University of Nebraska Lincoln EXTENSION
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HEF583
Participant's Manual

Bullying and Victimization: What Adults Can Do to Help

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Lesson Goals:

The goal of this program is to help people working with children and youth:

1. identify some of the most common forms of bullying and victimization, and
2. be able to effectively work with children and youth who are experiencing these kinds of conflicts and abuses.

Objectives:

1. Participants will be able to identify bullying and victimization and know some of the key differences in the types of bullying.
2. Participants will understand some of the processes that lead to bullying and victimization.
3. Participants will be able to identify some of the differences in bullying and victimization linked to gender and age.
4. Participants will be able to identify some common strategies and actions that might help reduce bullying and victimization (and some that are *not* effective).

Introduction:

What is bullying? Bullying and victimization are common experiences for children and adolescents. A majority of American students report having witnessed or participated in bullying by being a victim or a bully in their schools and peer groups. As we learn more about bullying and related problems, we have begun to recognize that there are important distinctions to make. We usually define bullying as a *repeated interaction* that is *meant to harm (physically or emotionally)* a victim where *the bully is more powerful*. In other words, unlike children simply fighting, bullying has three important components: 1) it is repeated; 2) it is meant to physically or emotionally harm another; and 3) the bully is physically, socially or psychologically more powerful than the victim.

Why do kids bully? This is a complex question. There are many reasons why some kids bully others. Some common reasons include:

1. they want to establish a social order and/or want dominance and power, or control over group membership (i.e. who is "in," who is "out.");
2. they want to control resources (play spaces or toys, social interactions, attention from others);
3. they want to keep others away if they are anxious or insecure about interacting.

Why are certain kids victimized? Victims are often seen as less socially or physically powerful, less

likely to defend themselves, and they may be seen as being different or showing unusual behavior. Boys who are seen as less masculine or girls who are seen as too masculine are often targets (peers tend to be less tolerant of boys in this regard). Kids who are different from the norm for any number of reasons are often targeted (e.g. ethnicity, religion, clothing, speech and behavior are commonly perceived differences that show up as reasons).

How do kids bully? First, it may help to discuss what is *not* bullying and to discuss some common misconceptions. The definition we gave earlier sets bullying apart from other kinds of aggression or fights that often occurs in kids' relationships. Children may get into occasional fights or conflicts with peers, but if they have relatively equal power we wouldn't consider it bullying. Sometimes rough-and-tumble play, common with boys, is a way of play-fighting or wrestling that boys' groups often use to establish power hierarchies — this is *usually* not considered bullying. However, it can be hard to identify this type of bullying if you are not familiar with the kids and their relationship history. It is also important that you recognize that rough-and-tumble play can evolve into bullying if more powerful kids persist at it.

Second, it is important to know that bullying does not always take the form of physical abuse such as hitting or kicking. *Taunting, teasing and threatening with the intent to harm can be bullying.* Bullying can also occur indirectly – spreading harmful rumors or gossip about someone behind their back can be bullying, as is consistently excluding someone from groups or social activities. This indirect type of bullying can be harder for adults to spot. Elementary-aged girls may use this form more often, and it tends to become more common as both boys and girls get older and physical bullying becomes less frequent. This does not mean that physical bullying does not occur in older age groups, but we tend to see younger kids using physical aggression more often. Some psychologists and educators believe that older children and adolescents begin to prefer more subtle verbal and social forms of bullying because they are more socially skilled and know that adults will punish physical aggression more harshly. All of these forms have the potential to cause the harmful effects with which we are concerned.

Finally, bullying now also happens through electronic forms — cyber-bullying. Tech-savy kids can harness the power of cell phones and the internet to insult or spread damaging information about victims.

Why is bullying an important problem? Many adults consider bullying so much a part of growing up that they view it as a healthy rite of passage for children and youth. While we know that not all bullying necessarily causes the victim serious harm, we know that kids who report frequent or regular bullying are much more likely to have very serious short- and long-term problems such as depression, anxiety, poor school performance, and are at greater risk for school dropout. Bullies are also more likely to have similar problems. Schools or organizations that tolerate bullying often lose the trust of the children or adolescents they serve and they often become less motivated to participate.

What can adults do? The most effective bullying prevention involves cooperation among teachers, schools, parents and communities. Prevention techniques tend to work best if there is a long-term commitment. See the resources at the end of this guide for some examples. Many states and communities now have laws against some types of bullying that are designed to protect victims. While contacting legal authorities may not be the first choice of intervention, it is important to know the legal responsibilities that your group or organization might have. However, there are still some simple things that adults (or peers) can do to help.

1. Know where to look for bullying. Kids are experts at bullying where adults have a hard time observing it. School hallways, lunchrooms and buses are some of the most common places. It helps to have adults closely monitor these settings. Sometimes, asking kids to draw a physical map of the school or other settings they frequent and identify the points where bullying occurs, can be helpful.

2. Set up a way for kids to confidentially report bullying and ensure that adults promptly respond. Some groups have used drop boxes where kids can leave a note reporting abuse. Others have used confidential surveys where

kids circle names of bullies and/or victims they know of from lists of peers' names. It is especially important to get an idea of how often a particular child is being bullied — as little as a few times a month can cause very serious problems. However it is done, kids should *know* that adults will respond *immediately*.

3. Set up clear expectations. Adults who consistently make sure kids know what bullying is *and* make it clear that it is not tolerated tend to have fewer problems. In one study, teachers who made this clear at the beginning of the school year had less bullying in their classrooms. Make sure that kids know adults' responses are timely and consistent.

4. Know that intervening helps. Many adults and kids hesitate to intervene because they think bullying is accepted by others or that their actions won't matter. Most of the time when an adult or child intervenes, the bullying ends quickly. Let adults and kids know that if they make comments such as "Stop that" or "We don't do that," the bully usually stops (physical intervention is usually not recommended).

5. Recruiting peer volunteers to support the victim and help look out for them can be successful. (The "volunteer" part is critical — don't force kids into it.) This can mean being there to talk to victims so that they feel they have support, or simply telling bullies to stop when they see bullying happen. It may also be more elaborate and use structured, positive social activities with peers.

6. It does *not* usually help to use peer intervention such as having youth directly talk to bullies about their issues (although this may help for other peer conflicts), nor does it help to put either bullies or victims together in groups (i.e. support groups) to work on the problem. In a number of cases this response has increased problems associated with bullying.

7. Divide kids into small groups and ask them to imagine a bully and a victim interacting. They can use real bullying incidents they have seen. They should generate different peer responses. Have them explain to the whole group why their scenarios might/might not work in real situations. Get peer reactions on the best/less effective solutions.

8. Keep records and discuss problems with colleagues. In addition to helping to track how often the problem happens, this helps identify consistent bullies or victims. Often different adults may not know that they are seeing problems with the same kids in different settings.

9. Know what the policies are. Before you even hear of bullying incidences, educate yourself about the policies currently in place for your state, school, program, or other settings in which you are working. Learning about these ahead of time will help you deal with bullying incidences as soon as they occur, rather than having to learn them when you are faced with the problem. For instance, parents might ask about school policies and who their children can go to should they be a victim of, or a witness to bullying. Find out what the rules are about reporting and anonymity. Make sure that your child knows who to go to and what these policies are.

10. For parents and concerned adults, if a child is a victim of bullying, take his reports seriously and do not attribute issues to normal childhood experience. Talk to the child and discuss his or her feelings, attitudes, and concerns. Develop safety strategies such as how to avoid situations or walk away from the dangerous context. Talk to the child about reporting to authorities such as school personnel, but make sure that the child is comfortable with this step. But first, find out what the school policies are (for example, confidentiality). Do not force the child to confront the bully or report the incident if he or she is not yet comfortable with it. Finally, try to empower the child by finding ways to change the situation — not just for that one child but also for others. For instance, brainstorm with the child on how together, you might bring the issue to the fore in their school. Talk about how you might try to help the school, club or other context develop some steps to alleviate the problem.

Recommended Resources:

Websites and multimedia

Stop Bullying Now, *www.StopBullyingNow.hrsa.gov*
This U.S. government Web site provides several resources and suggested programming.

Committee for Children, *www.cfchildren.org/*
This site provides an extensive set of programs designed to reduce peer conflict and bullying.

Bullfrog Films, *www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/bully.html*
This commercial site sells an excellent film to use with elementary-age children that shows scenarios and different types of bullying that will hep start discussions and brainstorming about what to do in various bullying situations.

UNL College of Education and Human Sciences, http://cehs19.unl.edu/wpmu/brnet
This site, run by CEHS Associate Professor Sue Swearer, offers several options and discussion points about bullying.

Books

Randazzo, M., S. R. Jimerson and M. J. Furlong, editors, *Handbook of School Violence and School Safety*, Routledge, U.K., 2006. *www.routledge.com*

Smith, S. and P. Smith, *Tackling Bullying at Your School: A Practical Handbook for Teachers*. Routledge, U.K., publisher, 2004. *www.routledge.com*

Espelage, D. and S. Swearer, *Bullying in American Schools: A Social-Ecological Perspective on Prevention and Intervention*, Psychology Press, *2003. www.routledge.com*

Community Lesson
EVALUATION

Form for Members/Participants

1. **I am:**

   ☐ Under 29 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 60-69
   ☐ 30-39 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 70 or older

2. **Are you attending this program as a part of a club/group/etc.?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If so, please specify what club, group, organization / agency or other:

   _____

   _____

3. **Please indicate which lesson you completed:** (check one)

   ☐ Bullying
   ☐ Fitting in the Fiber
   ☐ Housing Options for Today and Tomorrow
   ☐ Make Sure It's Done the Way You Want: Advance Directives

4. **How much of the lesson did you complete?** (check one)

   ☐ All
   ☐ About half
   ☐ About one-quarter

5. **Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.** Circle a number for each.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This topic is important to me and addresses issues that I need to know more about.	1	2	3	4
I am more knowledgeable about the topic covered.	1	2	3	4
I will use this information to make informed decisions in the future.	1	2	3	4
The information covered in this lesson will impact my life in a positive way.	1	2	3	4
One way is (please list): _____				
_____				
I will share this information with others who could use this information.	1	2	3	4
Because of this lesson, I will make a change in what I do related to this topic.	1	2	3	4
Changes I plan to make include (please list): _____				
_____				

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I now know the difference between bullying and other types of aggression.	1	2	3	4
I understand some of the processes that lead to bullying and victimization.	1	2	3	4
I now see that there are various ways by which I can help youth deal with bullying.	1	2	3	4
I would like to see more information and programs about bullying.	1	2	3	4
I am more aware of the various issues surrounding bullying.	1	2	3	4
I will share this information with others who could use this information .	1	2	3	4
Please share some suggestions you might have to improve this program. (open ended)				

Other comments. (open ended)

Comments:

Thank you for completing this form and returning it to your extension office or to

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