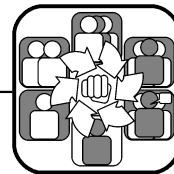


# Defining Bullying



## Why define it?

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

## What is bullying?

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

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

### **Bullying is a pattern of behaviour.**

Bullying is a behaviour, not a specific action. If one student punches another student is this bullying? It may not be right and it may not be an appropriate behaviour, but it is not necessarily bullying. This also does not mean that the action of punching can not be used to bully another student. What one must look at is the pattern of behaviour. What kind of pattern?

### **The behaviour is repeated and persistent.**

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

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

Bullying is not about actions between equals. The bully does not choose just anyone to bully. The bully chooses targets that show a weakness or are vulnerable. Or, they may target an individual who they see as a threat or someone they envy for one reason or another. Regardless, the bully emphasizes and takes advantages of differences. The bully may choose someone who looks different, behaves differently, or who may be unable to respond effectively. For example, the bully may choose an individual that is physically smaller or weaker to physically dominate. However, they may also choose someone who is physically bigger and stronger, but who has weaker verbal or social skills – the bully may use their stronger language or social skills to manipulate, dominate, or tease their target in public. The target may be unable to effectively respond in a public way or they may respond inappropriately, in a way that the bully can further focus upon. The bully capitalizes on differences in power to dominate, control or harm their target.

Some individuals may have legitimate power to dominate or exert control over others as a group leader, team captain, teacher, or parent. They may use their power differences for legitimate purpose, such as to keep individuals safe, to facilitate and promote learning or to maintain a positive learning environment. However, this power may also be used illegitimately to unfairly dominate or control. Students may be challenged to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of power. A bully may also try to legitimize their behaviour through rationalization such as the person “deserves it” or “they ask for it because...”, even though their response may be inappropriate.

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

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

**The abusive actions may target the victim directly or indirectly.**

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

## **The Challenge: “What is Bullying?” activity**

Can your students identify the characteristics of bullying? Ask the question “What is bullying?” Use this handout as your personal discussion guide, but challenge students to create their own definition. Use the **What is Bullying?** student worksheet to help students develop their ideas individually and in groups. Have groups present, record, share, and compare their definitions (use a chalk/white board, smart board, wiki or chart paper). Have each group find similarities and differences among the group definitions. Write a class definition of bullying and post it in the class.

From the **What is Bullying?** student worksheet:

### **Individual**

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

### **Group**

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

### **Share and Compare**

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

Follow-up and extension:

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

## **The Test: “Bullying: Case Studies” activity**

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

## Case: Bill and Joel

Bill and Joel are caught fighting on the school grounds during a “friendly” intramural soccer game.

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

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

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

## Case: Bill and Joel (continued)

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

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

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

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

## Case: Bill and Joel (continued)

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

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

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

- a) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying.
- b) Explain what you could do if you observe d this situation.
- c) Describe what you would do in this situation if you you were either Bill or Joel.

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

### **Case: Ashley, Jessica, Sarah and Samantha**

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

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

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

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

### **Case: Elizabeth's Dilemma**

Hi. I am Elizabeth. I am in the office again. This time for fighting. It all began a few years ago when I moved to this school for a fresh start. At first everything was OK. My marks were average and I wasn't having any problems. Then one day another girl said something about me in the gym changing room. Everyone looked and I was so embarrassed. I thought that was the end of it, but it wasn't. They began to whisper to each other in the hallway and snicker when I walked past at lunch. The next time, I asked them what their problem was and they just laughed out loud so I told them to shut up. Then there was writing on my locker and notes stuffed between the cracks. Other kids would stare and make faces at me in the hallways. The group of girls from the changing room would visit me at my locker in between classes and tease me with rude stories, knock my books onto the floor or slide my lock down the hallway. When I pushed one of the girls out of the way so that I could close my locker door, I got in trouble because a teacher saw me push her. They called my parents and they

got mad at me too. They are always yelling at me. Then someone started to send me rude emails and I got a lot of junk mail from some disgusting websites. The notes continued, I would get pushed in the halls by kids I hardly knew, and people would spill their drinks or leave gum on my assigned seat in class. The girls kept telling rude stories in the halls just close enough so that I could hear them. I was all lies about me, and my family and other disgusting stuff. I tried to ignore them. But they went too far. One day had enough and chased after the main girl, swearing and yelling. I grabbed her by the hair and pulled her to the ground. I started to punch her. She just laughed and her friends cheered her on until a teacher came and broke it up. I kept screaming at her as the teacher pulled me into the office. Now I am going to get kicked out of school for week. It is all my fault.

[This is clearly a case of bullying. The specific details of why Elizabeth is being bullied has been purposefully excluded from this scenario to emphasize the actions that affect her and to prevent students from saying it is her fault because she is overweight, or too skinny, or looks different or what she wears or whatever the bullies are focusing on. The bully will look for a soft spot that will get their target to react. In this case the bullies use this reaction as an excuse to continue their bullying – they may even use the reaction to continue their behaviour by saying/thinking “It is OK to pick on her because she is a freak and look what she does, she deserves it, she is asking for it”. Elizabeth is facing a combination of direct and indirect bullying that is physical, verbal and social. In this case the bullies seem to be disbursed, but a few key individuals are involved in perpetuating the bullying. It also appears that Elizabeth may not seek help from teachers because she is getting in trouble trying to deal with the problem on her own. Is she going to tell the teachers if she is already in trouble from them? The other girls are also continuing to bully without their role in the situation being addressed.]

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

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

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## External Resources

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

Bully Free Alberta

<http://www.bullyfreealberta.ca/>

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

B-Free

[b-free.ca](http://b-free.ca)

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

S-Team Heroes

<http://www.teamheroes.ca/>

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

# What is Bullying?

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## Individual

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

## Group

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

## Share and Compare

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

# Bullying in Books

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

a) Character's Name:

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

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

a) General description of the bullying:

b) Specific Example #1:

c) Specific Example #2:

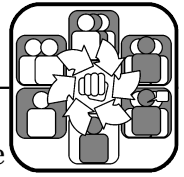
3) Refer to your bullying definition and explain how these are examples of bullying.

4) Briefly describe how you could help the bully in this situation in order to stop the bullying?

5) Briefly describe how you could help the person being bullied this situation in order to stop the bullying?

6) On a separate paper or in your notebook, rewrite a section of the story to show how you or another character becomes involved to stop the bullying in an appropriate and constructive manner. (Your teacher may also ask you to respond in another format)

# Bullying: Case Studies



Use your bullying definition to explain what is happening in each of these cases and describe what you can do.

## Case: Bill and Joel

Bill and Joel are caught fighting on the school grounds during a “friendly” intramural soccer game.

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

## Case: Bill and Joel (continued)

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

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

## Case: Bill and Joel (continued)

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

- a) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) Explain what you could do if you observe d this situation.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) Describe what you would do in this situation if you you were either Bill or Joel.

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

- a) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) Explain what you would do in this situation if you were Hannah or Emily?

c) Explain what you would do in this situation if you were Christopher or Joshua?

d) Describe what you would do in this situation if you were Ashley?

### Case: Elizabeth's Dilemma

Hi. I am Elizabeth. I am in the office again. This time for fighting. It all began a few years ago when I moved to this school for a fresh start. At first everything was OK. My marks were average and I wasn't having any problems. Then one day another girl said something about me in the gym changing room. Everyone looked and I was so embarrassed. I thought that was the end of it, but it wasn't. They began to whisper to each other in the hallway and snicker when I walked past at lunch. The next time, I asked them what their problem was and they just laughed out loud so I told them to shut up. Then there was writing on my locker and notes stuffed between the cracks. Other kids would stare and make faces at me in the hallways. The group of girls from the changing room would visit me at my locker in between classes and tease me with rude stories, knock my books onto the floor or slide my lock down the hallway. When I pushed one of the girls out of the way so that I could close my locker door, I got in trouble because a teacher saw me push her. They called my parents and they got mad at me too. They are always yelling at me. Then someone started to send me rude emails and I got a lot of junk mail from some disgusting websites. The notes continued, I would get pushed in the halls by kids I hardly knew, and people would spill their drinks or leave gum on my assigned seat in class. The girls kept telling rude stories in the halls just close enough so that I could hear them. I was all lies about me, and my family and other disgusting stuff. I tried to ignore them. But they went too far. One day had enough and chased after the main girl, swearing and yelling. I grabbed her by the hair and pulled her to the ground. I started to punch her. She just laughed and her friends cheered her on until a teacher came and broke it up. I kept screaming at her as the teacher pulled me into the office. Now I am going to get kicked out of school for week. It is all my fault.

a) Explain why this is or isn't a case of bullying

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

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

# Defining Bullying



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

# Stopping Bullying

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## For Students:

### Agree to tell...

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

### Agree to say stop...

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

### Agree to say no...

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

## For Teachers:

### Agree to intervene...

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

### Agree to respond to help change the behaviour...

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