disposal. The achievement gap, or the metrics that show just how much better high-income students tend to perform when compared to low-income students, is only widening. It's much wider now than it has been in decades past. Now, researchers are beginning to understand that the achievement gap between the poorest students and those who live at the very top of the socioeconomic spectrum is likely far larger than previously estimated - which makes it very difficult to allocate resources for the students who will be most in need of that help (Michelmore and Dynarski, 2017).

One metric used to target these resources is measuring the body of students who are eligible for free or low-priced lunch options. However, this is a very loosely-defined metric; about a quarter of American children live in poverty, but nearly half of American students are eligible for these lower-priced meal options. Within the subset of students that qualify for reduced-price meals, moreover, there is a very wide variation in test scores (another metric that may have questionable merit, but is one of few nationwide metrics that the current education system can provide) (Michelmore and Dynarski, 2017).

### **What specific issues might an under-resourced school struggle with?**

There are many differences between a school in a low-income community and its analog in a more affluent neighborhood. Among these differences are the following:

- **Teacher Issues:** Schools in lower-income communities tend to have issues with teacher consistency, and may even have staffing issues. Over the past years, the



demand for good teachers has increased. Teachers may tend to gravitate toward schools that have more resources (and are able to pay their teachers higher salaries). In addition, the stress of having to support students struggling through poverty can make it difficult for the teachers that do work in lower-income communities to stay year to year, creating a higher turnover rate for poorer schools than wealthier ones. As a result, students in lower-income schools are unable to form long-lasting bonds with teachers and may not be able to find the mentorship, trust, and support that they need (Thompson, 2018).

- **Student Readiness:** Students who live in low-income communities may not be as prepared for school as their wealthier peers. Not only are they more likely to have health issues, they may not have experienced the same level of care as other children or have been exposed to other pre-school enrichment factors (such as being surrounded by books, educational toys, or high-quality childcare). This can mean that low-income students require a higher level of support upon matriculation in kindergarten - support which a teacher may or may not be equipped or able to provide (Thompson, 2018).
- **Lack of Funding:** All public schools should receive equal funding. However, this isn't always the case. In wealthier school districts, parents often take the initiative to organize fundraisers for specific school programs or upgrades - an initiative which parents in lower-income neighborhoods may not be able to take on. In addition, many states may allocate their resources in a lopsided fashion: Studies have shown that poor schools often do receive less money from the government than wealthier ones receive (Thompson, 2018).

## Section 2: Summary

When a child struggles with childhood poverty, that child is exposed to multifaceted levels of harm and stress that can last their entire lives. From physiological health issues all the way to downstream psychological effects of trauma from adverse childhood experiences, a systemic and institutional low economic status can affect health and success even years after a child is no longer directly affected by it.

Because this is the case, in order to best support the next generation it is vital that we begin to work toward a more even financial balance in America. While much of the onus of precipitating this change is out of the hands of teachers and parents, there are steps that we can take to help struggling students and their families thrive. In the next section, we'll take a look at these factors.



## Section 3: What We Can Do to Help End the Cycle of Poverty

The two-generation approach for eradicating the cycle of poverty requires support for parents as well as their children. One myth often associated with poverty is that the children who grow up affected by it deserve worlds of help - and the parents who 'put them in that condition' should merely be held responsible. As we've seen, the cycle of poverty shows us that many adults who live under the poverty line did absolutely nothing to put themselves there - and are often in this situation despite working very hard to give themselves and their families every possible advantage (Columbia, 2020).

Even if it could be argued that an adult with a child who lives in poverty did do something to worsen their situation, simply placing the blame on the victim would not do anything to solve the problem. For the best outcome for the whole family, including the children who grow up under those conditions, support needs to be there for both parent and child (Columbia, 2020).

There's a scientific basis for the need for multigenerational support, as well. New research out of Columbia is showing that trauma is passed down from parent to child, both socially and through a biological process known as epigenetics. If parents suffer, so do their children; there's no such thing as isolating the youth and investing in their health and happiness. If only that is done, the investment is bound to be futile (Columbia, 2020).

### Concrete Steps to Break the Cycle of Poverty

Now that we have thoroughly covered the ways in which poor students suffer disadvantages when compared to their more affluent peers, it's time to get down to business. We've mentioned the two-generation approach that currently is the go-to strategy for breaking the cycle of poverty from an institutional level. However, that isn't nearly enough to ensure that children of all income levels are getting the education they need (Bringle, 2019).

Is there anything that teachers, parents, and other people who do not occupy positions of power within the government can do to help poor children thrive?

As it turns out, there is. In this next section, we'll look at ways to help children who are suffering the effects of poverty do well in school as well as strategies to get their parents more involved in their education, no matter what traumas their families may be

experiencing. These tips can apply whether you're a teacher of struggling students, a parent in this difficult situation, an administrator at a low-income school, or anyone else who would like to do something to work toward ending the cycle of poverty (Bringle, 2019).

- **Education Surrounding the Reality of Financial Situations:** The first step in taking actionable change is making sure that you and your community are aware of the facts. If you believe the current myths surrounding poverty or are unaware that it is an issue, you cannot help. If you're suffering from poverty and don't know the details of your situation or that you can take steps to help your family heal, you won't be able to do anything about it. If you're in danger of slipping into poverty, you need to know what's happening because if you don't pay attention, you are more susceptible to being taken advantage of. Finally, if you know people who are struggling from poverty, you need to make sure that they are aware of the following parts of financial literacy:
  - How credit works
  - Their options regarding financial institutions and their products
  - Their rights when it comes to financial products and banking
  - Basic financial literacy - such as the theories behind annual percentage rates, interest rates, and loan repayment terms

Having this knowledge at your fingertips or enabling persons struggling with financial inequality to have this information can give them the tools they need to make sure that they're not getting taken advantage of by predatory lenders or unstable banks. While this in itself might not be enough to break the cycle of poverty, it could certainly help families understand that making certain choices could worsen or perpetuate their predicament (Bringle, 2019).

- **Changing the Rhetoric and Mindset Surrounding Money:** For many people suffering from poverty, one of the biggest and most crucial changes that must occur isn't necessarily to do with their financial status. One of the most impactful adjustments that must come about in order to break the cycle of poverty (and one of the hardest changes to implement) involves altering the mindset and behavior of those who struggle from poverty. This is not to blame those who are struggling; it's to help them move from survival mode into a place where they are well-equipped to thrive. People who grew up in the cycle of poverty may have

deeply ingrained feelings about money that they inherited from their parents and influenced the behaviors that they now exhibit as adults. In order to question, challenge, or change your relationship with money (or assist someone else in doing so), you should start by asking these questions:

- How did the household in which you were raised handle money?
- How did your parents handle money? Did they pass along any habits to you, healthy or otherwise?
- Think about what happens right before you spend money. What triggers do you have around money (and spending or saving it)?
- Do you have any beliefs surrounding money?
- How many assets do you own? How much money is in the bank? How much do you owe? Is it more or less than what you own?
- Are you aware of any steps that you can take to make any of these beliefs, practices, triggers or habits move in the right direction?

These questions may seem facile, but being able to see your current financial status - or assisting another with this realization - as temporary and changeable can make a world of difference. People suffering from poverty need help; we can't expect them and their children to change the cycle of poverty all by themselves. But helping people in poverty and people close to the situation have the mindset that we can solve this problem if we all think objectively and logically will make a difference in the decisions we collectively make (Bringle, 2019).

- **Knowing How to Leverage Community Resources for the Common Good:** As has been discussed elsewhere, in order to break the cycle of poverty it's clear that we need to do far more than simply have a positive mindset. We also need to be aware of how to take advantage of opportunities that come our way (or come the way of people in need), and how to use those resources as a community so that no child has to experience suffering due to their family's income level. After we establish that we have the information that we need and we've worked to ensure that everyone involved has an optimistic mindset about the change that can happen, we need to be able to realize and utilize community resources to assist those in need. First, it's vital to know what resources are available in our local communities. If you have resident financial experts, tax filers, or other people who understand money well, see if you can get them interested and involved in

assisting those in need in your community or at your school. (A good strategy for doing so will likely involve taking any prospective volunteers through the education and mindset-shift steps outlined above). Some places that you may be able to visit first in order to find people who may be willing and able to help you include:

- Nonprofit organizations
- Public schools and libraries
- Community centers
- Churches

Some of these organizations will have programs in place to teach those in need about taxes, basic financial literacy, and financial products (such as loans) that are not predatory and are geared to help people succeed. Sometimes, institutions like libraries will even have recurring speakers, free courses, and resources to learn further about opportunities like coaching (Bringle, 2019).

- **Learning the Real Ways that People Take Advantage of the Poor - and Establishing Protective Practices in Your Community:** Unfortunately, it's very common for some businesses and financial institutions to have programs and practices that may look like they're helping people when in fact they are geared to take advantage of people who need help. For example, the cycle of payday lending rarely helps anyone other than the person offering the loan. Keeping impoverished people away from these types of so-called financial 'opportunities' can help them refrain from placing themselves in an even more difficult situation. Helping people be aware of predatory practices and making alternative options (such as credit coaching, budgetary resources and classes, and loans that have reasonable interest rates) very clear will help make sure that no one is taking advantage of anyone in your community (Bringle, 2019).
- **Remembering that Credit Counts - and Establishing Systems for Education Regarding Credit that Truly Helps:** If you or anyone you love has ever had bad credit, you know that it can truly take a toll on your financial wellness for a very long time. Helping our community members establish habits and practices that are geared to help their credit scores grow over time will help ensure that, when people want to purchase a home or a car or a loan, they aren't saddled with interest rates that could render those types of projects impossible. Bad credit can

do far more damage than necessarily in a person's financial life, as well - in some states, bad credit can influence the type of jobs that people are able to get. Breaking the cycle of poverty will definitely include thorough responsibility in the way that people manage credit. Connecting people in need to coaches, experts, and other people who can be trusted to assist them with the credit rebuilding process can go a long way toward improving a family's financial situation. It's also important that everyone knows precisely how credit works, how institutions determine one's credit score, and the types of actions that influence a person's credit (Bingle, 2019).

## Concrete Steps to Help Impoverished Students

So far, we've focused on general ways to support adults and parents to break the cycle of poverty. This is very important, as it's clear that assisting parents and helping rebuild the financial health of families is a key step toward making sure that America's children have access to a great education, regardless of their financial status.

Now, we turn to specific ways to help students who may be experiencing poverty. Studies indicate that approximately one in five children in America live in poverty - a statistic that has begun to fuel the fire of educational reform. Whether or not this comes to pass on an institutional level anytime soon, it's vital that each member of an academic community feels empowered to assist students directly. Next, we'll go into several concrete ways that you can take action to help students living in poverty:

- **Make sure that you have high expectations for your students who are living in poverty:** If you have an impoverished student, one of your initial reflexes may be to walk on eggshells around that student. You may wish, consciously or otherwise, to shield that student from further hardships in your classroom. You may think that giving these students an easy time in your classroom or cutting them a little slack is one way that you can make their lives a little easier. You'd be right - in the short-term. However, to make sure that your students from a meager financial background have the same skills and opportunities before them as their peers who may have a better home situation, you need to have high expectations of your students from low-income backgrounds as well. To do otherwise would truly be an injustice. As an educator, you will need to find ways to balance your empathy and compassion for what struggles a child may have with your primary job - which is to give them a rigorous, value-based education (Harmon, 2018).

Why is this important? If you, as a teacher, hold your students to high expectations, this teaches your students the ability to work toward reachable goals. It teaches them that success is possible. It helps motivate them to do better. This skill of motivation and goal achievement is more important than any subject you may teach your students in class - and it is impossible to do properly if you do not hold your students to high expectations (Harmon, 2018).

Interested in actionable ways to make this happen - and get your students more involved in the self-motivation process? Here are a few ideas you may wish to try:

- Have your students set their own goals - with input and assistance from you, if necessary. Then, meet with your students periodically to give them the information that they need to achieve those goals on their own!
- On the first day of school, make it very clear what your expectations are for behavior in your classroom and on assignments that you give your students. Make it clear to your students why you have those expectations of them; for example, that friendly, respectful behavior in class is beneficial for the other students, and handing assignments in on time will help your students establish habits of responsibility that will make life after school much easier. Children are practical people; these reasons will help! In addition, follow up with further conversations with students in your classroom if you find that a reminder is necessary.
- Expect nothing other than the best from each student when it comes to the work that they hand in to you. If you know that they're not doing their best, make the effort to call them out on it.
- Hold yourself to high expectations as well! Your students need to see that you're self-motivated so they can mirror that behavior. Share a few goals that you have with your students from time to time, as well as the ideas that you have for making them happen (Harmon, 2018).
- **When possible, help your students realize that there are worlds outside of your classroom.** As aforementioned, children are eminently practical people. If they believe that there's no point to schooling outside of making good grades on tests, they won't care much about doing well. In addition, children who live in poverty may have limited experience viewing and enjoying the world around them - perhaps due to limited resources, perhaps because their parents or caregiver needs to be at work, or for any of many other reasons. As their teacher, you can

open their eyes to what the world has to offer - which can help present motivation for children to do what they can to excel in school. Here are a few ideas to help with this that you may wish to try (Harmon, 2018):

- No matter what your specific subject or expertise is, teach your students about a wide array of career options. If you're a math teacher, you can write word problems about scientists and chefs; if you're a science teacher you can talk about the physics of repairing cars and the chemistry that goes into making medicine.
- If it's an accepted practice in your school, invite experts from other fields to come in and speak to your class. (These can even, simply, be other teachers who work at your school, or parents of children in your class).
- If it's an accepted practice at your school, take your children on a field trip to a local museum, sports center, factory or place of business. If you teach virtually or would rather stay on your school campus with your students, peruse the vast number of free video tours of noted museums on the internet for inspiration!

Whatever you are able to do, make sure that you connect the activity back to your students' real-life experiences. This will help them see what is out there through the lens of what's possible for them (Harmon, 2018)!

- **Build relationships with both your students and their families.** Children living through the trauma of poverty often need more reliability in their lives - particularly adults whom they feel safe around. If you can be a source of consistency for them and their families, they'll appreciate it. Additionally, when you're looking to build a creative, effective, and positive learning environment for students in your classroom, a relationship built on respect and trust can make your job much easier (Harmon, 2018).
- **Teach your students how to learn emotional and social skills and strategies, in addition to your specific subject.** Students who come from underprivileged or low-income backgrounds can often have a difficult time focusing when they're at school because of personal or emotional traumatic events (or ACEs). Further, they may not have the resources available to them at home to learn these social skills, ones that are crucial for building a community and enjoying personal growth. If you're at a loss for specific emotional learning strategies to share, consider beginning with these two:



- **Calming Breathing Techniques:** The way in which you breathe - the depth, the rate, etc - has a large impact on your anxiety and other physiological symptoms of stress. As children who undergo poverty tend to be very sensitive to a variety of stressors, you can teach these students how to manage stress with strategic breathing.
- **A Specific Place to Pursue Calm:** Instead of a punishment corner (or the equivalent) in your classroom, create, if possible a small reading nook with pillows, writing implements, stress balls and other implements that speak to a young student's senses. When it becomes clear that a student does not have a mindset that is conducive to learning, invite the student to go to the corner to use breathing techniques, reading or crafting materials, or any of another variety of activities specifically targeted to regulate their mindset. This will not only likely be a more attractive and peaceful option for your classroom, but it will also help establish in your student's mind that self-soothing is an option (Harmon, 2018).
- **Donate - or manage donations strategically.** If you're a teacher, there's a better-than-likely chance that you're already spending a lot of your own money for classroom supplies at the beginning of each year. Some schools and teachers work to alleviate this load by asking students to bring in classroom supplies in addition to their own personal materials when each semester begins. For some students and families, this isn't a heavy burden to bear. For others, it may be impossible. If you're aware that some students and families in your class may be in a better position to provide classroom supplies than others, work with the higher-income families to source the supplies you need. Don't request more from families already struggling to make ends meet. You could even consider asking higher-income families to donate unused school supplies to your school, for the use of anyone who may need them. This may feel like a humbling request, but it'll be much easier for you as the teacher to realize and act on this need than it is for a struggling student (Nelson, 2017).

## Ways to Boost Parental Involvement in Low-Income Families

Aside from ways to support the financial health of families in your community and the specific students in your classroom, you can also work to give the parents of your students the tools they need to be more involved in their students' education.



To that end, let's discuss a few actionable ways that we can help boost parental involvement:

- 1. First, start by examining any of the beliefs you may (even subconsciously) hold regarding parents and poverty.** As teachers, we need to remember that parents trust us with their children - and their children may not be fully healthy, may be sensitive, or may not have had access to an education or other resources prior to your involvement in their lives. For many parents and children, it is a huge exercise in trust, just sending their children to school every day. This flies in the face of a myth that, sadly, is quite popular among some affluent communities: The myth that parents of poor children simply care less than do parents with higher incomes. To help the students in our classroom, no matter what their socioeconomic status may be, we need to realize that all parents likely want to be involved in their child's education - or, if they don't, it's not simply because of their income level. Start with the assumption that the parents do care, always, very much - and work from there (Ferguson, 2017).
- 2. Establish a connection with the parents of your students as soon as possible.** Early in the school year, send over a personalized letter or email, or make a quick phone call. To you, it's an item on your to-do list; to the parents of a struggling child, it may well be a lifeline. Parents, especially parents making surviving on a low income, may be chronically overwhelmed or busy. They may not feel like they're able to initiate that connection or conversation with you. Many education experts strongly suggest that modern schools should rethink the current practices surrounding parental involvement, stating that schools would do better to avoid waiting until disciplinary problems arise to establish contact with the parents of students. Instead, if schools give opportunities for parents to be involved earlier in the academic year, disciplinary problems may never arise - or, more realistically, it'll be easier to manage them if a student's care team has already been established. This doesn't have to be a huge production: a quick note, or a call home when your student does something positive worth sharing is all that will be needed (Ferguson, 2017).
- 3. Brainstorm events and services that will draw parents toward your school.** When parents see your school as something that serves children, they may be disinclined to spend time there themselves - particularly if they're stressed, overworked, or busy. Work with your school to offer workshops and free classes that target topics of interest for adults in your area: whether it be for adult

subject matter (for example, courses about finances, as mentioned above) or for family health, such as on the biology behind child development, family nutrition, or easy ways for parents to help with homework, many parents will use this as a reason to set foot on campus for the first time. If your school has the wherewithal to encourage parental involvement in this way, parents will begin to feel welcomed - and that they can trust you and your school to be a positive influence in their lives (Ferguson, 2017).

- 4. Make sure that your school has a very public way to showcase opportunities for parents to volunteer.** Sometimes, parents very much want to be involved in their student's day-to-day life as volunteers, but they don't know where to begin or even how to learn more about what might be expected. If you can completely remove that barrier to involvement, you'll likely see parental participation increase. Make it clear at every turn that your school wants parents to be involved for field trips, at group presentations, and more. One expert recommends putting together a list of different ideas regarding ways that parents can be involved, and then simply reiterating at every turn that your school would love for parents to review and respond to the list. This makes it easy for parents who may be uncertain or timid about what they may be able to offer to do so in a private way. This also makes parental involvement feel significantly less like a chore than, say, a direct call mandating parent volunteers for a specific field trip (Ferguson, 2017).
- 5. Finally, ask parents for their ideas about how best to educate their children.** You are the professional, you are the one who knows the ins and outs of modern education and how best to apply them; but parents are the ones who best know their own children. Make sure that your school has a way to include parents simply by asking them, regularly, for feedback about how their children are doing. This will make parents feel valued, and it will also help them feel interested in the process. It will also help parents associate conversations with teachers and administration with optimism, hope, and efficiency instead of frustration and dissatisfaction - emotions that parents all too often connect with education professionals (Ferguson, 2017).

## Summary and Conclusion

When we consider childhood poverty, it's easy to assume that it's such an overwhelming and pervasive problem that we, as teachers, simply can't hope to do anything about it.

While it is a chronic and systemic issue, one that will require action at every level of communities and governments, as teachers, we do have the ability to make sure that we're caring for each student as they are, in our classrooms, as best as we possibly can.

To a child from an unstable home or one struggling with the effects of a low-income family, you can be a source of reliability, compassion, empathy, and comfort. You can also provide resources and high expectations so that your students learn to be self-motivated even in the midst of their troubles. As teachers, we have the unique possibility to help children precisely where they are; and, if they're struggling with poverty, there are a few specific ways that we can do just that.

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# Part 2:

## MODULE 1

# Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior

## Description

*Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior* is designed to equip classroom teachers and other educators to reduce the instances of bullying behavior within their classrooms .

## Contents of the Trainer Package

This comprehensive document provides you all materials necessary to provide training to education staff on issues related to understanding and intervening in bullying behavior in the school setting. Content provided includes:

### Learning About This Training

**Workshop Overview Materials:** Items describing the purpose and structure of the training.

- Learning Objectives
- Time Required
- Audience
- Workshop Series
- Icon Key
- Equipment and Materials
- Training Room Set-Up
- Handout Instructions

### Preparing for Training

**Trainer Resources:** Important information to inform your preparation for and conducting of the training.

- Trainer Terminology
- Polling Information
- Notes

**Special Preparations:** A description of steps to be completed prior to the day of training.

- Bullying Scenarios (used in Activity 3)

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**List of Slides:** A complete list of PowerPoint slides used in the training.

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**List of Handouts:** A complete list of the handouts used in the training.

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**Trademarks:** An important note regarding legal trademarks referenced within the guide.

## Facilitating the Training

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**Trainer's Outline:** A step-by-step guide for conducting this training event.

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## Workshop Overview

### Description

*Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior* is designed to equip classroom teachers and other educators to reduce the instances of bullying behavior within their classrooms.

### Learning Objectives

Participants 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.
- Learn to use specific strategies for addressing, reporting, and following up on bullying behavior when it occurs.

### Audience

The workshop is designed to be conducted with classroom teachers as well as other educators and support personnel who work with students within the school environment. The workshop works best with 12 to 30 participants but can be done with larger groups as well.



## Adapting the Workshop Delivery Time Frame

If the workshop is delivered to larger groups, it may be necessary for the trainer to adapt some activities to fit within a 2.5-hour time frame.

If the workshop needs to be delivered in shorter increments, we recommend breaking the training into 1-hour sessions.

In the handouts, we have provided two alternative versions of the workshop agenda that can be used. Handout 2A is an agenda for a workshop delivered in 2.5 hours. Handout 2B is an agenda for a workshop delivered in sessions. The first two sessions are 60 minutes each; the third session is 30 minutes.

## Workshop Series

This workshop is the first in a series of two training sessions intended to address bullying behavior within schools. Although the workshop can be conducted as a stand-alone training, it is *strongly recommended* that both workshops be conducted as a series. This module contains references to the second workshop; if the second workshop will not be used at some point following this training, it will be important to omit references to the second workshop when they occur in the Trainer's Outline.

## Equipment and Materials

The following equipment and materials should be present in the training room:

- LCD projector and large screen (if you are planning to use your own laptop computer with Microsoft PowerPoint loaded on it; otherwise, you will need to load the PowerPoint presentation onto a flash drive and add a computer to this list)
- Multiplug surge protector and an extension cord (if needed for the laptop and data projector)
- Internet access (if online polling will be used)
- Lavalier (wireless lapel-type) microphone (optional depending on the size and acoustics of the training room)
- Easel with a full pad of flip chart paper (self-adhesive type if possible)

- Markers (fresh nontoxic, water-based markers in bold colors)
- Masking or blue painters' tape (needed if flip chart pad is not self-adhesive type)
- 3" x 5" Post-it Notes (three per participant plus 20 extra in case of errors or unanticipated participants)
- 5" x 8" index cards (in equal amounts of colors red, green, and yellow. From these cards, you will create a set of three [one card of each color] per triad formed in Activity 3, plus four additional sets in case of unanticipated participants)
- ¾" round green dots (enough for three dots per participant)

## Training Room Set-Up

The training room should include adequate space for participants. It should be large enough to allow participants to be comfortably seated and also to move around and interact with each other.

*Avoid auditorium style seating.* If possible, have participants seated at tables so no one's back faces the front of the room. A rectangular table set at the front of the room can be used for trainer notes, materials, and handouts.

The training room should have controllable heating and cooling with clear access for you to set and adjust the room temperature.

The training room should have clear wall space for posting large sheets of flip chart paper before and during the workshop.

## Handout Instructions

*(See full list of handouts on page 13.)*

Duplicate a set of handouts for each participant using a **high-quality copier or commercial copy service**. You may wish to make copies on paper of varied colors to create a more interesting presentation and to assist participants in locating specific handouts during the training.

If you plan to use participant folders, assemble the handouts in the order they are listed in this guide. Be aware that some handouts should not be included in the folder because they need to be distributed as part of an activity. The use of these handouts is referenced in the trainer notes and also marked by an asterisk (\*) in the list of handouts. If you do not plan to assemble folders, individual stacks of each handout should be placed on the trainer table to be distributed during the workshop session.

**NOTE:** *Throughout the workshop, when using handouts, make every effort not to read excessive amounts of the content. Reading a handout instead of summarizing the information suggests a lack of trainer preparation and can be off-putting to workshop participants.*

# Trainer Resources

## Trainer Terminology

In conducting this workshop series, it will be important that, as the trainer, you model the use of specific terminology in speaking about bullying. Because bullying is a behavior and not a permanent characteristic or a trait of a student, it is important to avoid using terms like *bully* for students who engage in bullying behavior. It is also important to avoid using the term *victim* in talking about students who may be the targets of bullying behaviors. This is an important distinction for the following reasons, which you will be sharing in Activity 2:

- By understanding bullying as a behavior, we can use behavior management techniques to alter undesirable behavior and replace it with positive prosocial behavior.
- Viewing a student as a victim can suggest that there is something inherent about that individual that makes her or him a natural target for bullying behaviors. Because bullying is often based on perceived difference causing a student to be the target of bullying, any student can, at any point, become a target for bullying by another student.
- If we believe that bullying is a permanent characteristic of the student engaging in bullying, it creates a situation in which we believe it is not possible to change or alter the behavior.

Given the nature of this topic, you may need to answer questions from participants regarding certain terms. For example:

- **What is the difference between bullying and harassment?** Bullying overlaps with discriminatory harassment when it is based on race, national origin, color, sex, age, disability, or religion, which is covered under federal civil rights laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). When bullying and harassment overlap, federally funded schools have an obligation to resolve the harassment. At present, no federal law directly addresses bullying, but bullying meets the definition of harassment when it is based on membership in a class that is protected under federal civil rights legislation, such as race, national origin, color, sex, age, disability, or religion. Harassment represents a violation of federal law and so may require districts to respond to incidents differently than they would respond to other types of bullying that are not based on membership in a protected class. Bullying is still prohibited under state law and districts have an obligation to resolve it according to the provisions in their state laws.

If participants want more information, direct them to **Handout 8: Frequently Asked Questions With Additional Resources**.

## Polling Information

Schools and other organizations are increasingly using polling as a way to gauge individual responses within a group and to quickly tabulate responses to specific questions. Polling allows participants in a workshop to respond to questions posed by the trainer without divulging who chose which option. Polling is suggested as one option for use in Activity 3 in place of using colored cards and group preferences. If you are using polling, you can have participants respond as individuals rather than in triads. Polling is also suggested for possible use in Activity 4.

If you wish to use polling, check with the audiovisual or IT staff well in advance of the workshop date to determine whether the equipment is available at the training site. On the day of the training, provide adequate time prior to the workshop to set up and test the polling equipment in the training room.

If the training room is not equipped for polling but does have Internet access, you can still use polling. You can easily search for and access Web-based polling resources on the Internet. Most will allow you to use polling in which participants vote using their cell phones and the votes are tabulated and posted immediately. If you plan to use this format, make sure to confirm at the *beginning* of the training that every participant has a charged and working cell phone. If there are participants who do not have a charged and working cell phone, then you should plan to conduct Activity 3 using the colored cards rather than using polling. Be aware that if you use a Web-based tool, you should find out if there is a per-participant charge.

## Note

**Approach:** Throughout this workshop, we intend for *all* students to be represented in the content, activities, and strategies, regardless of race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning [LGBTQ] youth), socially isolated youth, and students with disabilities and special health needs.

## Before the Workshop: Special Preparations

1. As you plan the training event, determine whether you will use a pre-event *and* post-event self-assessment of participants or a post-event assessment only. We encourage you to use the two-step process to gather additional information about the impact of the training event, but the choice is yours. **If you choose to use the two-step self-assessment**, make an appropriate number of **Optional Handout A: Pre-Event Self-Assessment** copies to be distributed to every participant as you begin the training. See *Step 2 in Activity 1 in the Trainer's Outline*. (Note: *The Post-Event Self-Assessment* is included as **Handout 9**.)
2. Before conducting this workshop, make sure that you read the section **Trainer Resources: Trainer Terminology**. You will introduce the information in Activity 2, but it is important that you model correct terminology in speaking about bullying from the very beginning of the training session.
3. The workshop provides the option of using polling technology where it is available (see Activity 3). If you plan to use polling, it will be important to make the necessary arrangements and test the equipment before starting the training.
4. In preparation for the workshop, it is important for you to be familiar with the state laws and school district policies of the participants taking the workshop. Before the workshop, it is important to get a copy of the school's bullying policies and review them ahead of time. This will help you prepare for asking participants about their familiarity with their school policies in Activity 4.

All 50 states (as well as Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico) have anti-bullying laws, and a majority of states have anti-bullying policies in place as well. It is important for educators to know the details of laws and policies in their own states and school districts. This training offers a federal-level definition of bullying behavior that may differ from the bullying definition detailed in a participant's own state laws or school district policies. Bullying definitions are critical from a legal standpoint, so it becomes important for participants to understand that definitions and recommended actions for responding to bullying behavior presented in the training are general guidelines that should be considered in concert with their state laws and district policy provisions.

In some cases, the recommendations provided in the training may conflict with school district policy guidelines, so you should be prepared to adapt/refine the training to ensure that content aligns with policy requirements. Bullying policies in some states are extremely prescribed, and there may be consequences for staff who fail to follow policy prescriptions. You can find an up-to-date database on anti-bullying policies at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/index.html>.

5. It is recommended that you provide copies of school district bullying policies to each participant. This could be helpful when working through sections on how to respond to bullying incidents, particularly because districts have different rules and guidelines for how teachers and school staff are to respond.

6. This workshop series works best when it is part of a larger schoolwide effort to address bullying behavior. Before doing the workshop, it is important that you find out whether the schools that are represented by the participants actually have a coordinated schoolwide approach so that you can place the workshop into that larger context.
7. For several activities, you will need to get materials ready prior to the workshop:
  - For Activity 3, you will need to create sets of three colored index cards for distribution during the activity. Create sets by clipping together three cards, including one card of each color red, green, and yellow. (*Note: If using online polling, this preparation step can be omitted.*)
  - For Activity 3, you also should make a copy of **Bullying Scenarios** (found at the end of this section of the Trainer Package) to read during the activity.
  - For Activity 4, print (in LARGE block letters) on a sheet of flip chart paper posted in the front of the room:

#### WHAT BULLYING BEHAVIOR LOOKS LIKE

- For Activity 4, print (in LARGE block letters) each of the strategies listed below on a separate piece of flip chart paper and post the sheets randomly around the room on the walls of the training room.

Make one sheet per strategy and print the words “Bullying Strategy” at the top of each sheet:

- Immediately stop the behavior.
- Use a zero tolerance policy.
- Use your school’s policy to guide your actions.
- Provide group-counseling sessions for students who engage in bullying.
- Always enforce your school’s rules against bullying.
- When intervening, do not allow those involved in bullying a student to argue their case.
- Be aware of bystanders and remind them of their duty to help others.
- Develop simple short-term solutions.
- Use conflict resolution to help students involved work out issues.
- Use peer mediation to help students involved establish more positive relationships.
- Impose consequences for any students who were bullying.
- Do not ask those involved to sit down and work out the problem together.

8. An option to consider in preparing participants for the workshop and encouraging their active participation is to have the principal of the school where the workshop will take place send out a welcome or invitation e-mail to everyone, describing the purpose of the workshop, objectives, and topics that will be covered. The e-mail could include a copy of the one-page **Optional Handout 10: Ten Things Students Wish Teachers Knew About Name-Calling and Bullying** to give staff members an idea of the content to be presented.





## Bullying Scenarios

(Copy the following two pages for use in Activity 3.)

- Angie—usually a friendly, engaged student in your classroom—has started sitting in the back of the room and no longer gets involved much in class discussions. One day you observe that, as she’s leaving class, two other students walking out of class right behind Angie are whispering to each other and giggling.

**Answer:** *May not be bullying but raises concerns. More information is needed.*

**Rationale:** *There is no clear indication that the two students giggling were responding to Angie. The behavior patterns warrant close observation, and, as a teacher, you would want to reach out to Angie to discuss the changes you have noted. In particular, you want to explore whether Angie perceives a power imbalance in the relationship with the two other students or if this behavior is being repeated.*

- A class of fourth-grade children are brainstorming a list of topics they can write about during writing workshop. The conversation veers toward hobbies, and Sami says he wants to write about his dance class. The next day, he comes to school in jeans and his dance leotard. The teacher overhears two boys teasing Sami in the hallway as Sami takes off his jacket, “That’s a girl’s shirt. You look weird!” “How come you’re wearing a girl’s body suit?” and “Sami’s a ballerina.” Both break out into laughter. (Adapted from GLSEN’s 2016 *Ready, Set, Respect! Elementary School Toolkit*, [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)).

**Answer:** *May not be bullying but raises concerns. More information is needed.*

**Rationale:** *The comments made by the boy toward Sami clearly are potentially hurtful but could be more of an expression of immaturity than an intentional attempt to inflict harm. From the information provided, this is a single, isolated incident and may not yet rise to the level of bullying. The teacher(s) involved clearly will want to address the situation, using it as a teachable moment, and continue to monitor student interactions to ensure that it is not repeated. If concerns warrant, a single episode of unwanted or aggressive behavior among students in which there is a clear imbalance of power needs special attention to nip it in the bud before it can become repetitive and develop into a pattern of bullying behaviors.*

*Also in this scenario, this example may constitute discriminatory harassment based on sex or sex stereotypes because comments appear to be based on a student’s perceived gender nonconformity. Note that failure to recognize discriminatory harassment when addressing student misconduct may lead to inadequate or inappropriate responses that fail to remedy violations of students’ civil rights.*

- During most of the semester, Steve was part of what had seemed to be a pretty tight group of students who would often sit together in class and volunteer to work as a team on class projects. For the last few weeks, when Steve would sit with the group, they would ignore him, acting as if he wasn’t there. Steve has now started sitting on the other side of the room from the group. Steve’s mom calls to express concern

that her son is becoming increasingly withdrawn at home and talks about wanting to change schools. The previous evening, she walked into Steve's room and found horrible messages addressed to him on his Facebook page that he had left open. She has called you because the messages were from the same group of students with whom Steve had been friends—students in your class. When she confronted her son about the messages, he broke down and said that the messages have appeared every night for the past few weeks.

**Answer:** *Bullying behavior.*

**Rationale:** *The behavior of Steve's group of former friends is unwanted and socially aggressive and is occurring over time. Steve's efforts to remain connected with the group proved him to be powerless to combat the social isolation it imposed. Steve eventually expressed his isolation in physical form by sitting away from the group. The bullying then continued outside the classroom on the Internet.*

- Today is the day that your students are presenting their posters at the conclusion of their genealogy projects. Every student is supposed to stand up and talk about their families and what they put on their poster. When Rita talks about her dads, someone in the back of the room yells, "That's weird!"

**Answer:** *Not bullying.*

**Rationale:** *Based on the information provided, there does not appear to be a repeated pattern nor does the student involved seem to have "less power" than other students do. The comment warrants discussion of being an inappropriate response to a classmate's presentation but, without other indicators, does not appear to be bullying.*

- Cathy is a bright student who has done well in your class for the first half of the year. You have been impressed by the way that her kindness and bubbly personality have made her a popular student. Cathy is also overweight. In a unit on the early American West, Cathy presents a fine oral report on the role of women in settling the Western frontier. She gets an A on her report, but from that point on, you begin to see a marked change in her personality. She becomes increasingly withdrawn in class, and her academic work is barely passing. Concerned about the change you're seeing, you ask to meet with her after school. When you express your concern, Cathy explodes in anger, lashing out at "this stupid school" and storms out of your classroom. A piece of paper falls from her book bag as she's leaving. You pick it up and find that it contains a crudely drawn picture of a fat woman in a cowgirl outfit. Written across the top of the sheet are the words "Cathy the **COW**girl." After further investigation, you find that these pictures have been appearing in the girls' bathroom and locker room as well as on the Internet. Some of them simply read "Cathy the Cow."

**Answer:** *Bullying behavior.*

**Rationale:** *Focused primarily on her weight, the behaviors are unwanted, aggressive, designed to make Cathy look foolish, and clearly being repeated over time. Cathy's outburst may be her pent-up anger at feeling powerless to stop the behavior.*

## List of Slides

*(Provided here as a reference only. Review entire contents of this module to see how titles support workshop content.)*

### SLIDE

1. Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior
2. Disclaimer
3. Introductions
4. Workshop Objectives
5. What Is Bullying?
6. Core Elements of Bullying Behaviors
7. The Circle of Bullying
8. A Change in Perspective
9. What Do You See?
10. What to Look for in Bullying Behavior
11. Color Code
12. What to Look for in Bullying Behavior (2nd use of slide)
13. Types of Bullying
14. Context for Bullying
15. Cyberbullying: Special Concerns
16. How Often Does Bullying Occur?
17. Forms of Bullying\* (in order of frequency)
18. Students Bullied Because of Perceived Differences
19. Students Most Likely to Be Bullied
20. Impact of Bullying
21. Possible Indicators of Students Who Bully
22. Common Myths About Students Who Bully\*
23. Possible Indicators of Students Who May Be Being Bullied
24. Why Students Don't Ask for Help
25. What Do You See? (2nd use of slide)
26. What Does Not Work\*
27. Address Bullying Behavior
28. 1. Stop the Behavior on the Spot
29. When to Get Help

30. 2. Find Out What Happened
31. 3. Support the Students Involved
32. Turn Down the Heat
33. 4. Report and Follow Up
34. Important Reporting Considerations
35. Impact of Trauma on Students
36. Common Symptoms of Trauma
37. Common Symptoms of Trauma (more information)
38. Reflections\*

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Asterisk (\*) indicates animated slides in which the trainer will be asked to click the same slide more than one time.

## List of Handouts

*(Provided here as a reference only. Review entire contents of this module to see how titles support workshop content.)*

### HANDOUT

- A. (Optional) Pre-Event Self-Assessment
  1. Choose Three
  2. Workshop Agenda
    - 2A—Workshop delivered in 2.5 hours (single session)
    - 2B—Workshop delivered in three segments (multiple sessions)
  3. Facts About Bullying Behavior\*
  4. Warning Signs of Students Who Bully and Those Who Are Being Bullied
  5. Strategies for Addressing Bullying Behavior at School\*
  6. Turn Down the Heat: Techniques for De-Escalating Student Behavior
  7. Resources About Trauma-Sensitive Practices for Teachers
  8. Frequently Asked Questions With Additional Resources
  9. Post-Event Self-Assessment
  10. (Optional) Ten Things Students Wish Teachers Knew About Name-Calling and Bullying

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Asterisk (\*) indicates handouts that should not be placed in participant packet but rather handed out separately. See the Handout Instructions section for more information.

## Trademarks

Microsoft PowerPoint is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation.

Post-it is a registered trademark of 3M.

## Trainer's Outline

### ACTIVITY **1**

## Welcome and Introductions

**NOTE:** Before starting the workshop, display **PowerPoint slide 1: Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior** so it is on view as workshop participants arrive.

1. Introduce yourself, and briefly share your background and your interest in or connection to the subject matter of the training.

**NOTE:** The first time you are asked to display a PowerPoint slide or distribute a handout, the number and title of the slide or handout will appear in bold type.

2. **Optional activity at trainer discretion:** If you have decided to use the pre-event and post-event self-assessment process as outlined in **Before the Workshop: Special Preparations**, distribute **Optional Handout A: Pre-Event Self-Assessment** now. Indicate that a similar form will be provided at the conclusion of the training and that participants' feedback will help you get a sense of the value of the training for participants. Ask participants to take a few moments to provide their best self-assessment to the questions provided. Instruct participants about how you wish to collect the completed forms.
3. Distribute or draw attention to **Handout 1: Choose Three**, and explain that in a moment participants will have an opportunity to meet a few other individuals who are part of the workshop. Instruct participants to complete the handout by finishing three of the sentence stems. Explain that they can complete any of the three stems they choose.

**NOTE:** If the workshop is being done with a group of teachers who already know each other, point out that during this brief activity they may find out a few things about each other that they did not know before.

4. When participants are ready, explain that you are going to create some groups that will encourage participants to meet a few people who they might not already know or work with on a regular basis. Instruct roughly half the group to take their completed worksheets and line up on one side of the room side-by-side facing the center of the room. Ask the other half of the group to line up in the same fashion on the opposite side of the room.

5. When participants are ready, explain that at your signal they should move toward the center of the room and pair up with someone from the other side. State that once they have created a pair, each pair should then find another pair and create a group of four. Explain that as each group of four has formed, they should move to the side of the room to indicate that they are ready for the next step.

***NOTE:** Because it is unlikely that the line of participants on either side of the room will be equal in number, some people will end up partnering with someone from their side of the room. This is perfectly fine. The intention in creating groups in this fashion is to encourage participants to meet new people.*

***NOTE:** If you have an odd number of participants, you can ask people to join a different foursome, creating two groups of five. To make sure that everyone has a chance to share within the time allotted, it is important that no group is larger than five members.*

6. When all the groups have formed, display **PowerPoint slide 3: Introductions**. State that everyone will have 10 minutes to introduce him- or herself using the prompts on the slide and then share their three completed sentence stems.

***NOTE:** The introduction slide asks participants to describe their role within the school. Although most participants in this workshop will be teachers, it is also possible that you may have a group that includes other classroom or school personnel.*

7. When 10 minutes have elapsed or when it is clear that all the groups have finished, tell the groups to do one more task in setting the stage for their time together.
8. First, remind participants that this workshop will address bullying in school and its impact on students and teachers alike. Point out that in a moment you will review the objectives and agenda for the training, but first each group will consider what bullying looks like, particularly as they might see it occurring in their school.

***NOTE:** As trainer, you should have reviewed **Trainer Resources: Trainer Terminology**, which provides the rationale for using and not using certain terminology to describe bullying behaviors. Throughout the workshop, it will be very important that you avoid using terms like ‘bully’ or ‘victim of bullying’ when discussing this subject area. Instead, use terms like “students who bully” and “students who are bullied.” The importance of how we talk about this area will be explored with participants in Activity 2.*

9. Distribute three large-size (3” x 5”) Post-it Notes and a marker in a dominant color (black, dark blue, dark green, etc.) to each group.

- Instruct participants that each group is now to reach consensus on three short statements describing what bullying behavior looks like as they understand it or see it. Emphasize that statements may be no longer than three words; in fact, a single word would be even better. Tell groups they will have 5–7 minutes to discuss and come to consensus on their three statements, and, as they do so, they should record their statements in LARGE block letters—one statement on each Post-it Note.

*NOTE: Make sure you have extra Post-it Notes available in case a group makes a mistake or wishes to change a statement they recorded.*

- When 5–7 minutes have elapsed, point out the empty sheet of flip chart paper posted at the front of the room titled WHAT BULLYING BEHAVIOR LOOKS LIKE. Explain that each group will now take turns sharing their three statements, and, as they do so, someone from each group should come up and stick their Post-it Notes on the flip chart sheet.

*NOTE: As mentioned in the introduction section **Before the Workshop: Special Preparations**, you would have created and posted the flip chart sheet prior to starting the workshop.*

- Tell participants that as each group shares their Post-it Notes, they should be looking for themes or common ideas among the groups. If their statement matches or is very similar to an idea already on the flip chart sheet, they should stick their Post-it Note next to the matching statements.
- When all the groups have shared their ideas and posted their Post-it Notes, thank everyone for their work and tell them they can now return to their regular seats.

*NOTE: As participants are returning to their seats, use a marker and draw circles around those places where there are groups of Post-it Notes reflecting common themes.*

- When participants are ready, briefly review the evident themes from what was posted on the flip chart sheet. Tell them that in a few moments, they will consider a research-based definition of bullying and will look at common ideas between their own experience and a more formal definition of bullying behavior.
- Distribute or call attention to **Handout 2: Workshop Agenda** and display **PowerPoint slide 4: Workshop Objectives**.
- Review the workshop objectives on the PowerPoint slide. (Objectives are also recorded on the agenda.) Review the agenda and objectives, pointing out the activity blocks that will be addressed, reassuring participants that the workshop will end on time.
- Ask for and respond to any questions participants have about either the agenda or objectives.



## ACTIVITY 2

### What Is Bullying?

1. Display **PowerPoint slide 5: What Is Bullying?** Point out the definition on the slide (15).

*NOTE: The numbers shown in parentheses throughout this document refer to the source for material listed in the References section at the end of this guide.*

2. Review the definition and connect it to any similar themes identified in the previous activity that were posted on the flip chart sheet at the front of the room. Use that information to affirm the degree to which participants are already aware of key elements of bullying behavior.
3. Display **PowerPoint slide 6: Core Elements of Bullying Behaviors**, and stress the three central elements in the definition of bullying behaviors. Point out that although definitions of bullying may vary in some ways, bullying is a form of youth violence that includes (3, 15):
  - Unwanted, aggressive behavior
  - An observed or perceived imbalance of power between the student(s) doing the bullying and the student(s) being bullied
  - Behavior that is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated
4. Use the four questions below to process a conversation with the group to help ground the definition in the experience of your participants:
  - a. Point out that bullying behavior may inflict harm or distress on the student or students being bullied through physical, psychological, social, or educational harm, including limiting a student's educational opportunities (3).

*Ask:* Without revealing student identities, what are the ways you have seen this occurring in your building or classroom that illustrate how students can be hurt or harmed through bullying behavior?

As you process a brief conversation, it is very important that you make the following points if they do not emerge during the conversation (3, 5, 15):

- Students can be physically hurt ranging from minor bruises to severe injuries like lacerations, broken bones, and internal injuries.
- Being bullied by others can lead to health complaints, depression and anxiety, increased feelings of sadness and loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, and loss of interest in activities. These issues may persist into adulthood.

- In the classroom, students may experience inability to focus on their work, get poor grades, begin to withdraw from classroom activities, and can become absent from school more. Students are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.
  - A very small number of bullied children might retaliate through extremely violent measures (15).
- b. Point out that a central element of bullying behavior is that there is an observed or perceived imbalance of power, and that can include having unique information on someone. Stress that the *perception* of that imbalance on the part of a student, whether it exists or not, is enough to constitute a bullying situation. If a student feels it, then it probably exists (3, 15).

*Ask:* Again, without revealing student identities, what kind of power relationships have you seen between students being bullied and those that do bullying behaviors?

As you process a brief conversation, it is very important that you make the following points if they do not emerge during the conversation (5, 15):

- Students who engage in bullying behavior may target other students because they are perceived to be physically weaker, but it can also be because they are perceived to be less athletic, less intelligent, less popular, less connected, or otherwise viewed as different from their peers by the student who bullies.
  - Given the imbalance in power and control, the student or students who are being bullied may not be able to defend themselves in that situation (although they may be able to in other situations).
- c. Point out that bullying behavior is repetitive or is highly likely to be repeated between and among the same students over time (3, 15).

*Ask:* Can a single episode of aggressive or intimidating behavior ever be defined as bullying?

As you process a brief conversation, it is very important that you make the following points if they do not emerge during the conversation (5, 15):

- The potential of bullying behaviors to be repeated over time is a critical element that differentiates this behavior from other forms of aggressive behavior (15).
- Aggressive behaviors like fighting, aggressive communications, conflicts, and disagreements can all be extremely disturbing and must be addressed when they occur but may not be bullying.
- In some cases, rough play among friends may appear to be bullying but neither party has the intent of actually hurting the other.
- A single episode of aggressive behavior among students in which there is a clear imbalance of power needs special attention to nip it in the bud before it can become repetitive and develop into a pattern of bullying behaviors.

- d. Display **PowerPoint slide 7: The Circle of Bullying**. Point out that bullying is not limited to those who bully others and those who are bullied. Some researchers talk about the “circle of bullying” to define those directly involved and those who actively or passively assist the behavior or defend against it.

*Ask:* What are the different ways you have seen students be involved in bullying situations?

As you process a brief conversation, it is very important that you make the following points if they do not emerge during the conversation (15):

- Some students may not start the bullying or lead in the behavior, but they serve as an “assistant” to children who are doing the bullying. They might encourage the behavior or even join in.
- Some students may not be directly involved, but they may give bullying an audience. They might laugh or provide support for the student engaged in bullying. This may encourage the bullying to continue.
- Some students remain outside the bullying behavior, neither reinforcing it nor defending the child being bullied. They may just watch, which is still a way of providing an audience.
- Not all students contribute negatively to a bullying situation. Some defend the child who is being bullied or actively comfort him or her.

Tell participants that in the second workshop on building positive school climate, they will learn about ways to help students become effective bystanders when bullying occurs.

5. At the end of the discussion, distribute **Handout 3: Facts About Bullying Behavior**, and explain that it includes much of the information just shared and discussed.
6. Draw participants’ attention to the fact that you have been using very specific terminology in discussing bullying behavior. Point out that instead of talking about students who are bullies, you referred to students who engage in bullying behavior; instead of referring to a student as a victim of bullying, you spoke of a student who is being bullied. Ask participants why that change in terminology might be important when thinking about this area of student behaviors.
7. After a brief conversation, display **PowerPoint slide 8: A Change in Perspective**, and review the shifts in language and perception noted on the slide.

**NOTE:** As a resource for reviewing the PowerPoint slide, use the information in the **Trainer Resources: Trainer Terminology** cited in Activity 1.

8. State that now that we have looked at a formal definition of bullying, we will consider what it actually might look like in a school building or classroom.

## ACTIVITY 3

### What Might Bullying Behaviors Look Like?

1. Tell participants that in just a moment, you are going to display a PowerPoint slide, and, as soon as it appears, participants should immediately read the statement on the slide aloud.
2. Confirm that participants understand the directions, and then display **PowerPoint slide 9: What Do You See?**
3. Most if not all participants will read the statement missing the second “the” on the slide. Read the statement on the PowerPoint slide again, pointing out the second “the” that most folks overlooked. Process a conversation asking why it is that most people fail to read the full statement. During the conversation, be sure to stress that because most people are familiar with the statement itself, most of us make unconscious assumptions about what is there.
4. Suggest that when it comes to bullying behavior, it is important to have a clear sense of what it looks like so that we can avoid making assumptions about why we see or fail to see some forms of bullying behavior altogether.
5. Explain that in a moment, you’re going to introduce five scenarios and ask participants to determine whether the behavior in each scenario is bullying. State that just as in reading the statement on the slide, it is important to ensure that we see what is actually happening without making unconscious assumptions and also not overlook bullying behavior when it actually occurs.
6. Display **PowerPoint slide 10: What to Look for in Bullying Behavior**, and review the major points in the definition of bullying.
7. Ask for and respond to any questions from participants concerning the elements of the definition.
8. Divide participants into groups of three, and distribute a red, green, and yellow 5” x 8” note card to each triad.

**NOTE:** Before the workshop, you may wish to create sets of three cards clipped together for quick distribution.

**NOTE:** If you are working with a group who may not know each other, you may want to provide a minute or two whenever you create new groupings for participants to quickly introduce themselves.

Display **PowerPoint slide 11: Color Code**. Explain that in a moment, you are going to read five different scenarios, one at a time. After each scenario is read, each triad will have two minutes to discuss the scenario, and then at your signal the groups will be asked to hold up the color card that indicates what they think is being illustrated in that scenario. Point out that you will do this in five rounds. Explain the meaning of the cards:

- Red card: Clear example of bullying behavior—contains all three elements.
- Green card: Behavior would concern me but does not rise to the level of bullying.
- Yellow card: No clear indication based on the scenario—I would need to get more information.

***NOTE:** If the room you are using for the training is equipped with polling equipment, you may wish to use it in place of the colored cards. Check with the audiovisual (or IT person if you are using a Web-based process) before the workshop to set up and test the polling equipment in the training room. If you are using polling, you can have participants respond as individuals rather than in triads. Polling will allow participants to respond to each scenario without having to divulge who chose which option.*

***NOTE:** If the training room is not equipped for polling but does have Internet access, you can still use polling. You can access a Web-based polling process on several different websites. Most will let you use polling in which participants vote using their cell phones, and the votes are tabulated and posted immediately. If you plan to use this format, make sure to confirm at the beginning of the training that every participant has a charged and working cell phone. If there are participants who do not have charged and working cell phones, then you should plan to do the activity using the colored cards rather than using polling. If you use a Web-based tool, check to see if there is a per-participant charge.*

***NOTE:** The section **Trainer Resources: Polling Information** provides information on the use of polling.*

9. Make sure that participants understand the directions, and proceed to read the scenarios from **Before the Workshop: Special Preparations: Bullying Scenarios**.

***NOTE:** It may be helpful to participants if you read each scenario slowly and read each at least twice.*

10. After you read each scenario, tell participants that they have two minutes to discuss in their triads what they think is being illustrated in the scenario. At the end of two minutes, ask the triads to signal their response by holding up the color card that indicates their response to the scenario in terms of the three choices. Then process a brief conversation, pointing out the information in the **Bullying Scenarios** resource as to which is the correct response for each one and why.

**NOTE:** Although the **Bullying Scenarios** resource provides the correct answer and a rationale for that answer, the purpose of this activity is not to insist that every group gets the “right” answer. The purpose is to encourage the importance of looking at a behavior using the guidelines as to what bullying looks like before making assumptions as to whether it is bullying. Remind participants that the schools should still consider intervening in each of the examples.

11. Use the discussion following each scenario to reinforce the elements of bullying in the definition shared earlier. Display **PowerPoint slide 12: What to Look for in Bullying Behavior** as triads discuss each scenario. (This PowerPoint slide is a repeat of the information on PowerPoint slide 10.)
12. When all five scenarios have been discussed, ask each of the triads to pair up with another group of three to create groups of six.
13. When groups have formed, display **PowerPoint slide 13: Types of Bullying**, and review the four most common types of bullying listed on the slide (3, 15):
  - Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things.
    - Teasing, name calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, threatening to cause harm
  - Social or relational bullying involves hurting someone’s reputation or relationships.
    - Leaving someone out on purpose, telling other students not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, embarrassing someone in public, posting embarrassing images publicly or electronically
  - Physical bullying involves hurting a person’s body.
    - Hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting on, tripping, pushing, making mean or rude hand gestures
  - Damage to property includes theft, alteration, or damaging of someone’s property to cause harm.
    - Taking away someone’s personal property and refusing to give it back, destroying someone’s property in their presence, or deleting personal electronic information

**NOTE:** As you cite each type of bullying, ask participants for examples, and then use the information above to add elements that are not identified by the group.

14. Display **PowerPoint slide 14: Context for Bullying**. State that because educators may not always see bullying behaviors occur, it is important to understand the contexts in which it can occur. Within these contexts, bullying can include a range of verbal, social, or physical behaviors. Note that it is important to understand that bullying that occurs

using technology is considered cyberbullying, or electronic bullying, and is viewed as a context or location in which verbal, relational, or property bullying occurs through electronic means (3, 15).

15. Display **PowerPoint slide 15: Cyberbullying: Special Concerns**, and review why this form of bullying causes some unique concerns (3, 15):
  - Electronic and social media have become so widespread, it is now possible for anyone to post content about someone that is viewed by both acquaintances and strangers.
  - Cyberbullying can be persistent because digital devices allow 24-hour communication, making it difficult for students experiencing cyberbullying to find relief.
  - Cyberbullying can be permanent because most information remains electronically and publicly available if not reported and removed. This can harm students and impact college admissions, employment, and other areas of life.
  - Because teachers and parents may not see or overhear cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.
16. After reviewing the types of bullying, tell participants that after a few minutes of discussion within their groups, you will be asking each group to indicate which form of bullying they think is most common among students and which form is least commonly reported by students on national surveys.
17. Provide about three minutes for discussion in the small groups. Then have each group indicate which type of bullying they think is most common and which type is least common among students.
18. After all the groups have shared, display **PowerPoint slide, 16: How Often Does Bullying Occur?** State that these data come from surveys done with students ages 12–18, conducted during the 2014–15 school year by both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Education.
19. Display **PowerPoint slide 17: Forms of Bullying** that lists the forms in their order of predominance (13).

***NOTE:** This slide is animated so that a new bullet point will be displayed with each click of the slide.*

State that the forms of bullying displayed are listed in descending order, with number 1 occurring the most often. These results come from 24 million students surveyed in the 2014–15 school year, five million of which reported being bullied.

20. After a brief discussion, ask participants to return to their regular seats.
21. State that participants have now had an opportunity to consider a definition of bullying and what it might look like in a school. Suggest that they will now take



a few moments to think about which students may be more likely to become the targets of bullying behavior.

*Ask:* What groups of students in your school are more likely to become the target of bullying? Ask participants to share examples, again, without revealing the identity of individual students.

22. Record examples on a flip chart sheet as they are shared.
23. After sharing and recording examples from participants, display **PowerPoint slide 18: Students Bullied Because of Perceived Differences**, and review the items on the slide, noting where items match what was listed on the flip chart sheet (12).
24. After reviewing the PowerPoint slide, point out that the items are listed in the order in which student groups are most likely to be bullied. Ask participants whether the order reflects what they see in their school. Suggest that whether or not the order mirrors what they observe, the information can be very helpful as a tool for building their sensitivity to seeing where and with whom bullying may be occurring.  
  
Remind participants that the list is not exhaustive (this may be evident by items listed on the flip chart sheet that do not occur on the PowerPoint slide) and that any child can exhibit bullying behavior or become the target of bullying by others.
25. Display **PowerPoint slide 19: Students Most Likely to Be Bullied**. State that reliable data reveal a disturbing predictability as to groups of students who are bullied. Note that studies of cyberbullying and bullying on school grounds reveal the same predictability. Review the data shown on the slide and point out any similar examples from the flip chart where participants named groups of students in their school that they see as more likely to become targets of bullying (2, 4).
26. Display **PowerPoint slide 20: Impact of Bullying**. State that there can be a variety of impacts on students who are bullied. The same impacts can be seen in students who do the bullying as well as those who witness it. Researchers cannot say, however, that bullying directly causes suicide-related behavior.
27. Display **PowerPoint slide 21: Possible Indicators of Students Who Bully**, and distribute **Handout 4: Warning Signs of Students Who Bully and Those Who Are Being Bullied**.
28. Suggest that another helpful tool in spotting bullying is to understand what some of the behavioral signs are that might help draw our attention to students who may be more prone to engage in bullying behavior and to students who may be being bullied by others.
29. Use the PowerPoint slide and the first section of the handout to review the behavioral signs of students who may be prone to bully others. Ask participants whether they have seen some of these characteristics in students they know are or have been involved in bullying behaviors.

***NOTE:** Make sure to point out that the list of characteristics is suggestive and there may be students who reflect some of the characteristics who never actually engage in bullying behavior.*

30. Display **PowerPoint slide 22: Common Myths About Students Who Bully**. State that one potential barrier to identifying students who bully is that there are a number of myths that could easily lead one to overlook some students. Review each myth, making the following points for each (5):

***NOTE:** This slide is animated so that a new bullet point will be displayed with each click of the slide.*

- Students who bully are loners.
  - Students who bully typically have larger groups of friends than other students.
  - Students who bully demonstrate more leadership skills than their peers, but use those skills to engage in abusive behavior.
  - The segment of their friendship group that they control usually supports and encourages the bullying behavior.
- Students who bully have low self-esteem and are insecure.
  - Research indicates that students who engage in bullying behavior tend to have average or above-average self-esteem.
  - They are good at controlling and manipulating social relationships.
- Students bully others because they want attention.
  - Power and control are the two main motivating factors, and while the behavior may draw attention, it is not the motivating factor.
  - Bullying behavior does not stop if adults or peers ignore the behavior.
- Bullying is a normal part of kids being kids.
  - Abusing others is not a normal part of childhood and if reinforced, such behaviors will often continue into adulthood.
  - There is a strong correlation between bullying behavior and later patterns of criminal activity (15).
- Only boys bully others.
  - Girls are just as likely as boys to bully their peers.
  - Girls are more likely to engage in relational bullying while boys are more likely to physically bully other people.

31. Display **PowerPoint slide 23: Possible Indicators of Students Who May Be Being Bullied**, and refer participants again to the matching section on **Handout 4**.
32. Using the PowerPoint slide and the information in the second part of the handout, review signs that may indicate a student is being bullied.

***NOTE:** Be sure to point out that although these behaviors may be the result of something other than bullying, they are still “red flags” that should be addressed with the student involved.*

33. Display **PowerPoint slide 24: Why Students Don't Ask for Help**. Go over the contents on the slide and refer participants to the matching section on **Handout 4**. Note that more than half of students who are bullied do not report being bullied to a teacher. Students do not tell adults for many reasons (7).
34. Display **PowerPoint slide 25: What Do You See?** (This slide is a repeat of the image used earlier on PowerPoint slide 9.) Point out that everyone now sees the extra “the” in the statement, and it may even appear obvious because we now know what to look for on the slide. Suggest that the more we know what bullying is, what it might look like in a school, who are the students most likely to be bullied, and the behaviors that may indicate a student is bullying others or is being bullied, the better we will be able to identify bullying and respond to it when we see it.

***NOTE:** Be sure to point out that bullying can occur during or after school hours. Although most reported bullying happens in the school building, teachers may or may not see it. Bullying also happens in other places where teachers won't see it, like on a playground or the bus, or, in the case of cyberbullying, electronically. But because teachers can learn to recognize the impacts of bullying in students, they can see it in their students in the classroom and address it appropriately.*

***NOTE:** Tell participants that later in the workshop you will be providing more information on how to recognize the impact of bullying trauma on students as well as sharing handouts that will give them additional trauma resources to explore. Also say that some states now have provisions to address bullying that occurs in other contexts if it affects school performance, and the additional handouts will provide links to finding out more about model policies if their school does not have one on this topic (15).*

35. State that we will now consider how best to address bullying when it does occur.
36. Before moving to the next activity, ask and respond to any questions that participants have regarding any of the information shared up to this point.

## ACTIVITY 4

# Addressing Bullying Behavior

1. Walk around the room, and point to the flip chart sheets on which you have recorded possible strategies for intervening in bullying behavior. (As described in the section **Before the Workshop: Special Preparations**, you would have posted these before beginning the workshop.)
2. Take a moment to read each strategy.
3. After you have read each strategy, point out that although each is a potential strategy for intervening, not all of them have been shown to be effective or are recommended.
4. State that they will look at all the strategies in just a moment, but first there is one strategy posted in the room that is *absolutely* the most important in addressing bullying behavior within a school.
5. Ask participants to identify which strategy they think is most foundational to all the others.

***NOTE:** You can do this as a simple conversation with the whole group. This may be preferable if you see you are running behind in the time you have remaining for the workshop.*

***NOTE:** If you want to have an opportunity for participants to move around, you can ask them to go stand near the flip chart sheet on which they think the most foundational strategy is listed.*

***NOTE:** If you have access to polling technology, this might be another opportunity for participants to state their choice without being visibly connected to their response. (Information on polling options is reviewed in the section **Trainer Resources: Polling Information**.)*

6. Once participants have discussed and shared their responses (whether individually or as a group), point out that the most important thing that should guide their actions in addressing bullying behavior is their own school's policy regarding bullying.
7. If participants have moved to stand near a flip chart sheet, ask them to return to their regular seats. Explain that each school's policy is what guides the responses of personnel within that building. Ask participants if their school has a bullying policy and how that policy is shared with students, teachers, and staff.

***NOTE:** If you are doing this workshop with participants from the same school, you should acquire a copy of the policy before doing the workshop and review it so you will be able to identify places where the school policy and the strategies that will be*

*shared in this activity are consistent. Be aware that if there is a place where a strategy runs counter to the school policy, school personnel are bound by the policies of their school. If it becomes clear that there are participants who represent a school that does not have a bullying policy, it will be important to point out the importance of having one in place, but it is not within the purview of this workshop to offer guidance on creating a schoolwide bullying policy. Tell participants that at the end of the workshop, you will be giving them a handout that has many additional resources on it, including where they might find copies of model schoolwide bullying policies.*

**NOTE:** *This would also be a place to take a few moments to discuss with participants their level of familiarity with their school's policy on bullying. If there are participants who do not know what their school's policy is, simply suggest they make a point of familiarizing themselves with it because those policies define their responsibility for addressing bullying in their school. If you have access to polling technology, you can use it to gauge familiarity with and application of bullying policies on a more precise level by asking participants to respond to a series of items like:*

- *My school has a policy on bullying. (Yes, No, Unsure)*
- *My school's policy on bullying is clear and understandable. (Yes, No, Unsure)*
- *My school has a bullying policy, and it is known by teachers, staff, and students. (Yes, No, Unsure)*
- *My school has a bullying policy, and it is fairly applied across the school. (Yes, No, Unsure)*

8. Depending on the group with whom you are working, you may choose to add other questions designed to get a clearer picture of whether a bullying policy is in place and if it is known and applied within the school. The anonymous nature of polling allows participants to respond honestly without fear of embarrassment or possible retaliation.
9. Acknowledge again the importance of knowing and following school policies regarding bullying, and suggest that they will now consider strategies for intervening that are endorsed by most school policies and supported by research on what works best to address and stop bullying when it occurs in school.
10. State that you will now have participants consider effective strategies that can be used to reduce or prevent bullying.
11. Ask participants to pair up with someone who is not currently sitting at their table.
12. Once pairs are formed, distribute three  $\frac{3}{4}$ " green dots to each pair.
13. Tell each pair to move around the room, review the posted strategies, and then come to consensus on the top three strategies they believe are effective. Tell participants that as a pair decides on a strategy, they are to place one of their green dots on that flip chart sheet. Explain that they will have 5 minutes for pairs to discuss and place their three

dots on the three strategies that they choose. Tell participants that when each pair has finished placing their dots, they can each return to their regular seats.

***NOTE:** If you do not wish to use green dots, you can also give each pair a marker and instruct them to place a check on each of the three flip chart sheets bearing the strategies that they think are effective.*

14. When 5 minutes have elapsed or when all the pairs have completed the task, take a moment to review where the dots (or checks) have been placed. Ask participants if they felt unsure in attempting to identify the most effective strategies. Briefly discuss what thinking went into the decisions that pairs made.
15. After a brief discussion, state that you'll take a moment to first identify a few strategies that have been proven ineffective and explain why. Tell participants that in a moment they will receive a handout that covers this area as well as the more effective strategies that they will also review and discuss.

***NOTE:** It is important that participants do not receive the handout until after you have identified the ineffective strategies. If you are providing a handout packet at the beginning of the workshop, make sure you keep the handout separate until it is distributed following this review. As the trainer, you also may wish to use the handout as your notes for reviewing strategies.*

***NOTE:** As you identify each of the four ineffective strategies, you may want to stress the point by making a large X across each of those flip chart sheets.*

16. Display animated **PowerPoint slide 26: What Does Not Work**, and ask participants why these strategies might be ineffective. Process a brief discussion, and summarize these points if they do not emerge during the conversation (5):
  - *Group treatment* for children who bully is ineffective because the group can become an audience for students who bully to brag about what they have done and encourage negative role modeling.
  - *Peer mediation and conflict resolution* may further traumatize students who are being bullied by exposing them to more bullying or giving the message that they are partly to blame and must solve their own abuse.
  - *Short-term, one-event approaches* do not affect repeated problems or give teachers and students a chance to practice and master prevention and intervention skills.
  - *Zero tolerance policies*, which are typically exclusionary, do not help solve bullying because suspension and expulsion fail to address the underlying causes of the behavior. Students often return to school with the same behavioral patterns. This strategy tends to brand a student more or less permanently as a bully and eliminate the exposure they need to positive role models that are around in a caring school.



**NOTE:** In discussing why zero tolerance does not work, make sure to stress the point that eliminating this strategy does not suggest that bullying behavior is ignored—teachers and staff still should respond immediately to address bullying when it occurs. The point to stress is that rather than automatic expulsion (often the only response available in a zero tolerance setting), each instance of bullying is dealt with on an individual basis with options for response that fit the needs of both the student who is bullying and the student who is being bullied.

**NOTE:** Point out that a staff workshop like this one can be very valuable, but it should always be part of a larger comprehensive approach to addressing bullying behavior. Solutions to bullying are not simple, and prevention approaches that show the most promise confront the problem from many angles. Multiple effective strategies that involve the entire school community—students, families, administrators, teachers, and staff such as bus drivers, nurses, cafeteria, and front office staff—in creating a culture of respect seem to make a difference. If this workshop is part of a larger comprehensive approach, point that out to participants and explain its place in the larger approach to address bullying behaviors within the school. (15)

**NOTE:** If you are planning to deliver the second workshop in this two-workshop series, explain that the next workshop will address the use of multiple, effective strategies to build the kind of caring school climate in which bullying is less likely to occur. Also note that the second workshop offers specific ideas for how individual teachers can build a positive climate in their classrooms, develop good relationships with students, help students develop good relationships with each other, and become effective bystanders.

17. Ask for and respond to any question participants have regarding what was just covered, and distribute **Handout 5: Strategies for Addressing Bullying Behavior at School**. Point out that the handout includes the ineffective strategies as well as a selection of strategies that have proven to be successful in addressing bullying behavior.

**NOTE:** Handout 5 is a very dense handout with a lot of information. Make sure you study the handout prior to presenting the strategies so that you avoid simply “reading” the handout as you touch briefly on each idea. For additional information on this topic, see <https://www.stopbullying.gov/respond/support-kids-involved/index.html>.

18. Display animated **PowerPoint slide 27: Address Bullying Behavior**, and say that you will now review the four successful strategies shown on the slide (15). Note that the first three tasks for addressing a suspected bullying episode are less a sequence and more like a checklist to help intervene effectively. Keep in mind that some of these tasks will be completed at nearly the same time.



19. Suggest participants follow along with **Handout 5** and add any notes that seem useful to them during the next few minutes of discussion.

***NOTE:** Another option for sharing the information on the handout in a more participatory manner is to create three smaller groups by dividing the total group of participants into groups of four. Before displaying PowerPoint slide 27, assign one of the strategy areas to each group and give them five minutes to review the ideas on the handout under their strategy. Ask each group to discuss and then reduce the ideas under their strategy header to a few summary sentences that can be shared in just a few minutes rather than simply reading each item on the handout. Then, as you display each strategy heading on the PowerPoint slide, you can ask the groups to share their summary sentences with the rest of the participants.*

20. Display **PowerPoint slide 28: 1. Stop the Behavior on the Spot**. Process a brief discussion about which of the strategies shown on the slide participants may have used and why they were useful.

State that a bullying episode offers a teachable moment that participants' mature, considered response models appropriate behavior for handling difficult situations. Acting in accordance with school policy, participants need to address the student being targeted, the person engaging in the potential bullying behavior, and bystanders.

Remind participants that the behavior in which they are intervening may or may not ultimately be determined to be bullying. Don't call the act "bullying" while you are trying to understand what happened. An important part of what participants are doing at this stage is making this determination so the appropriate measures can be taken. (15)

21. Display **PowerPoint slide 29: When to Get Help**. State that sometimes it may be necessary to call for police help or medical attention, as shown by the circumstances listed on the slide.

22. Display **PowerPoint slide 30: 2. Find Out What Happened**. Process a brief discussion about how participants may have gone about determining whether an incident in their school is bullying. Ask what they thought was especially important about trying to intervene in a situation, and find out what happened. Mention that listening is one of the most important things they can do.

Remind participants that the core elements of bullying covered earlier in the workshop, coupled with their school's policies, will help them get the necessary information to make an accurate determination about the nature of an incident. It is important to listen to what students have to say without blaming and also to document what students say in their own words. Participants may also need to track evidence such as text messages, damaged property, or social media images. Suggest that they get copies of everything they can and gather it into a folder. (10, 15)

23. Display **PowerPoint slide 31: 3. Support the Students Involved**. Process a brief discussion about supports participants have provided for students being bullied, students engaging in bullying behavior, and bystanders. Ask:

- What supports have you used that you believe have been most effective?
- Why it is important to also provide supports to the student who may be engaging in bullying behavior?
- Why it is important to provide support to student bystanders who may have witnessed something?

***NOTE:** If you are planning to deliver the second workshop in this two-workshop series, explain that the next workshop will outline proactive strategies for teaching students how to be effective bystanders as part of promoting an overall positive school climate.*

24. Display **PowerPoint slide 32: Turn Down the Heat**. State that sometimes emotions may run so high in a situation that a deliberate, measured response aimed at de-escalation is needed. In suspected bullying incidents, a response is required, but participants want to avoid making the situation worse by overreacting or responding so passively that the situation gets ignored.

Direct participants' attention to the three main points on the slide as well as **Handout 6: Turn Down the Heat: Techniques for De-Escalating Student Behavior**. Briefly go over the slide content, reminding participants that the strategies for de-escalation listed in the handout involve skills that work best when practiced. The most important point to remember is to stay calm. Transferring your sense of calm to an agitated student will help you better manage the situation. (11)

25. Display **PowerPoint slide 33: 4. Report and Follow Up**. Process a brief discussion about whether participants have guidelines in their schools for developing reports. State that good research and documentation will help write a thorough, accurate, and helpful report. Because most of the responsible adults in a school will probably not be witnesses to the actual events, a report is essential for:

- Determining the next steps and following up
- Connecting all the adults involved, including parents, caregivers, and school staff
- Responding appropriately to all participants, including bystanders

Go over the bullet points displayed on the slide. Emphasize that developing accurate reports will help determine exactly what happened and what needs to happen in the follow-up phase to remedy the situation.

26. Display **PowerPoint slide 34: Important Reporting Considerations**. Direct participants' attention to the section titled the same at the end of **Handout 5**. Go over the details of the handout content as you cover the bulleted points on the slide.
  27. Ask for and respond to any questions participants have about developing reports.
  28. Conclude by noting the importance of following up with all the students involved. Part of your report development should include a plan for checking in with both the student who was bullied and the student who engaged in bullying behavior to see how things are going. Your plan may include following up with bystanders, too. 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 also lets all the students involved know there is continued adult support for them.
- 

## ACTIVITY **5**

### Trauma Awareness

1. Display **PowerPoint slide 35: Impact of Trauma on Students**. State that trauma can affect students in many different ways, and some students are more vulnerable to trauma than others.
2. State that teachers must be aware that all students involved in bullying situations may experience trauma. The term trauma is used to describe an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. Trauma has lasting adverse effects on students' daily functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (8)
3. Display **PowerPoint slide 36: Common Symptoms of Trauma**. State that the four broad categories shown on the slide can cover a variety of symptoms.
4. Ask participants to get into pairs. State that each pair will have about two minutes per person to describe what they might see in a student displaying one or more of these common symptoms of trauma. Note that what participants describe may be based on something they have seen occur with a student or something they imagine could occur as a result of bullying. Tell participants you will keep time and tell them when it is time to switch to the second person.
5. Once everyone has had a chance to share in their pairs, process a brief conversation about the sorts of evidence or changes participants discussed.
6. Display **PowerPoint slide 37: Common Symptoms of Trauma**. (This slide repeats the contents of slide 36 and adds more information.) Cover the content on the slide, reinforcing those points made by participants or highlighting symptoms that may not have been mentioned.

7. Note that some of the symptoms overlap with some of the indicators that a student may be prone to bullying behavior or to being bullied that was covered earlier in the workshop, including: (9)
  - Difficulty paying attention and learning
  - Trouble building relationships with teachers and peers
  - Spending more time out of class, increasing chances of failing, lower test scores
  - More likely to be suspended or expelled and have higher rates of referral to special education
8. State that more and more schools are adopting trauma-sensitive practices and policies to help students recover from trauma and succeed in school. Distribute **Handout 7: Resources About Trauma-Sensitive Practices for Teachers**, pointing out that the resources listed in the handout can help schools that do not yet have any trauma-sensitive practices or policies get started on using them. The resources may also be useful to supplement what some schools are already doing. Point out that the resource list includes self-care resources for teachers, too.

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## Activity 6

### Review and Evaluation

1. Review the workshop, noting that the session has covered a lot of information, including introducing a definition of bullying behavior, what that behavior might look like in a school, strategies for addressing it, and guidelines for documenting incidents and following up with students.
2. Distribute **Handout 8: Frequently Asked Questions With Additional Resources**, and tell participants that this handout provides additional sources of information for further exploring topics covered in this workshop.
3. Remind participants that a workshop can provide new information and strategies, but the most important element is what happens after the workshop as they seek to apply and practice the skills and strategies that have been introduced during the session. Point out that the workshop is successful only if participants are able to use the information and strategies to address bullying in ways that can reduce its prevalence in the lives of their students.

**NOTE:** *If this workshop is part of other things a school is doing to prevent bullying, make sure to place it in that context.*

***NOTE:** If you are doing the second workshop in this series, point out that the next workshop will look at creating a whole-school climate in which bullying behavior is less likely to occur and where students themselves have a major role in that effort. If the information is available, announce the time and place for the next workshop.*

4. State that it is clear that participants in the workshop represent different levels of experience in education, and for some participants the material presented in this training may well affirm much of what they already do. Note that at the same time, ideas and strategies that have been addressed together may also suggest some new ways to understand and/or address bullying behavior regardless of the experience level each participant brought into the room.
5. Display **PowerPoint slide 38: Reflections**, and ask participants to think about something they experienced or learned in the workshop that affirms something they already do in their daily work with students. Then ask participants to think of something new they experienced or learned that they can apply in their work in the school.
6. After providing a few minutes for reflection, distribute a brightly colored 3" x 5" index card to each participant and ask them to record on their card one idea, strategy, or learning that they gained from the workshop that they will commit to apply in their work with students.
7. If the group is small and time permits, after providing a few moments for participants to record their commitments, you can go around the room and have each participant share what they will commit to do. If the group is large or time is limited, ask participants to share within the same groups of three in which they introduced themselves at the beginning of the workshop. If time does not permit getting into groups, simply ask participants to share their commitment with another participant sitting near them.

***NOTE:** Regardless of how you do the sharing piece, it is extremely important to help participants identify something concrete that they can apply in their daily work with students. It will also give you a sense from the workshop participants the learning they may be able to translate into their daily lives.*

8. After participants have shared, state that each person should now fold their card and place it in their pocket, purse, or briefcase and carry it with them until they actually do what they have committed to do, and at that point they can throw their card away.
9. Click **PowerPoint slide 38** again and thank participants for their time and commitment to addressing bullying in the lives of their students. Distribute **Handout 9: Post-Event Self-Assessment**, and ask participants to complete it and hand it in as they depart.

# What Is Bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among students that involves an observed or perceived imbalance of power. The behavior is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated.



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# Core Elements of Bullying Behaviors

Bullying includes:

- Unwanted, aggressive behavior
- An observed or perceived imbalance of power between the student(s) doing the bullying and the student(s) being bullied
- Behavior that is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated

# The Circle of Bullying

**Students may play a number of different roles in bullying.**

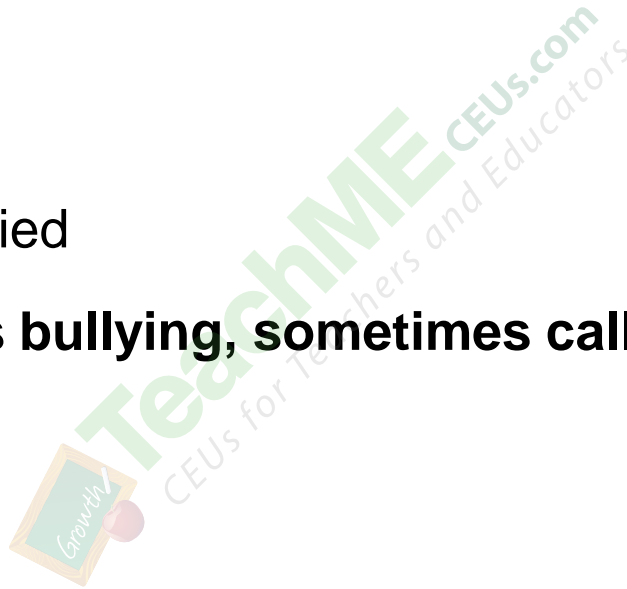
- **Direct roles include:**

- Students who bully
- Students who are bullied

- **Students who witness bullying, sometimes called bystanders, can also be affected:**

- Those who assist
- Those who reinforce
- Those who remain separate

- **Some students may comfort others who have been bullied or even come to the defense of others.**





# A Change in Perspective

## FROM

“Bully”



“Victim”



Behavior is a permanent characteristic.

## TO

“Student who bullies”

“Student who was bullied”

Behavior can be replaced or changed.



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# What Do You See?



# What to Look for in Bullying Behavior

1. Unwanted, aggressive behavior
2. An observed or perceived imbalance of power between the student(s) doing the bullying and the student(s) being bullied
3. Behavior that is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated

# Color Code

**Red card:** Clear example of bullying behavior—contains all three elements.

**Green card:** Behavior would concern me but does not rise to the level of bullying.

**Yellow card:** No clear indication based on the scenario—I would need to get more information.

# What to Look for in Bullying Behavior

1. Unwanted, aggressive behavior
2. An observed or perceived imbalance of power between the student(s) doing the bullying and the student(s) being bullied
3. Behavior that is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated

# Types of Bullying

- Verbal—saying or writing mean things
- Social or relational—hurting someone's reputation or relationships
- Physical—hurting a person's body
- Damage—theft, alteration, or damaging personal property, including personal electronic information

# Context for Bullying

Bullying can occur within multiple contexts, such as:

- School and school events
- Traveling to and from school
- A student's neighborhood
- On the Internet

Cyberbullying, or electronic bullying, is considered a context or location in which bullying occurs.



# Cyberbullying: Special Concerns

- Electronic and social media have become so widespread that anyone can post anything about anyone.
- It can persist because digital devices allow 24-hour access and communication, making it hard for students experiencing it to find relief.
- It can also become permanent if information isn't found and removed. This can hurt students later when they apply for college admission or jobs.
- Cyberbullying can take place outside of school and, without policies to address in-school impact, can be harder to address.

# How Often Does Bullying Occur?

- Nationwide, about 20% of students ages 12–18 said they experienced bullying during the school year.
- About the same number said they were bullied on school property.
- Among high school students, an estimated 16% said they were bullied electronically during the school year.

# Forms of Bullying

Of the 24 million students surveyed in one year, five million students experienced these forms of bullying:

1. Made fun of, called names or insulted—3,223,000 students
2. Subject of rumors—2,968,000 students
3. Pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on—1,235,000 students
4. Excluded from activities on purpose—1,220,000 students
5. Threatened with harm—941,000 students
6. Made to do things they did not want to do—607,000 students
7. Property destroyed on purpose—440,000 students

# Students Bullied Because of Perceived Differences

Although any student can become a target of bullying, those at heightened risk are often those who are perceived to differ in some way from social norms. This may include perceptions about:

1. The way they look or their body size
2. Whether they are, or people think they are, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning
3. How masculine or feminine someone thinks they are
4. Their ability in school
5. Their race/ethnicity/national origin and/or religion
6. How much money someone's family may have
7. Youth with disabilities and other special health needs

# Students Most Likely to Be Bullied

- Females are bullied more than males.
- Lesbian and bisexual females are bullied more than heterosexual females.
- Gay and bisexual males are bullied more than heterosexual males.
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning students are bullied more than heterosexual students.
- Electronic bullying is higher between students who have had sex with each other whether they are the same sex or the opposite sex.

# Impact of Bullying

## **Being involved in bullying in any way can lead to:**

- Poor school performance, including lower grades and test scores.
- Poor classroom attendance.
- Negative physical and mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, involvement in interpersonal violence or sexual violence, substance use disorder, and poor social functioning.

## **Youth who report any involvement with bullying behavior are more likely to report high levels of suicide-related behavior than youth who do not report any involvement with bullying behavior.**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it is correct to say that “involvement in bullying, along with other risk factors, increases the chance that a young person will engage in suicide-related behaviors.”
- Researchers do not know if bullying *directly causes* suicide-related behavior.

# Possible Indicators of Students Who Bully

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



# Common Myths About Students Who Bully

- Students who bully are loners.
- Students who bully have low self-esteem and are insecure.
- Students bully others because they want attention.
- Bullying behavior is a normal part of kids being kids.
- Only boys bully others.



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# Possible Indicators of Students Who May Be Being Bullied

- Physical signs like torn, damaged, or soiled clothing; unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches; missing or damaged items like books or homework without a credible explanation
- Social isolation, sudden loss of friends, or avoidance of social situations
- Frequent headaches, stomach aches, feeling sick, or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, difficulty sleeping, frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors or talking about suicide

# Why Students Don't Ask for Help

- They might feel helpless, weak, or fear being seen as a tattletale.
- Students might fear backlash or more bullying.
- They might feel humiliated and not want adults to know.
- Students might already feel socially isolated.
- They might fear being rejected by peers and losing support.

# What Do You See?



# What Does Not Work

- Group treatment for students who bully
- Peer mediation and conflict resolution
- Short-term, one-event approaches
- Zero tolerance policies



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# Address Bullying Behavior

1. Stop the behavior on the spot.
2. Find out what happened.
3. Support the students involved.
4. Report and follow up.



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# 1. Stop the Behavior on the Spot

- Stay calm and keep your voice at a normal pitch.
- Reassure the students involved, including bystanders.
- If necessary, get another adult to help.
- Make sure everyone is safe.
- Separate all participants, preferably to different rooms.
- Ask the person being targeted, “What do you need from me?”
- Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
- Focus on student behavior rather than personalities, reputations, or discipline history.



# When to Get Help

- A weapon is involved.
- Someone has been seriously or physically harmed.
- Threats of serious physical injury have been made.
- Threats of hate-motivated violence, such as racism or homophobia, have been made.
- Someone has been sexually abused.
- Anyone is accused of an illegal act, such as the use of force to get money, property, or services.
- Someone's valuable property has been destroyed.

## 2. Find Out What Happened

- Was the aggressive behavior actually unwanted?
- What is the history, including past conflict, between the students involved?
- Is there a power imbalance?
- Has this happened before?
- Is the student who was bullied worried it will happen again?

# 3. Support the Students Involved

## 1. Support the student being bullied.

- Listen to, focus on, and ask the student, “What do you need from me?”
- Reassure the student.

## 2. Support the student engaging in bullying behavior.

- Make sure the student knows what the problem behavior is.
- Apply consequences in accordance with school policy, and also involve the student in making amends or repairing the situation.

## 3. Support the bystanders.

- Listen to what bystanders have to say about what they have seen.
- Reassure bystanders and let them know that you take the situation seriously.

# Turn Down the Heat

## Maintain control of yourself and your emotions

**DO**—Appear calm, centered, and self-assured; use a modulated low tone of voice. Be aware of options. You can leave, tell them to leave, or call for security or the police. Be very respectful even when firmly setting limits or calling for help.

**DON'T**—Be defensive even if the comments or insults are directed at you.

## Communicate effectively nonverbally

**DO**—Allow extra physical space between you and the aggressor, get to the same eye level, keep your hands out of your pockets to protect yourself, and stand at an angle to the student.

**DON'T**—Turn your back, stand full front to the student, maintain constant eye contact, point or shake your finger, or laugh.

## Calm the discussion

**DO**—Trust your instincts, empathize with feelings but not with the behavior, suggest alternatives, and explain limits in a firm but respectful tone.

**DON'T**—Get loud, yell, scream, argue, or analyze.

## 4. Report and Follow Up

- Write down what students say in their own words.
- If you witness an incident, accurately report what you heard and saw along with what else you learn.
- Track evidence when you can, such as text messages, photos of damaged property, social media messages, etc.
- Get copies of everything you can and keep it all in one folder.
- Fill out reports completely and legibly.
- Avoid editorial comments like, “Suzy is just like her brother.”
- Keep reports confidential and private.
- Develop a plan for following up with all the students involved.

# Important Reporting Considerations

- When bullying occurs, reports should indicate whether the conduct included anything that may trigger a school's obligations under civil rights laws that could interfere with their access to education.
- To help track any "hot spots" for bullying that should be monitored, the report should include information on:
  - The identities of the students involved
  - The location of the incident
  - The date(s)
  - Other relevant information that documents patterns involving the same students
- Schools should have a system for documenting and tracking issues, individual students, and patterns that reveal systemic problems that need to be addressed at a higher level.

# Impact of Trauma on Students

- Difficulty paying attention and learning.
- Trouble building relationships with teachers and peers.
- Spending more time out of class, increasing chances of failing, lower test scores.
- More likely to be suspended or expelled and have higher rates of referral to special education.
- Particularly vulnerable groups are at increased risk of being adversely affected by trauma, such as youth who are refugees/immigrants, speak English as a second language, come from high-poverty or low-socioeconomic-status backgrounds, or have a disability.

# Common Symptoms of Trauma

- Evidence of emotional distress
- Changes in behavior
- Changes in social interaction
- Changes in school performance



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# Common Symptoms of Trauma

## **Evidence of emotional distress**

- Anxiety, fear, worry
- Irritability, discomfort, sleep problems, easily startled

## **Changes in behavior**

- Withdrawal, avoidance
- Angry outbursts, increased physical complaints

## **Changes in social interaction**

- Loss of trust or negative perceptions of others
- Increased difficulty interpreting or responding to social cues

## **Changes in school performance**

- Can't concentrate
- Change in work quality or classroom participation

# Reflections

What's something you learned in this workshop that **affirmed** what you're already doing in your daily work with students?

What's one idea, strategy, or learning that you feel you **can apply** to improve your skills and/or experience in your role as an educator?

MODULE 1

# Pre-Event Self-Assessment

Optional Handout A

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

your level of knowledge related to bullying behavior and what will be presented within this training module. Please answer the following questions from your perspective **before**

On a scale of 1–4, with 1 being “Limited Understanding” and 4 being “Extensive Understanding,” how would you rate your understanding of what constitutes bullying behavior as you begin this training?

Limited Understanding			Extensive Understanding	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

On a scale of 1–4, with 1 being “Not at All Confident” and 4 being “Highly Confident,” how would you rate your level of confidence in using each of the following 10 skills to prevent bullying behavior as you begin this training?

1. Identifying bullying behavior when I see it.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Describing my school’s policy on how to address bullying behavior.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Identifying possible indicators of students who bully.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Recognizing possible warning signs of students who are being bullied.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Knowing how to intervene in bullying behavior when I see it.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Knowing how to de-escalate a situation if necessary.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Knowing how to address bullying behavior that is reported to me.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Knowing how to find out what happened so I can make an accurate determination of whether an incident may involve bullying.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Knowing how to support the student(s) involved, including bystanders.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Knowing how to follow up and report on bullying behavior.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 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...

## **Workshop Agenda**

(Single Session)

### **Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in Our Nation's Classrooms: Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior**

#### **Objectives**

Participants 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.
- Learn to use specific strategies for addressing, reporting, and following up on bullying behavior when it occurs.

#### **Agenda**

1. Welcome and Introductions (15 minutes)
2. What Is Bullying? (25 minutes)
3. What Might Bullying Behaviors Look Like? (40 minutes)
4. Addressing Bullying Behaviors (40 minutes)
5. Trauma Awareness (20 minutes)
6. Review and Evaluation (10 minutes)
7. Adjourn

## Workshop Agenda

(Multiple Sessions)

### Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in Our Nation's Classrooms: Understanding and Intervening in Bullying Behavior

#### Objectives

Participants 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.
- Learn to use specific strategies for addressing, reporting, and following up on bullying behavior when it occurs.

#### Agenda

##### Session 1 (60 minutes total)

Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)

What Is Bullying? (25 minutes)

What Might Bullying Behaviors Look Like? Part 1 (20 minutes)

Wrap-Up, Session Evaluation, Next Session (5 minutes)

Adjourn

##### Session 2 (60 minutes total)

Welcome Back; Recap Session 1 (5 minutes)

What Might Bullying Behaviors Look Like? Part 2 (10 minutes)

Addressing Bullying Behaviors (40 minutes)

Wrap-Up, Session Evaluation, Next Session (5 minutes)

Adjourn

##### Session 3 (30 minutes total)

Welcome Back; Recap Sessions 1 and 2 (5 minutes)

Trauma Awareness (20 minutes)

Review and Evaluation (5 minutes)

Adjourn

## Facts About Bullying Behavior

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among students that involves an observed or perceived imbalance of power. The behavior is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Both students who are bullied and students who bully others may have serious, lasting problems. Bystanders who witness bullying may also experience harm.

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

- **An observed or perceived imbalance of power.** Students 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 students. Power imbalances can be observed or they may be perceived between the student doing the bullying and the student being bullied.
- **Repetition.** Bullying behaviors are repeated multiple times or are highly likely to be repeated.

### The Roles Students Play

Understanding the multiple roles students play in bullying situations can help schools prevent and respond to them. It is important to avoid labeling students as “bullies” or “victims” because that sends the message that the behavior cannot be changed. It also fails to recognize the multiple roles that students might play in different bullying situations. These roles include:

- Students who bully by engaging in bullying behavior toward their peers
- Students who are the targets of bullying behaviors
- Students who are not directly involved in bullying but are bystanders who witness the behavior, such as those who:
  - Assist by encouraging or occasionally joining in
  - Reinforce by giving bullying an audience by laughing or providing support for the students engaging in bullying
  - Remain separate, neither reinforcing the bullying nor defending the student being bullied
  - Defend by actively comforting the student being bullied, even coming to the student’s defense

### 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
  - Comments made to embarrass or humiliate
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
  - Posting embarrassing images publicly or electronically
  - Unwelcome contact of a sexual nature
3. **Physical bullying** involves hurting a person's body. Physical bullying includes:
- Hitting/kicking/pinching
  - Spitting on
  - Tripping/pushing
  - Taking or breaking someone's things
  - Making mean or rude hand gestures
4. **Damage to property** involves theft, alteration, or damaging of someone's property to cause harm. It includes:
- Taking away someone's personal property and refusing to give it back
  - Destroying someone's property in their presence
  - Deleting personal electronic information

## The Context for Bullying: Where and When Bullying Happens

Bullying can occur in multiple contexts. Although most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in other places like on the playground or the bus. Some of the other contexts in which bullying can occur include (but are not limited to):

- School and school events
- Traveling to and from school
- A student's neighborhood
- On the Internet

**Cyberbullying or electronic bullying is considered a context or location in which many kinds of bullying can take place.** Cyberbullying can include the use of e-mail, social network sites, cell phones, webcams, text messages, SMS or instant messaging, forums, gaming, Internet sites, and other electronic forms to:

- Send, post, or share negative, harmful, false, or mean content
- Share personal or private information
- Embarrass or humiliate

- Verbally harass
- Socially exclude
- Threaten physical or psychological harm

## Frequency of Bullying

The following are sources of federally collected data on youth bullying:

- The 2014–2015 School Crime Supplement (National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics) indicates that, nationwide, about 20% of students ages 12–18 experienced bullying.
- The 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) indicates that, nationwide, 20% of students in Grades 9–12 report being bullied on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Data Collection collects data from every public school district, including data on harassment and bullying. These data can be found at <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.



## 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.

It is important to talk with students 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 student can help identify the root of the problem.

### Signs That a Student Is Bullying Others

A student or students 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
- Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity

### Signs That a Student Is Being Bullied

Look for changes in the student. However, be aware that not all students who are bullied exhibit warning signs nor will they ask for help. Some signs that may point to a bullying problem are:

- Unexplainable injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick, or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating
- 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
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

## Why Don't Students Ask for Help?

According to a report called *Preventing Bullying Through Science, Policy, and Practice*, more than one half of bullied students do not report being bullied to a teacher. Students do not tell adults for many reasons:

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



## Strategies for Addressing Bullying Behavior at School

It is important to respond to reports of bullying whether you witness the behavior or a student reports it to you. 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.

### What Does NOT Work

Research shows that strategies that bring students who have been bullied together with those who have engaged in bullying into group situations does not work. Strategies that emphasize simple or one-size-fits-all solutions do not work either. Four commonly used strategies to reduce or prevent bullying have been proved to be ineffective against bullying behavior.

1. Group treatment for students who bully does not work because:
  - The group becomes an audience for students who bully to brag to about their exploits.
  - Other group members can actually serve as negative role models for each other.
  - Group members can learn from each other who to bully.
2. Peer mediation and conflict resolution strategies send the wrong message because bullying is a form of peer abuse, not conflict between peers of equal power and control. These strategies do not work because:
  - They may further victimize the student who has been bullied by suggesting he or she is partly to blame.
  - It raises the idea that the student who has been bullied must solve his or her own abuse.
  - Sessions and meetings can become opportunities for bullying to be repeated.
3. 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 those 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.
4. Zero tolerance policies do not help solve bullying because:
  - Although bullying behavior is never tolerated, this response 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.

- Suspending or expelling everyone who bullies is not practical and fails to address the underlying causes of the behavior. Students often return to school with the same behavioral patterns.
- Students who engage in bullying behavior are often suspended or expelled when they may benefit most from continued exposure to positive role models and a caring school climate.

## Avoid These Common Mistakes

- Ignoring suspected bullying.
- Telling the student who is being bullied to ignore it.
- Blaming the student for being bullied.
- Telling the student to physically fight back against the student who is doing the bullying. It could get the student hurt, suspended, or expelled.

## What DOES Work

### 1. Stop the behavior on the spot.

Take these steps:

- Stay calm and keep your voice at a normal pitch.
- Reassure the students involved, including bystanders.
- If necessary, get another adult to help.
- Make sure everyone is safe.
- Separate all participants, preferably to different rooms.
- Ask the person being targeted, "What do you need from me?"
- Meet any immediate medical or mental health needs.
- Focus on student behavior rather than personalities, reputations, or discipline history.

Get police help or medical attention immediately if:

- A weapon is involved.
- Someone has been seriously or physically harmed.
- Threats of serious physical injury have been made.
- Threats of hate-motivated violence, such as racism or homophobia, have been made.
- Someone has been sexually abused.
- Anyone is accused of an illegal act, such as the use of force to get money, property, or services.
- Someone's valuable property has been destroyed.

### 2. Find out what happened.

Use the core elements of bullying and your school's policies to help get the information needed to make an accurate determination of an incident. Document what is said in students' own words, and gather copies of anything you can to keep in a folder. Determine:

- Was the aggressive behavior actually unwanted?
- What is the history, including past conflict, between the students involved?

- Is there a power imbalance?
- Has this happened before?
- Is the student who was bullied worried it will happen again?

### 3. Support the students involved.

Support the students who are bullied:

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

Support the student engaging in bullying behavior while addressing it:

- Make sure the student knows what the problem behavior is.
- Tell the student that you and the school take bullying seriously.
- Apply consequences to teach in accordance with school policy.
- Involve the student who bullied in making amends or repairing the situation.
- Avoid strategies that don't work or have negative consequences.
- Follow up.

Support bystanders who witness bullying.

Students who witness bullying may suffer some of the same impacts as those who are targeted, including trauma. Bystanders may also witness bullying that takes place online, for example, on social media. Youth may be even less likely to stand up or intervene because there is additional distance between the bystander and the target of the bullying behavior. It's important to listen to what bystanders have to say about what they have seen and reassure them that you take the situation seriously.

In the classroom, offer these tips to students, as appropriate, to inform their interactions with other students who are targets of bullying behavior. Students can:

- Set a good example and not bully others or participate if someone is being bullied.
- Tell the person being bullied that they don't like the bullying and ask the student being targeted if they can do anything to help.
- Help someone they see being bullied get away from the situation.
- Help someone they see being bullied to tell an adult.
- Tell an adult if they see someone being bullied.
- Spend time with the person being bullied at school. Talk with them, sit with them at lunch, or play with them at recess.
- Listen to them.
- Be kind to the person being bullied at another time.
- Look for opportunities to contribute to the anti-bullying culture of their school through creating posters, stories, or films.

#### 4. Report and follow up.

Only with all the information can you make a determination about the nature of a conflict that occurred. The information you gather and your findings should go into a formal report guided by your school's policies. Your report should include plans for what needs to happen next for all the students involved.

Here are some tips to help you gather information and write a report:

- Write down what students say in their own words. Unless school policy forbids it, it's even best to write down the actual language (including curse words and/or offensive language) to document what occurred and better involve school staff, parents, and others in understanding what occurred.
- If you witness an incident, accurately report what you heard and saw along with what else you learn.
- Track evidence when you can, such as text messages, photos of damaged property, social media messages, etc.
- Get copies of everything you can, and keep it all in one folder.
- Fill out reports completely and legibly.
- Avoid editorial comments like "Suzy is just like her brother."
- Keep reports confidential and private.

Following up with all the students involved allows you to monitor the situation, gather more information if needed, and continue to let students know that there is continued adult support for them. When you follow up, you can find out if:

- Anything has changed and what the changes are.
- Plans put into place are working or not.
- Anything else needs to be done.

### Important Reporting Considerations

According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, reports should also include the following:

- If it is determined that an incident was bullying, the report should indicate whether the alleged conduct included anything that may trigger a school's obligations under the civil rights laws, e.g., sexual harassment; harassment based on sex stereotypes, race, national origin, or disability; and any impact the conduct may have had on the student who was bullied that could interfere with their access to education based on their race, sex, disability, etc. For example, federal law requires a school to remedy the effects of bullying on the services that a student with a disability receives (special education or other disability-related services) to ensure that the student continues to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE).
- The report should include information on the identities of the students involved, the location of the incident, the date(s), etc., so that the school can track any "hot spots" for bullying that should be monitored, or patterns that involve the same students.
- Schools should have a system for documenting and tracking issues, individual students, and patterns that reveal systemic problems that need to be addressed at a higher level.



## Turn Down the Heat: 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

1. Appear calm, centered, and self-assured. This will help everyone stay calmer, too.
2. Use a modulated, low tone of voice.
3. 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.
4. Call on a colleague, an administrator, security, or the police if you need more help.
5. 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 him or her to know that it is not necessary to show us that they should be respected. We automatically treat them with dignity and respect.

### Communicate Effectively Nonverbally

1. 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.
2. Get at the same eye level and maintain constant eye contact. Allow the student to break his or her gaze and look away from you.
3. Do not point or shake your finger.
4. Do not touch the student—even if some touching is generally culturally appropriate and usual in your setting. It could be easy for physical contact to be misinterpreted as hostile or threatening.
5. Keep hands out of your pockets, up and available to protect yourself, and stand at an angle to the student.

## Calm the Discussion

1. Remember that there is no content except trying to calmly bring the level of arousal down to a safer place.
2. Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming person. Wait until he or she takes a breath; then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.
3. 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.
4. 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?").
5. 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.").
6. Do not solicit how a person is feeling or interpret feelings in an analytic way.
7. Do not argue or try to convince.
8. Suggest alternative behaviors where appropriate (e.g., "Would you like to change seats?").
9. Give the consequences of inappropriate behavior without threats or anger.
10. 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. If it becomes obvious that the person you are trying to calm down has a weapon, remain calm and follow your school's procedures for addressing the presence of weapons to ensure maximum safety for all students and staff members present.

# Frequently Asked Questions With Additional Resources

## Law and Policy Resources

### 1. How do I know if my state has laws and policies addressing bullying?

State and local lawmakers have taken action to prevent bullying and protect children. Through laws (in their state education codes and elsewhere) and model policies (that provide guidance to districts and schools), each state addresses bullying differently.

Bullying, cyberbullying, and related behaviors may be addressed in a single law or may be addressed in multiple laws. In some cases, bullying appears in the criminal code of a state that may apply to juveniles.

Find out how your state refers to bullying in its laws and what they require of schools and districts at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/index.html>.

Look at the 11 key components state bullying laws have in common: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/key-components/index.html>.

### 2. How can I help my school have good policies and rules to prevent bullying?

Many schools have rules and policies that work to prevent bullying. Sometimes bullying is also dealt with under a school's code of conduct. For more information about what model policies and codes of conduct look like, how to integrate them into your school's culture, and how to establish clear procedures for a reporting system, go to <https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/rules/index.html>.

## Additional Bullying Details

### 3. What is the difference between bullying and harassment?

Bullying overlaps with discriminatory harassment when it is based on race, national origin, color, sex, age, disability, or religion. When bullying and harassment overlap, federally funded schools have an obligation to resolve the harassment.

At present, no federal law directly addresses bullying. In some cases, bullying overlaps with discriminatory harassment, which is covered under federal civil rights laws enforced by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). No matter what label is used (e.g., bullying, hazing, teasing), schools are obligated by these laws to address conduct that is:

- Sufficiently severe, pervasive, or persistent that it interferes with or limits a student's access to the school's programs and activities from the services, activities, or opportunities offered by a school.

- Targeting a student's race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion as covered under federal civil rights laws.

Although ED, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, does not directly cover religion, often religion-based harassment is based on shared ancestry of ethnic characteristics, which is covered. DOJ has jurisdiction over discrimination based on religion under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

State and local laws may offer additional protections from discriminatory harassment.

To find out more, go to <https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/federal/index.html>.

#### 4. Does bullying cause suicide?

In its report, *The Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide: What We Know and What It Means for Schools*, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that:

- Bullying behavior and suicide-related behavior are closely related. This means youth who report any involvement with bullying behavior are more likely to report high levels of suicide-related behavior than youth who do not report any involvement with bullying behavior.
- Enough is known about the relationship between bullying and suicide-related behavior to make evidence-based recommendations to improve prevention efforts.
- It is not known if bullying directly causes suicide-related behavior. Research shows that most youth who are involved in bullying do NOT engage in suicide-related behavior. It is correct to say that involvement in bullying, along with other risk factors, increases the chance that a young person will engage in suicide-related behavior.

To read the full CDC report, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-suicide-translation-final-a.pdf>.

#### 5. Where can I learn more about cyberbullying?

This landing page at [stopbullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/index.html) leads you to a variety of sources: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/index.html>.

Here are tips for teachers: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/tips-for-teachers/index.html>.

#### 6. Where can I learn more about bullying prevention and evidence-based programs?

*NOTE: Definitions of "evidence-based" vary between organizations. Review these resources closely, and undertake due diligence to ensure that you are identifying resources that align with your community's needs and the population(s) you serve.*

An extremely comprehensive report called *Preventing Bullying Through Science, Policy, and Practice* that covers data, consequences, prevention interventions, and laws and policies can be downloaded for free at <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/23482/preventing-bullying-through-science-policy-and-practice>.

Additional information on preventing bullying is at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/index.html>.

The federal government's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) can be found at <https://knowledge.samhsa.gov/ta-centers/national-registry-evidence-based-programs-and-practices>.

Youth.gov provides a directory of evidence-based programs identified by various federal agencies at <https://youth.gov/evidence-innovation/evidence-based-program-directories>. These directories contain resources beyond the topic of effective bullying prevention programs.

The National Institute of Justice's Comprehensive School Safety Initiative (CSSI) provides resources designed to increase safety in schools nationwide.

A list of programs and practices can also be found at <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/Programs.aspx>.

## Population-Specific Resources

### 7. **Where can I find resources on protecting different groups of children and creating safe environments for them?**

Stopbullying.gov is a good source for information. Check out:

Diversity, race, and religion at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/groups/index.html>.

LGBTQ youth at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/groups/lgbt/index.html>.

Youth with disabilities and special health needs at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/at-risk/groups/special-needs/index.html>.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, which includes information on how federal civil rights laws apply to harassment and bullying at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/protectingstudents.html>.

Other good sources include:

*Ready, Set, Respect! GLSEN's Elementary School Toolkit* at <https://www.glsen.org/readysetrepect>.

*A Framework for School Wide Bullying Prevention and Safety* from the National Association of School Psychologists at <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/bullying-prevention>.

### 8. **How can I learn more about intervening in bullying that is linked to teen dating violence?**

CDC has a great deal of information and links to resources about teen dating violence and how to address it at [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen\\_dating\\_violence.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html).

See also information provided by the Office of Adolescent Health about teen dating, including bullying, dating violence, and healthy relationship information, at <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/healthy-relationships/index.html>.

Futures Without Violence also has information on *5 Signs of a Healthy Teen Relationship* at <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/5-signs-of-a-healthy-teen-relationship/>.

## Involving and Informing Parents

### 9. What can I give parents if they ask me for information on cyberbullying?

Digital awareness for parents at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/digital-awareness-for-parents/index.html>.

Establishing rules at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/establishing-rules/index.html>.

### 10. How can I get parents more involved in our school efforts to prevent bullying and protect students?

Engaging parents and youth at <https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/engage-parents/index.html>.



# Post-Event Self-Assessment

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you have received the content of this module, please provide your best self-assessment on the following questions from your perspective after the training event.

On a scale of 1–4, with 1 being “Limited Understanding” and 4 being “Extensive Understanding,” how would you rate your understanding of what constitutes bullying behavior after completing the training?

Limited Understanding			Extensive Understanding	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

On a scale of 1–4, with 1 being “Not at All Confident” and 4 being “Highly Confident,” how would you rate your level of confidence to use each of the following 10 skills to prevent bullying behavior after completing the training?

- Identifying bullying behavior when I see it.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Describing my school’s policy on how to address bullying behavior.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Identifying possible indicators of students who bully.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Recognizing possible warning signs of students who are being bullied.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Knowing how to intervene in bullying behavior when I see it.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Knowing how to de-escalate a situation if necessary.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Knowing how to address bullying behavior that is reported to me.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Knowing how to find out what happened so I can make an accurate determination of whether an incident may involve bullying.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Knowing how to support the student(s) involved, including bystanders.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Knowing how to follow up and report on bullying behavior.

Not at All Confident			Highly Confident	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

On a scale of 1–4, with 1 being “Not at All Willing” and 4 being “Highly Willing,” how would you rate how likely you are to use any of the knowledge and skills you have learned in this training, should the opportunity arise?

Not at All Willing			Highly Willing	Don't Know
1	2	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>

Identify one new strategy for addressing bullying behavior, as presented in this training, that you are willing to employ in your daily work with students, should the situation arise.

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## Ten Things Students Wish Teachers Knew About Name-Calling and Bullying

1. Take the issue of name-calling and teasing seriously. Rethink statements like, “Kids will be kids...” or “He didn’t mean anything by that comment; he was just kidding.”
2. Let students know that you are available to talk to them. If possible, set aside ten minutes of class time each week to discuss issues that students want to bring up. Get to know students as individuals.
3. Take time to listen. Don’t try to “fix” a situation before you have taken time to listen carefully. Avoid making the situation worse by blaming the targeted student. Make sure your actions don’t discourage students’ honesty.
4. Don’t harp on what should have been done in the past; focus on the present. Saying, “Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” is not helpful.
5. Be a role model. If students observe you gossiping or exhibiting other bullying behaviors toward students, their families, or colleagues, they will interpret it as permission to behave similarly. Remember that everyone, including yourself, has biases that can influence behavior and that your words can have a strong impact.
6. Do not belittle, tear down, or publicly embarrass students. Although these strategies are common in competitive sports, they are ineffective in motivating students to do better.
7. Help students learn how to act as effective allies. Provide time for them to learn the range of behaviors practiced by good allies. Do not communicate the expectation that students should always directly intervene when bias incidents occur. Discuss safety concerns and brainstorm effective alternative strategies with students.
8. Acknowledge when name-calling and bullying are occurring and that being the target of these incidents can be painful. Do not downplay what a student says he or she is feeling or experiencing.
9. Be proactive. Prepare your students to respond effectively to bias incidents and become a partner with their families. Discuss name-calling and bullying and school policies that outline how these situations will be handled. Explore the different roles students can take in bias incidents—target, perpetrator, bystander, and ally, and help students consider responses to situations from the perspectives of each of these roles.
10. Be discreet and, whenever possible, maintain confidentiality. Do not announce to the class when a student is having a problem with name calling, bullying, or harassment. Whenever possible, help each student privately.



“This document was developed from the public domain document: Diamanti, K., Duffey, T., & Fisher, D. (2018). Creating a safe and respectful environment in our nation’s classrooms. Washington, DC: National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.”

# Part 3:

## Introduction

Even though protections and fair, equal norms for LGBTQ persons are at an historic high as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, the vast majority of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer students enrolled in public schools report high levels of depression and anxiety. Many also report harrowing tales of victimization, physical and emotional bullying, and of violence. Those who do not have these stories are often the LGBTQ students who choose to stay home—or choose not to share any personal information with their peers. These forms of repression have long-lasting effects on these students' academic and personal growth, as do also all forms of anti-LGBTQ sentiment in the schools themselves.

Psychologists have confirmed that real, effective education cannot exist without security for students. For schools to educate their LGBTQ students, therefore, changes will need to be made to increase their sense of safety and well-being on campus—and off it—during their formative years. In this course, we discuss the current situation in detail, the reasons change is crucial for these students, and several practical methods for doing so in an efficient and effective manner.

## Section One: School Safety is Paramount for LGBTQ Students

### *Case Study One*

One case study highlighted the characteristics of a Boston Public School which contributed, both positively and negatively, to one bisexual student's mental health. This particular individual realized that he was bisexual during his sophomore year of high school; he came out before he graduated. Positive experiences included the student's participation within the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club and the acceptance of many of his peers—including the fact that his school had a zero-tolerance policy on bullying. Negative experiences included the difficulty of coming out to his family and friends, dealing with their reactions mostly on his own, and the mental health implications of feeling alone during most of his school experience as an LGBTQ individual. However, due to the support of his community, this individual was able to graduate and feel fulfilled most of the time. He is currently attending a four-year college.

## ***Case Study Two***

In rural Oregon, a case of rampant high school homophobia illustrates a wholly different scenario. Recent investigations into student success and safety reveal that gay and transgender students have had to endure slurs and insults from the rest of the student body—and even, in some cases, the staff. In one episode, a transgender student was pelted with food in the school’s cafeteria while the teachers and administration turned a blind eye.

After asking the staff how such cases of homophobia and student bullying were punished, the investigator found that the victims of such activities—the gay and transgender students—were often punished by being assigned readings from the Bible. Students reported having suffered years of such bigotry and harassment with no support or protection to help them survive or cope.

Officials at the school had hesitated to take action or file reports both because they did not know what to do or how to help and because they were afraid of persecution themselves. This inaction resulted in an unsafe and abusive scenario for students deemed different by the majority of the community.

## ***Case Study Three***

In one school system which until recently had no LGBTQ-centric or -inclusive education, the LGBTQ students were not harassed or bullied, leading the administration to think they were doing very well in comparison to more horrific cases of LGBTQ student bullying. However, LGBTQ students felt a lack of support when, in health class, only topics concerning heterosexuality and more normative gender identities were taught. This lack of support extended to all students, as non-LGBTQ students simply did not know how to interact with those who identified otherwise. One study followed the public perception of the LGBTQ students over a year during which LGBTQ information was incorporated into the school’s health education curriculum. Instances of LGBTQ students being bullied plummeted, and the LGBTQ students themselves experienced much-ameliorated mental health benefits as a result of this inclusivity.

## ***Summary/Conclusions***

Before a student can prioritize education, they need to feel safe. Schools, therefore, need to emphasize student safety as much or more than the normal classes educating students for efficacy's sake, if nothing else.

When it comes to protecting LGBTQ students specifically, a consistent lack of information, empathy, or oversight is allowing the victimization of any students identifying away from the norm. In the cases where action has been taken, such as the establishing of GSA clubs and inclusion of LGBTQ language in school health classes, the mental and physical health and bodily safety of LGBTQ student has been much improved.

### **What are the responsibilities of a school regarding each of its individual students?**

- When evaluating the relationship between a school and its students, it's easy to think of the social conventions regarding the gratitude, services, and actions a student owes their school. Loyalty, a level of obedience, social investments—these are all examples of intangible 'things' commonly believed that students owe to their schools. However, a school also owes its students several 'things'—intangible and also extremely concrete.
- Firstly, a school owes its students a good education. It is expected by every level of communities—students, teachers, parents, and all—that when a student graduates, that student is prepared for higher education or to be prepared fend for themselves socially and financially in the world. This may not be news; most people associate schools with the hope of a solid education.
- However, a school owes its students more than algebra, history, and a spring musical. Students attend classes with the hope of learning but with the assumption that they will be safe in order to learn. Parents entrust their children to these institutions with the trust that the school will ensure basic safety for their children. Before schools owe students a good education, schools owe their students (and the entire community) a safe space in which their minds, bodies, and persons will be protected so that they might have room to grow.

### **Is safety a prerequisite for a good education?**

- Think about school from a student's perspective for one moment; step into their shoes. Before you lies a to-do list rife with assignments, reading recommendations, and class projects. However, underlying that list is a much simpler one: walk home, find a place to eat, and make it down this hallway without being heckled. Unfortunately, for many youths belonging to minority cultures including LGBTQ students in modern schools, there is no assurance that hallways are not gauntlets.
- Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist of the twentieth century, first put forth the idea of the hierarchy of needs. Everyone, according to this theory, has fundamental needs which need to be met prior to more specialized ones.
- While education is extremely important for a student's welfare, safety is a more basic need. Maslow argued that if a student does not feel safe in an educational environment, that the child at best will not be able to concentrate on his studies—and, at worst, may not be around long enough to benefit from them.
- Psychologically speaking, when a student feels safe, he or she feels the freedom required to think critically. When we're in fight-or-flight mode and adrenaline is coursing through our systems, our mental capacity necessarily shrinks.

### **What constitutes safety for students in school?**

- A safe space can be defined as a place in which an individual can be certain of expressing potentially uncomfortable truths without fear of repercussion. The term originated in American colleges attempting to set certain places aside for free discourse between students and staff.
- In the history of the LGBTQ movement, which has gone through periods of time in which no space was safe for members to live freely according to their identity, a 'safe space' has referred to a place in which individuals could be themselves without worrying about suffering punitive action by authorities. This has involved dressing the ways they wanted, being with the people they loved, and other activities.
- In the parlance of schools and young LGBTQ students, safety would refer to an environment in which students are free from the threat of violence, unfair treatment, or harm from their peers, teachers, external threats, and from themselves due to depression or poor mental health.

- Being safe from external threats (such as mass shooters) is a heavy topic which must be given due consideration, but is beyond the scope of this course. We will focus on ways to ensure LGBTQ students are safe from their peers, school personnel, and any ways in which they may mentally or physically self-harm.

### **What do we need to be safeguarding our LGBTQ students against to keep schools safe?**

- After breaking down the three main sources of potential harm to LGBTQ students (their peers, the staff, themselves), we can identify the various methods for harm to come to the students. There is physical harm in the form of bodily aggression, sexual harassment, or property damage; there is emotional harm in the form of heckling or other means of verbal abuse; and—in modernity—the prevalence of Internet abuse is on the rise.
- Cyberbullying is one type of Internet-based aggression to which LGBTQ students may be subject. This can simply take the form of posting, sending, or sharing information (or implied information) about another person which is false, insulting, derogatory, or simply private. Because of the prevalence of social media among school-age individuals and the ease with which information can be shared, spreading unwanted information from behind a screen can be simpler for the perpetrator and more injurious for the victim.
- LGBTQ students are also at risk of being taken advantage of by peers or other people hiding behind the anonymity of the Internet through cat-fishing or other forms of disingenuous remote contact. Because the gender and sexuality of students on the LGBTQ spectrum may be more publicly known or discussed than that of students who do not identify as such, there are those who might wish to reach out to these LGBTQ students in unacceptable ways to abuse or make inappropriate suggestions. These practices can alienate and disturb recipients of unwanted attention online. These practices can also tempt young individuals to place themselves in dangerous situations (for example, going and meeting someone that they've previously only spoken with online) and also contribute to negative mental health.
- Discrimination refers to any scenario in which a person has been treated unfairly because of any characteristics they represent or simply because of who they are.



This can manifest itself in several ways. Several school examples might include being passed over for inclusion in a theater production, a sporting team, or an academic opportunity; or even, in some extreme cases, achieving lower grades. One common LGBTQ-specific example of discrimination might be the disallowing of LGBTQ groups on campus while other similar groups are allowed to form and meet without restriction. Singling out LGBTQ students in this way can make them targets for pejorative or violent actions on the part of their peers and contribute to an isolated mentality for the students, lowering their likelihood of good mental health.

- Physical heckling or abuse are unfortunate practices to which LGBTQ students are often subjected. At least one parent of an LGBTQ student has compared their child's educational experience to that of 'walking into a hail-storm every day'. Because school-age children are often not the most developed in regards to tact, empathy, comprehension, and polite discourse, they sometimes react to the unknown with aggression and hostility. This is bullying, and it can range from simply impacting an LGBTQ student's mental health all the way to severe physical ramifications.
- Property damage is commonly experienced by LGBTQ students in the place of or in addition to verbal or physical abuse. One way that school-age children retaliate when confronted with an individual they do not understand is through theft or defacement of property belonging to that person. This can result in (at the very least) unnecessary expenses incurred on the part of the victim; and, at the most, contribute to an atmosphere of disparagement surrounding at-risk LGBTQ students.
- Finally, as alluded to in every scenario above, the mental health status of minority and LGBTQ students needs to be safeguarded. Far more dangerous to any student, in that it is less obvious and more insidious than physical abuse, is a depressive mentality. LGBTQ students' emotional needs for community, connection, and support not being met can result in the students' feeling depressed, isolated, and at risk for self-harm. Schools need to prioritize support for at-risk students, including LGBTQ students, and find ways to help these struggling individuals find joy, confidence, and connection in their everyday experiences. Not doing so opens these students up to devastating opportunity for lifelong harm.

**Do all students in America, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, feel safe within their school environments?**

- A 2017 study asked 35,000 students across eight states in the USA about their perceived safety at school. Only just over half responded that they felt safe while in classrooms, hallways, in bathrooms or on school property. This leaves a very large percentage of students who spend their school hours afraid for their emotional, mental, or physical health.
- That same study found that up to 79% of parents felt their children were in completely safe environments—free from all threat of violence. This means that some 30% of students who felt in danger did not feel like they could reach out to their parents to describe what was happening.
- In recent years, 28% of students reported being physically or verbally bullied at school. 30% admit to bullying others. 70% of students report seeing bullying happen. This means that intra-student violence—verbal or physical—effects the vast majority of the average school’s student body.

**Do students who specifically identify as LGBTQ feel safe within their school environments? Are students who identify as LGBTQ safe at school?**

- Of the students targeted for bullying or harassment at school, most are those who identify as other or outside the norm. Right now, one perceived norm, especially among school-age children who are taught to expect nothing else, is heterosexual cisgender individuals. Those who identify publicly as anything other than that are different; and school-age children are often not naturally gifted in inclusion and tolerance.
- Even those LGBTQ students who do not choose to publicly share their identities may still be perceived by other students as quiet, different, or other without having to be told. Additionally, the stress of hiding themselves from the public eye can make closeted LGBTQ students undergo untold and extremely unhealthy levels of stress.
- The Human Rights Campaign in conjunction with researchers from the University of Connecticut recently completed a comprehensive survey of over 12,000 LGBTQ teenagers across the nation. The results were stark:
  - 8 in 10 LGBTQ students reported school-related depression.
  - Only 25% said they felt safe at school.

- 95% said they had trouble sleeping at night. Sleep issues contribute to a depressive state and simply make it harder for students to keep up in school.
- 86% of LGBTQ students characterized themselves as stressed.
- Only 41% of these students said that they received psychological or emotional support at school.
- Perhaps tellingly, only 31% of the surveyed LGBTQ students were able to express themselves in a manner fully reflecting their gender identity at school.
- The HRC also specifically asked survey questions of teenagers who identified as transgender. Two-thirds of transgender teens surveyed reported avoiding going to the bathroom if at all possible while at school. 25% skip PE to avoid having to change and shower in front of their assigned peers; 19% simply skip showering.
  - Only 12% say that their general health or sex education courses provided information helpful to their status as members of the LGBTQ community.
  - 11% say they have been assaulted or raped because of their identity.
  - 7 in 10 have experienced verbal threats.
  - 8 in 10, unwanted sexual comments.
  - 3 in 10 physically threatened because of identity. The ratio expands for those identifying as female, affecting nearly 50% of transgender girls.
- The fact that such a large proportion of the students feels unsafe at school represents a large fraction of the student base which the school system is not adequately protecting and therefore not educating as the students require (and, indeed, as discussed earlier—are owed).

**Do teachers currently have the right toolsets in place to help them advocate and protect LGBTQ students?**

- The short answer is, unfortunately, no. An interview with one college-age LGBTQ student revealed that many times when he had been bullied in middle and high school after coming out as gay, a teacher had been within ear- or eye-shot. The teacher could have stepped in and ensured that he was safe. This did not occur.
- For the most part, when teachers don't act, it's not because they don't want to. The student who relayed this information mentioned that sometimes, a teacher would come by and announce that bullying wasn't cool—but then walk away without enforcing any actions or corrections. Other times, teachers themselves would use incorrect vocabulary regarding his gender or orientation, pull him out of class, attempt to speak with him, but end up blushing and looking away—further alienating this student and ramifying his status of 'other' among the other students.
- Changing the culture to protect LGBTQ students will take many investments and programs. Among these will be extensive, comprehensive opportunities for teachers to educate themselves in LGBTQ history, issues, and vocabulary as well as anti-bullying messaging and actions so that when they see something occur, they're fully prepared to take action to protect those who need it most.
- This need for teacher action necessitates a response and protective activity at the slightest hint of anti-LGBTQ sentiment. There can be no threshold under or over which permissiveness is okay. LGBTQ students report that sometimes bullying was addressed when the perpetrators were caught in the midst of the harassment, but often harmful remarks and off-color jokes about LGBTQ students were passed off by teachers as 'just slurs'. There is no such thing as 'just a slur'. In order to ensure the complete safety of LGBTQ students, there must be a zero-tolerance policy in effect for any and all anti-LGBTQ sentiment.

## **The Effects of an Unsafe School System for LGBTQ Students**

- Students are more likely to participate in risky behaviors if they feel unsafe.
- Being alienated due to their sexual orientation or gender identity has also been shown to have a negative impact on LGBTQ students' test scores. Being depressed due to lack of support and community makes it harder to focus in class or to muster up the motivation to try to do well. Many LGBTQ students report staying home from school more often than not to avoid the unhelpful actions of their peers. The isolated LGBTQ student will likely feel unwelcome in study or homework groups and

may not even feel comfortable reaching out to their teacher for advice or clarifications on confusing homework. LGBTQ students often fail out of school when they are unable to keep up; but what's really happening is that the schools are failing their students.

- According to the CDC, there is a positive link between bullying at school and suicidal behavior in students. This is explicable due to the mental health impacts of being consistently bullied, especially when 'the reason why' is such an integral (and potentially new and confusing) part of who LGBTQ students are.

### **What's distinctive about the elementary, middle, and high school years for LGBTQ students? Why is it important to support them during this specific time frame?**

- During middle and high school years are the years during which many LGBTQ students consider coming out—or, in other cases, feel pressured to keep themselves hidden. Either way, these formative years are precisely when LGBTQ students need the most support for optimal mental health and safety.
- When a young person decides to come out as LGBTQ, they are putting themselves into the limelight for opinions and comments from their peers. Put another way: When these children are at their most vulnerable, they are likely being judged by people who do not yet have the sensitivity, training, or maturity to handle such an event with respect.
- When a student comes out, they also have to deal with the reaction of their family. If the family is less than supportive, the student will have to look elsewhere for comfort and respect; and, if these are not found at school, the student runs the risk of getting involved in unhealthy outlets for frustration, or becoming extremely depressed.
- The fact that young LGBTQ students often don't receive this support receive it puts them in a higher risk bracket for self-harm, other-harm, and even tragic action. This is not a failure on their parts, but on the behalf of the school which did not support or at the very least protect them.
- Research shows that being 'out' is good for the mental health of the young LGBTQ individual; it lessens a sense of secrecy and shame which even at the best of times is mis-applied and too much for one person to bear. However, if the environment of

the school is not conducive to a student feeling safe enough to make that public declaration, they will keep themselves bottled up and recused. This can lead to emotional trauma, which in turn will have lifelong repercussions.

### **Does lack of LGBTQ representation in school materials qualify as endangering the student?**

- This may not be seen as actively endangering the child, but a lack overall of LGBTQ representation in health and other school subject materials helps enforce the erroneous idea that those who identify as LGBTQ are different or 'other'. Therefore, lack of representation may not directly endanger the student, but it may contribute to an atmosphere which does not support the student as is needed.
- Specific methods for welcoming and including LGBTQ students in normal discourse need to be emphasized—particularly in teacher education. In one case, a student who identified as agender and preferred them/they/their as their personal pronouns instead of more socially accepted male/female personal pronouns asked their teachers to refer to them as such. When the teachers struggled with this simple request, the student became depressed and attempted suicide. If such tragedies can be avoided by simply educating the staff about the acceptability of different personal pronouns, then such education must be had.
- Normalizing oft-preferred social distinctions for those who identify as agender, transgender through an update of school policy and distributed materials will go a long way towards helping at-risk individuals feel much more accepted, supported, and welcome. If they feel supported, they will be less at risk for harassment by the uninformed and self-harm manifesting as a depressive symptom.

### ***Section One Summary***

Academic institutions need to be safe places in order for the students attending them to be in the right psychological mindsets for growth and education. Currently, despite the progress made in recent years for LGBTQ rights, students who identify as anything other than heterosexual, cisgender individuals are targeted for discrimination, heckling, bigotry and abuse. This often occurs under the very noses of the staff entrusted with their care—but in some scenarios, the teachers and principals of those academic institutions are adding to the problem.

LGBTQ students who are not protected and who do not experience safety at school are at higher risks for self-harm, suicide, violence, and emotional and physical turmoil. Few student subjected to such conditions thrive—let alone graduate on time. To care for these students as well as to ensure the basic effectiveness of the school system, it's necessary for teachers and officials to adopt an empathetic and comprehensive inclusivity and mindset towards helpful education and support when it comes to working with LGBTQ+ students.

### ***Section One Key Concepts***

*“Children cannot get a quality education if they don’t first feel safe at school.”* -Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education

- Psychologists, teachers, and administrators agree: No child who is afraid is going to be able to learn well. As the first and second duties of a school to its students are to protect and educate, a school is failing in its duties if any student does not feel safe—much less if an entire sector of the student population is consistently harassed, heckled, abused and made to suffer.
- Studies and surveys show that even though the LGBTQ movement as a whole has made incredible strides over the past decades in terms of rights accrued for their members and national recognition as individuals of worth, the young members of the community remain vulnerable to everyday misunderstand and persecution at school.
- At a stage of personal growth during which many young children are just discovering who they are, the school system affords them no protections as they attempt to reveal to the world their unique identity.
- Because of a distinct lack of focused protections and widespread education and inclusion of LGBTQ information in school curricula, LGBTQ students are labelled as ‘other’ and targeted for discrimination or abuse by intolerant or simply uninformed members of society—including students, teachers, and families.
- In order for these students to be supported according to their rights as students of a protecting, educating school, action needs to be taken to actively support each of them in their journey to full growth—as every student at every school should be supported.

- In order to reduce phobic comments or abuse, full education of LGBTQ rights and situations as well as full LGBTQ representation needs to be incorporated into all relevant school materials.

### *Section One Key Terms*

- **Bullying:** In 2014, the CDC defined bullying as an umbrella term for certain core elements of undesirable behavior, including aggression, enforced power imbalance, and repetition of unwanted attention.
- **Cyber-bullying:** This refers to primarily verbal aggression or relational aggression (i.e., spreading rumors) via the Internet to cause harm.
- **LGBTQ:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. Sometimes termed simply 'LGBT', other times referred to as 'LGBTQ+', the term refers to those who identify otherwise than heterosexual, cisgender persons on the sexual and gender spectrums.

### *Section One Personal Reflection Question*

Think for a moment about the students in your school. Are there any on the sidelines of things who seem sad and outcast? Is there anything that your school is actively doing to improve their lives?

### **Section Two: Treatment/Action Items**

Earlier in this course, we discussed the fact that LGBTQ students are at risk for dangerous activity from three discrete sources: their peers, predators, and themselves. We can reduce the risk that they will become victim to unhelpful or harmful behaviors by seeking to ameliorate relationships and inclusion at school and reduce exposure to the harmful sides of these three conduits for unhelpful actions.

For example, LGBTQ students are liable to be victims of bullying from misinformed and confused peers. One strategy for stopping this might include comprehensive education on LGBTQ issues, and the implementation of inclusive anti-bullying policies at your school. If LGBTQ students are at risk of being exploited by those older than



them in a predatory fashion, enforcing background checks and swift disciplinary action in such cases will improve their safety in another fashion.

Finally, because studies do show that LGBTQ students are more highly at risk than their peers to be depressed and therefore liable to tragic expressions of depression, it seems reasonable to think that we will be able to improve LGBTQ student safety by introducing resources to improve the mental health of struggling students. We can do this by improving education about LGBTQ issues, making sure that the teachers and administrative staff are caring, empathetic resources, and ensuring that our schools are in every way safe spaces for all students to grow.

### ***What steps can administrations take to help support their LGBTQ student population?***

- Many teachers surveyed by the GLSEN have reported that they would like to do something to help, but do not feel equipped to help a student dealing with the complex, diverse issues that the LGBTQ community has had to face. Because of this, school administrations should provide ongoing training and development for their staffs on current LGBTQ topics so that their teachers are best able to support their students who belong to the community.
- According to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, between a quarter and a third of teachers nationwide currently receive information and training regarding the handling of LGBTQ issues. When compared to the resources that are now available to help train teachers on the appropriate response towards racism, sexism, and ableism, it is clear that there is more that can be done to equip teachers to help support and respond to struggling LGBTQ students.

### ***Do teachers have a specific role to play to help mitigate anti-LGBTQ bias?***

- Yes. This is not news to most teachers; some 83% of teacher surveyed by the GLSEN agreed that they had a responsibility to ensure that their learning environments were safe for LGBTQ students.
- As trusted figures of authority within the school community, teachers can be seen as resources to struggling students. One responsibility teachers have to their students is to be informed and ready to assist when approached with an issue by any student

(LGBTQ or otherwise). While assisting with academic topics comprises the majority of their job description, ensuring the safety of each student by being such a resource is a duty few teachers deny.

- If the administration of a school does not support LGBTQ rights or does not adapt materials, culture norms and practices to avoid the isolation and targeting of LGBTQ students, each individual teacher needs to educate themselves so when the schools' LGBTQ students suffer and require assistance, the teacher is able to help.

### ***What specific actions can be done to make school safer for LGBTQ students?***

- Now that we've discussed the reasons schools need to be safe, who specifically is responsible for making the changes to make schools safe, and the stakes for the LGBTQ students, we'll discuss ten concrete ways to make schools safer for LGBTQ students.
- It might be tempting to wonder where to start, what the true priorities are, and how to make the biggest difference the most quickly for the vulnerable students at your school. The best change is always the change you can make today; a moment of empathetic compassion and understanding for one at-risk student can change their whole lives for the better. However, in terms of effective change for your school as a whole, here is a recommended course of action to help build a more inclusive and supportive school community for all.

#### **Learn the facts**

- Before you can help the LGBTQ students in your school and community, you need to be equipped with accurate statistics and correct information about the current status of LGBTQ students so that you can employ an empathetic concern to improve their situation.
- Taking this course is a great first step, but taking time to educate yourself about the history of the LGBTQ movement, the psychological traumas that usually accompany the self-discovery process in LGBTQ youth, as well as the prevalence of harmful anti-LGBTQ behaviors in schools across the country which victimize countless youth, placing them at risk for bullying and self-harm will help you to become an even better resource for struggling LGBTQ students.

## Understand the language

- It is possible to hurt an LGBTQ individual with the best of intentions if you are unaware of the precise language used by the LGBTQ community. Taking time to review the terminology used by the LGBTQ community is a sign of respect and will ease your conversations with members of the community.
- When in doubt, it's usually okay to politely (and sensitively, and privately) ask the individual about the terms they are comfortable with, as long as you're committed to using them. If this doesn't seem like the right course of action, notice the vocabulary they use in self-referential statements and mirror those words unless requested to behave otherwise.
- Equip yourself with resources designed to bring common LGBTQ terms into mainstream language! While this is not a comprehensive list, you can find here some commonly-accepted LGBTQ terms:
  - gay (when used as an adjective), lesbian, bi or bisexual (when used as an adjective), sexual orientation, transgender, gender identity, gender expression, transition, fairness and equality, intolerance, rejection, exclusion, unfairness, and hurtfulness (as less-charged ways to discuss behaviors to be avoided).
- Without being informed, it's easy to use a term that is pejorative without malicious intent. However, it's best to educate yourself so harmful mistakes don't happen. Below, find an incomplete list of terms which the LGBTQ community would generally rather distance themselves from:
  - homosexual, gay (when used as a noun), lesbianism, sexual preference (connotes choice), gay lifestyle, same-sex attractions, sexual identity, the verb 'admitted' (connotes inherent guilt), transgender (when used as a noun), transvestite, tranny, sex change, pre-operative, post-operative, any mention of 'rights', hatred, bigotry, and prejudice (as more-charged ways to discuss behaviors to be avoided).
- One extremely important term is simply 'ally'—an LGBTQ ally. This is a term for individuals who may not identify as LGBTQ, but are firmly supportive of their

protections. This is important because it gives those who do not identify as LGBTQ a specific role to play as well as a choice: to ally, or not to ally.

- Words have power. Using one set of terms instead of another might seem like an easy, ephemeral fix—but allowing the LGBTQ movement to choose its vocabulary, offering its individuals the respect they need, and setting an example for others are powerful ways to help increase inclusion and reduce isolation.
- When inaccurate, insensitive, or hurtful language is used, providing education and then working to stop harmful behaviors is necessary for the safety of LGBTQ students.

### **Stop bad behavior**

- The unfortunate news is that daily hurtful actions are a part of every LGBTQ student's life. They're well used to being passed over for social activities, being the target of rude comments and hallway heckling, and finding a safe and secluded place to eat or sit on the bus. The good news? Now that you know about it, you can do something to help.
- With knowledge comes responsibility. Even before your school places policies in effect to help LGBTQ students, you should keep an eye out for students who are struggling or being marginalized. Addressing unhelpful behaviors constantly and consistently when you see them will go a long way towards changing the culture and laying the groundwork for policy change.
- Here is a basic strategy you can follow when you notice that an LGBTQ student is being targeted or victimized:
  - If a student is in danger, stop what is happening. Do not over-react, just quietly ensure that the student is no longer in harm's way.
  - Once the immediate urgency is over, speak to all personnel concerned in the incident privately. Keep your mind open to all sides of the story to prioritize fairness.

- With respect for the feelings of all involved, define what happened in succinct and uncharged terms. However, do not shy from using the correct vocabulary. If a student was being bullied, calmly state it as such.
- Affirm clearly to all involved that the harmful behavior is not to be tolerated and will result in punitive actions for those responsible. If your administration does not have clear disciplinary actions in place for bullying or other harmful behaviors, you can simply state that you will be investigating further and will be in contact with the student's parents and the school's administration.
- If the incident was of lesser danger and/or a first-time offense, you can use your best judgement as to whether immediate disciplinary action is necessary or if simply marking the occasion with a teachable moment would be best practice. However, if a student seriously came into harm's way, it is likely you will have to take action to ensure that the behavior is permanently stopped.

### Set the policy

- Each student at every school needs to be protected from bullying on an administrative level. If this isn't the case, or if this isn't enforced for LGBTQ students, then these paradigms need to change.
- In order for a policy to be effective at helping students, including LGBTQ students, stay safe within an ever-changing school environment, it needs to cover three basic things:
  - The policy needs to be very specific as to which behaviors are not going to be tolerated at your school. For example, if the protection policy will cover anti-LGBTQ bullying, the policy needs to have specific language in it that specifies what constitutes each of those terms (LGBTQ, bullying, etc). Your goal needs to be education—i.e., that those who read the policy understand it; and to close loopholes. People will attempt to circumvent the policy in the future. Do not help them.
  - The policy must contain clearly-delineated consequences and courses of action as to what will happen if intolerable actions take place.
  - The policy must contain a plan for how the policy will be implemented.

- As far as anti-bullying policies aimed at protecting LGBTQ students go, they require several specific components in order for them to be fully effective and protective for LGBTQ students (and the entire student body). These include:
  - A thoughtful definition of the harassment and bullying the policy seeks to squash;
  - Language that protects the identity of each student. Particularly for LGBTQ students, their privacy should be paramount and protected by specific language in the policy;
  - Plans designed to protect those LGBTQ students who partake in gender-specific activities and information about gender-segregated locations (such as bathrooms);
  - Language that protects the LGBTQ students in with regard to both the physical and perceived components of their gender identity;
  - School-specific logistical information, including how LGBTQ students should adhere to the dress code (for example); and
  - Plans for specific training and ongoing education for support, teachers, and other staff so they are able to be good resources for struggling LGBTQ students.

### **Plan school-wide activities**

- Policies are essential for change, but needed action does not end once the administration has everything down in black and white. Very few people will actually read the policy. It's up to the staff of your school to ensure that the contents of the policy are incorporated into daily actions and communicated to the entire school community.
- Planning LGBTQ-supporting activities makes your school's support for the community visible and undeniable. This visibility assists the community in understanding that your school plans to support LGBTQ students and communicates the fact that your school will be a safe place for those within the community.

- Specific ideas for events and materials for publicizing the ideologies of the community can be found via national resources such as GLSEN and Teaching Tolerance.
- Examples of extremely effective events that helped spread awareness and foster inclusion for LGBTQ students have included No Name Calling Week, Day of Silence, Mix It Up, and National GSA Day.
- Remember that it's important to host these events not only when you first implement the policy but as ongoing support for members of the LGBTQ community.

## **Be public**

- The scheduled and celebrated events spreading LGBTQ are excellent ways to start a wave of inclusion and pro-LGBTQ activity across your school's community. However, they are just that: a start. What must follow is sustained, public commitment and support of the LGBTQ community in order to normalize the lives of its members in your school.
- On an administrative level, this includes enforcing the policies put in place to protect the LGBTQ students at your school; scheduling and celebrating LGBTQ-centric events and activities on an ongoing basis; and inviting the surrounding community at large to partake in and put on similar events so that everyone knows your school is an LGBTQ-positive entity.
- However, administration can only go so far. The wave of LGBTQ support that follows in administration's footsteps must be individualistic action on the parts of every teacher at your school. In short, to properly support the at-risk LGBTQ youth, each teacher should consider coming out as an LGBTQ ally.

## **What is an LGBTQ ally?**

- A straight ally of the LGBTQ movement is an individual who may not identify as gay, transgender, or any of the other orientations or expressions encompassed by the movement. This individual, however, does entirely support fairness and equality for the individuals of the LGBTQ movement.

## What are the responsibilities of an LGBTQ ally?

- Consider the historical messaging you may unconsciously be programmed with: One of the first steps is to realize that everyone has been impacted by the incorrect and unhelpful treatment and portrayal of the LGBTQ community over the past several decades. Doing your best to forget any judgmental lens through which you might have unconsciously be viewing members of the LGBTQ community is best. Honestly ask yourself whether any of the programming of the past actually reflects the people you know who identify as LGBTQ. Likely, the answer will be a resounding ‘no’.
- Educate yourself thoroughly on the issues and history of the LGBTQ movement. Harboring correct empathy for the modern-day plight of the LGBTQ students at your school will be richer and more authentic if you know where they are all coming from. While the LGBTQ movement has been around for centuries (indeed, as long as there have been people), it’s only recently that those who identify as members of the community have had the freedom to live as they wish in public. However, that doesn’t mean that the community as a whole feels safe doing so—especially younger members who may just be learning about themselves and may be feeling confused about their identity. Having the context of the history of the movement will help you better support those keeping it alive today.
- Proactively learn and use inclusive, correct language. Words have power. Both for your own more accurate discourse, the mental health and happiness of those who identify as LGBTQ, and as a subtle but far-reaching form of public support within your community, learning what to say (and what to steer away from) can only be construed as a public good.
- Practice active, empathetic listening techniques when supporting LGBTQ individuals: LGBTQ individuals undergo unhelpful, isolating treatment on a day-to-day basis. Allowing them the freedom to convey how they feel and how they would prefer to be treated is a good initial step in protecting them from harm.
- Good questions, comments, and starter conversation topics that are endorsed by national LGBTQ-friendly organizations for allies to keep in mind are:



- Do you remember when you first knew you were [gay, transgender, etc]? Can you tell me about that?
- I'm interested in what growing up was like for you. Can you tell me a story?
- Coming out was a brave choice—I'm sure it must have been difficult for you. How did you know it was time?
- Can you tell me about the coming out process?
- Tell me how I can best support you.
- Intervene when intolerable behavior on the part of others make instant action necessary. The only way to keep children safe across the board is to ensure that whenever anyone sees improper action taking place, the instantaneous reaction is to stop it from happening. Too many times, LGBTQ students' victimization is ignored. Staff unfairly look the other way, often. Do not do this. Regardless of the victim's gender identity or orientation, if someone is being hurt or treated unfairly, it needs to stop. When you see something harmful or unhelpful occur, step in and take action—don't look the other way.

### **Address cyber-bullying**

- Any use of technology to send or share information which could hurt or embarrass another falls under the definition of cyber-bullying. The overwhelming majority of students have access to the Internet, personal devices that allow for 24/7 connection, and social media accounts that permit them to reach massive platforms of strangers and friends with personal information.
- According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, 1 in 5 students have experienced cyber-bullying. Many of these are LGBTQ victims, as the anonymity and distance permitted by the Internet make improper behavior more accessible to misinformed perpetrators.
- A good place to begin is with a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes cyber-bullying, as only with a definition is it possible to take steps towards

corrective action. Cyber-bullying, as defined by the Cyberbullying Research Center, is not limited to but can include:

- Sending messages or texts that are mean or threatening;
  - Tricking someone into posting personal information, or revealing that information for them online;
  - Forwarding clearly private messages to others or posting them to a wide audience;
  - Sharing images that are overly explicit online without consent;
  - Starting and spreading harmful rumors about others online; and
  - Starting, curating, and perpetuating fake social media profiles to embarrass, seduce, or make fun of anyone while under a false identity.
- Addressing cyber-bullying can take many forms, but it's recommended to make it clear to students that:
- Cyber-bullying is a form of bullying and as such it will be addressed with similar disciplinary action as in-person or physical bullying;
  - Being involved with cyber-bullying is a negative thing that will follow them through school and job applications for the rest of their lives; and
  - If they are on the receiving end of cyber-bullying of any kind, it needs to be reported to a teacher or staff member for further investigation.

### **Train and educate everyone**

- Most teachers realize the fact that they are in a position with a unique opportunity to provide support for LGBTQ students undergoing unfairness and persecution. Most of these teachers do not feel equipped to take further action, however. Advocate for comprehensive education and training to be in place at your school to empower teachers to be the support that young, struggling LGBTQ students need to thrive and learn.

- A good place to begin is with a comprehensive school survey. Ask the teachers and administrative staff at your school to rate the school's perceived safety levels, what they know about the LGBTQ movement, and what they believe good action steps would be.
- After this, turn to certified and well-produced online programs such as Groundspark's Let's Get Real or Ready, Set, Respect from GLSEN. Provide these resources to each individual staff member, schedule ongoing events to review the materials as a staff, and incorporate LGBTQ educational material into the curricula of your students.
- Anticipate a transition period for those unaccustomed to the concept, but gently make everyone aware that while confusion is understandable, unfairness and harmful behavior is not. Enforce the safety-oriented policies you've helped put into place while repeatedly guiding the misinformed to a more inclusive mindset.

### **Work for comprehensive health education**

- A very difficult struggle that many LGBTQ students have to bear is the fact that health education in schools (an awkward subject for any student, regardless of identity or orientation) often is tailored to heterosexual people who identify as male or female. The fact that the information simply does not, in many cases, apply to LGBTQ students makes them feel 'other', and singles them out for unhelpful and harmful attention from their peers.
- A lack of education is the single most prominent reason LGBTQ students are targeted for harmful actions. Most students are not inherently malicious; fear of the unknown simply prompts them to target that which they do not understand. Therefore, comprehensive and sweeping education of the entire community regarding LGBTQ issues should provide the most safety for LGBTQ students in the quickest and most efficient fashion.
- In order to be a truly helpful and ultimately inclusive curriculum, an LGBTQ-friendly health education should include:
  - Comprehensive, accurate, scientific information about gender, physical anatomy, and orientation

- Age-appropriate information, depending on the audience the materials are intended for
  - Representation, in text and picture form, of the entire spectrum of healthy and happy families in today's world
  - Accurate and practical information about sexual health, and resources for assisting students in preventing STDs
  - A brief historical overview of the LGBTQ movement
  - Perspectives from underrepresented communities, including those from the LGBTQ movement.
- Note that many of these points are applicable to healthy, safe experiences for individuals who do not identify as LGBTQ as much as those who do—making an updated, more comprehensive health education a good goal for the improvement of the entire community.

### **Provide resources**

- If met with opposition and disapproval from the non-LGBTQ community, the best thing you can do is be non-confrontational. Provide resources detailing the history and statistics regarding the LGBTQ movement. If necessary, simply make the argument that you are prioritizing a community in which no-one is bullied and every student is safe. Few people can argue against that.
- The distribution of resources that educate about LGBTQ issues should be non-confrontational, positive, informative—and, if possible, endorsed, approved, or obtained from one of the nationwide LGBTQ advocacy groups.
- Resources may also include one-on-one counseling with a professional trained in LGBTQ advocacy, invitations to GSA or other LGBTQ events, or other.

## ***Will upping support of the LGBTQ student population have an adverse effect for others within the school?***

- Teaching tolerance will have a positive effect on everybody. By showing that it is not okay to target and abuse one group of people, the school will ameliorate the support and safety of the next minority group which might have been targeted.
- If any other, non-LGBTQ, students and staff within a school feel uncomfortable with treating LGBTQ community members according to their preferences (for example, adopting a person's potentially nontraditional personal pronouns), that is an issue to be handled by direct mentors on a case-by-case basis, as long as there is not discrimination, violence, or bigotry evidenced by the non-LGBTQ person. Confusion and quiet discomfort with a new norm affect non-LGBTQ members far less than physical and mental abuse affect the LGBTQ community. If there is any harmful action such as bullying or abuse, then that should be handled with the urgency required in all cases of school violence.
- Ultimately, supporting the LGBTQ portion of the student body will result in safer conditions for the entire population due to increased awareness of interpersonal boundaries and expectations for appropriate school behavior.

## ***Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs***

- These organizations are student-run, and members of the LGBTQ community as well as persons who identify otherwise are all welcome to join. They form a safe space in which questions can be asked, tough conversations can be had, and—crucially!—peoples of all orientations and identities can brainstorm ways to grow within their communities. Any disparities or issues seen between GSA members and the non-GSA portion of the school are discussed, and then awareness and action plans are spread throughout the rest of the community.
- Some of the actions of GSA clubs in the past have been LGBTQ workshops, Days of Silence for quiet protest and the raising of awareness, and attending community walks and events.

## ***Communication with Families about School Safety Issues***

- School safety neither begins nor ends at the boundaries of the school campus. Recent studies on student and parent perceptions of school safety revealed that parents tend to believe their children are far more safe than reality would indicate. This can lower the chances of students successfully approaching and confiding in their parents for help.
- When families of LGBTQ students are not supportive and empathetic to their child while their child navigates his choices regarding his identity, that child becomes high-risk for depression and self-harm. Families must be educated comprehensively—whether their child is LGBTQ or not—as to the effects of their actions, reactions, and inactions.

## ***The Purpose of a School (The Need for Change)***

- If the purpose of a school is to provide an effective education for their students AND provide basic security for each student, it would appear that the current status quo isn't doing either of these things. LGBTQ students are overwhelmingly treated as different, which opens the door for bullying, harassment, and abuse.
- Even when the students themselves are not targeted for violence (emotional, physical, or otherwise), the lack of support for their journeys leaves them more liable than their peers to depression and self-harm.
- When school health curricula do not include comprehensive information about the LGBTQ path, students who identify as such are made to feel less-than and other.
- Therefore, updating educational materials to include adequate representation, educating students and staff alike about the LGBTQ journey, and establishing support systems such as GSA clubs (and more) are vital for the LGBTQ student's education, safety, and livelihood.

## ***How should schools handle LGBTQ students and their usage of traditionally gendered activities and locations?***

- This is a charged subject, and one which, likely, your state's government has written about. Taking the time to check what the current laws are in your area is a good

first step. Then, ensuring that your school is in compliance with those laws—whether or not you believe they are fair—will help at least ensure that there is no confusion with how students should be behaving. Working towards more inclusive laws on a national and statewide basis is beyond the scope of this course, so making sure that your school is compliant and then prioritizing support of the students after that is currently the best course of action.

### ***What are some specific actions that teachers can take to ensure the safety of LGBTQ students?***

- Whether the administration of your specific school supports the LGBTQ community or not, there are definitely actions that individual teachers can take in order to establish themselves and their classrooms as resources to LGBTQ students in need.
  - Create colorful, happy ‘safe space’ signs and post them in your classroom and on your classroom door. These signs and stickers help notify students that you are available for discussion of issues relating to LGBTQ or anything else during the course of class or just in conversation. Having this outlet and solidarity can be the difference between a student who feels he has no recourse and a student who feels completely supported even during a difficult time.
  - Get an LGBTQ Ally or similar flag pin and wear it on your clothing for wordless affirmation that you can help struggling students.
  - Offer to start a GSA or other LGBTQ organization at your school. For any students or teachers who choose to attend meetings, it will be an outlet for frustration and a place of commonality from which you can brainstorm further actions to make your entire school a safe place for LGBTQ students. For any LGBTQ individuals or allies who do not feel comfortable attending such a meeting, it will still bolster their confidence that there are those at their school who care.
  - If you see homophobia, take instant action. Aim to be compassionate towards the instigator of any unhelpful or harmful action, but be very firm to ensure that everyone who witnesses the action knows that anti-LGBTQ sentiment or activities are not tolerable at your school.

- Try to integrate topics relating to LGBTQ history, issues, or fairness into your subject and everyday tutelage. For example, if you teach science, feel free to assign information about the contributions of Alan Turing, an LGBTQ computer science; if you teach about politics, discuss LGBTQ policies and the contributions of Harvey Milk. Even if you're not able to add concrete subjects to your curriculum regarding LGBTQ topics or people, incorporating the language into your everyday rhetoric will assist with helping your students have a more authentic view of the world in which they live.
- Lastly, if you're an LGBTQ ally, consider that just as much a part of your professional identity as your academic credentials! Pursue ongoing education regarding LGBTQ issues and mental health care as much as you can, informally or otherwise, so you're able to provide even stronger resources to those students at your school (LGBTQ or not) who are struggling and need expert advice.

### ***How can I prioritize a healthy relationship between myself and my students so that I can be there for them if they are struggling?***

- Research does show that if a student has mentors and supportive educators in their life, they will be much more likely to reach out if they are in a time of crisis. Fortunately, that means that one of the most impactful ways to improve the lives of LGBTQ students at your school is something you can do yourself: You can become an LGBTQ ally and live that in your daily life.
- However, supporting another human being goes far further than merely supporting the concept of their sexual identity, or even working to establish fairness and equality for the community to which they belong. Finding ways to build a healthy teacher-student relationship with every student should be a major goal that every teacher should work towards. In the case of struggling students, however, this relationship can be completely life-saving.
- There are three general ways to present yourself as a dependable mentor and resource for students in your classroom:



- Create a sense of trust. If you prioritize making sure that every student in your classroom—and, indeed, the whole school—feels seen and cared-for, they'll be much more likely to see you as someone worth trusting if they need serious help. You can do this by being curious about them and their lives, by paying attention to them, and showing appreciation. A small comment here or there, or even simply asking how things are going, will go a long way.
- Steep yourself in your student's context. Making sure you know as much as is possible about the background of your students—what they like to do, where they come from, what their needs are—will make you a more relatable mentor.
- Model healthy social dynamics. As their teacher, you're responsible for teaching them far more than just academics.
- One caveat must be mentioned: Every healthy student-teacher relationship has its boundaries. For the protection of the student as well as your own, take commonsense precautions. For example, being alone with one student in a secluded area is likely not a good idea; and if the student starts showing signs of over-dependence upon you or begins to share things that are inappropriate, work with the student's family as well as the administration and resources at your school to gently aid the student find professional help elsewhere.

### ***How can we protect LGBTQ students from abuse and predators over the Internet?***

- Unfortunately, this is a threat that is present for every student, not just minorities. Taking precautions to teach students about the internet while limiting their access and the access of others to their online personas will result in a safer browsing experience for all students.
- Adding modules to the students' education to help them learn safe practices on line, how to spot when people are not being their authentic selves, and lessons on the permanency and inherent danger of the Internet and social media would also be potentially life-saving inclusions for not only LGBTQ students but the entire student body.

- Lessons that help instill the fact that the Internet is forever would likely reduce the occurrences of cyber-bullying as well as other forms of online harassment and harmful behavior.

### ***Can incorporating widespread clarification and use of preferred personal pronouns contribute to the safety of LGBTQ students?***

- LGBTQ students may inherently feel a lack of control over their surroundings, their bodies, and much of what goes on in their lives. One thing they can hope to control is how they are perceived; and part of that perception carries through in the way people refer to them.
- A powerful way to show support, inclusion, and acceptance of the identity to which students identify is to encourage the use of preferred personal pronouns.
- Often, for LGBTQ youth, their chosen pronouns are such an emblematic part of who they identify as and who they wish to be that if their pronouns are rejected or belittled, they feel as if they are as well. Students who feel rejected are at risk for depression and other symptoms of negative mental behaviors.
- Asking students what their personal pronouns are, therefore, is a sign of deep consideration and respect. This need not be limited to students identifying as LGBTQ.

### ***Section Two Summary***

*“Schools often lead the way for the broader society in modeling inclusiveness and pluralism.”* -The American Federation of Teachers

LGBTQ students aren't safe at school. Changing that for their better health and growth will take both sweeping administrative reform and proactive initiative on the part of each individual staff member. However, by prioritizing education, fairness, and inclusivity within the school systems, more students will be safer—and your school will set a good example for other schools to become safer after you!

## ***Section Two Key Terms***

- **GLSEN:** The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educational Network is a national group that has many resources for helping schools and communities support their LGBTQ members.
- **GSA:** Gay Straight Alliance clubs are fantastic resources to create small safe spaces and resources for LGBTQ students within schools, as well as forge relationships between members of the community and allies to create inclusion and fairness for all within the school community.
- **Pronouns:** A person's personal pronouns refer to the set of relative articles by which they prefer to be addressed. Typical male pronouns are he, him, and his; typical female pronouns are she, her, and hers. Many individuals who identify as agender – as neither specifically male or female – choose to identify with either, both, the plural pronouns of they, them, and theirs—or any of a widely varying group of other personal pronouns.

## ***Section Two Personal Reflection Question***

Would you consider yourself an LGBTQ ally? If not, why? If so, are there ways you can help others become allies, or ways you can further your support of the LGBTQ youth at your school?

## **Section Three: Making School a Place Where Students can Be Themselves**

The end goal for any school should be to help usher into a world of possibility young individuals who feel comfortable in who they are and also feel equipped to continue growing—while being able to support themselves and make the world a better place.

As the only way that students can be productive members of society is if we first allow them to realize the unique way in which they can do so, schools need to be safe places in which students are allowed to express themselves. One difficulty arises when one considers that young students are inherently living and being in a state of metamorphosis. The pre-teen and teen years constitute a period of time during which self-realization is occurring; and that can be scary and confusing—even for those

whose gender identity and sexual orientation has been traditionally supported for centuries.

For both LGBTQ students and their peers, comprehensive support from their school and teachers will transform the way they're able to relate to themselves and each other. If LGBTQ students are supported, they will be able to grow where they're planted and bloom successfully. If those who don't identify as LGBTQ are taught compassion and empathy and supported in their own right, they'll be much less likely to lash out at the unfamiliar—creating a safer environment for all.

Ultimately, each school needs to work hard to create an atmosphere of trust in which each student can be themselves. In this final section, we'll discuss a few proactive ways teachers and administrations can work to make this happen.

### ***Are teachers able to go beyond teaching and help their students be fully themselves?***

Yes. Think back to your own formative school experiences. Was there ever a case where a teacher or support staff at your school helped ensure that you were able to grow? Conversely, did you ever feel like the administration looked away when you needed help most? See if you can brainstorm ways to ensure that no child under your care will experience a similar plight. It's impossible to be there at all times for all people, but with creativity and a little bit of effort, it's entirely possible to change lives for the better.

### **Teach Your Students the Art of Speaking (And Disagreeing) Well**

We teach our students the fundamentals of sentence structure and drill them in mental math. However, when it comes to putting together a logical argument, learning how to disagree with someone politely and productively, and having respect for each other through sticky situations—these are often skills which we assume (or hope) that our students will pick up by themselves. Instead of leaving this to chance, let's instill in our students a real-world skill which will ameliorate school violence now and set them up for a lifetime of success later!

**Why is it difficult for students to speak well? Why would they resort to other ways of working through confusion (such as bullying) instead?**

- In America, the #1 fear isn't death or falling from great heights; it's the fear of public speaking. Having to put your own thoughts on display and defend them in front of even one or two other people requires a vulnerability which makes most of us exceedingly uncomfortable. Because putting together a respectful response to an unknown scenario often requires a level of introspection requiring significant self-knowledge and, to be frank, not a little humility and effort, many students find it easier to speak with their fists (so to say) instead of their brains and hearts.
- Setting up a classroom (and school) environment in which opinions are celebrated and arguments are carried out well will allow students to find ways to express themselves peacefully, particularly if we help them walk through confusing and stressful circumstances to help them make it happen.

### **Teach Your Students to Respect Views Other than Their Own**

- When a child is very young, they tend to believe that the entire world is as it is viewed through their unique and very specific lens. This built-up world-view is extremely important for early development, as it allows the child to form the opinions which inform his personality, goals, habits, relationships, and other intrinsic facets of his life.
- However, when the child has grown to a more mature age, it's equally important that the child discovers their world-view isn't the only one, and that other, potentially very different, world-views not only exist but can be equally valid. The fact that not many people are able to understand this as adults (and act in a way commensurate with that belief) is the root cause of many problems. Ensuring that this understanding takes root during a child's more formative years can not only transform a school community, it can set up an entire generation for more positive action as adults.
- The best way you can help facilitate this awareness in your classroom is by giving your students the rhetorical toolkit they'll need—compassion, empathy, curiosity—and then exposing them to as many world-views which differ from their own as possible. This is a fundamental part of education.
- For a concrete approach to making this happen, consider equipping your students with thoughtful, respectful questions to use when confronted with a world-view they may disagree with. For example, they could say something like, "Can you

please explain why you believe/do/say that?” or “I respectfully disagree with what you just said, because [insert cogent argument here],” or simply “I think something different” instead of the much more forceful “You’re wrong.” It will certainly take time for students to achieve this level of mature discourse, but that’s what school is about: the journey and the training.

- Ultimately, it’s imperative to help students realize that a respectful disagreement is not a negative thing. It’s a positive thing—as long as it’s carried out with respect to all parties concerned.

### **Celebrate Mistakes Made in Your Classroom**

- As mentioned above, the act of sharing one’s beliefs before a classroom—or, even more pertinently, coming out to one’s community as a member of the LGBTQ movement—takes incredible amounts of bravery and vulnerability. Doing all you can to foster these two tendencies in your students will help ease the journey an LGBTQ student is going through. One concrete way you can foster bravery and vulnerability in your classroom environment is to celebrate mistakes made and lessons learned.
- Focusing on teaching students not only the right answers to questions but the development of a correct answer, the ability to justify their opinions and question others’ in respectful ways will take them further than memorizing mental math. Try to create a classroom atmosphere which positively supports each student’s growth—even when their trajectories take a dip (and perhaps especially then). This will foster an environment in which students feel safe to be themselves.

### ***Section Three Summary***

To make schools safe havens of growth for all students, teachers are called upon to go further than merely teaching their subject. Ensuring that every student has the creative space and trust necessary to be vulnerable and present their authentic selves in class without fear of being mocked or treated poorly will help them grow—and it may help them feel less likely to lash out when they encounter people who represent world-views different from their own.

Teachers should focus on celebrating students’ mistakes and growth and on teaching their students to disagree well. Respectful disagreement instead of incendiary,

instinctive disbelief and reaction has the capability to change the world—and certainly can change your students' lives for the better.

### ***Section Three Key Concept***

Respectful disagreement: The idea that two people with two differing world-views can in fact disagree without resorting to violence or unhelpful hatred.

### ***Section Three Personal Reflection Question***

Think about the last time you felt most like yourself. Who were you with? Where were you? What were you doing?

Do you remember the first time you felt that way? Was it a good or bad experience? Did anyone help you to discover that state? Consider the joy of helping someone else get to that place of self-knowledge as you prepare to make your classroom a more inclusive, fair, and helpful community.

## **Conclusion**

LGBTQ students comprise, according to some studies, roughly 8% of school-going children in the United States of America—which means that at least 1.5 million students in schools today face the challenges of navigating life with those who do not understand them. This would be difficult under the best of circumstances, but when those around them can be violent and vindictive, it's easy to understand why many LGBTQ students choose to just stay home.

It doesn't have to be that way. Those 1.5 million students—a number which is likely an understatement—can be supported and even cherished by their communities. Steps can be towards inclusion and fairness, steps which can simultaneously protect these at-risk youth from bullying, depression, discrimination, and other unhelpful and even harmful outcomes.

These steps towards safety need to be taken at the administrative, staff, and student level; but it starts with individual action. Begin to create an atmosphere of trust, an environment in which students believe they can share themselves with security and

even celebration, and students everywhere will be able to make the most of their education and become everything that they are meant to be.

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