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1. UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

What Is Bullying?

Bullying is not a new problem. Parents, schools, and governments have long wrestled with how to deal with the issue. In our society, where emerging technologies unite us in new ways, bullying is being recognized as an epidemic. Most students can identify and describe bullying behavior, but it is important to move beyond the basics and provide a safe forum in our classrooms to explore the complexity of the bullying web. Activating prior knowledge and prior experience is a place to start; sharing expert opinions, research, and statistics can help us explore our own stories and feelings.

ACTIVITY: CONSIDERING EXPERT VOICES

As you read the words from expert psychologists in the box to the right, what stories are you reminded of from your own life? From the lives of others? Respond in writing or work in small groups to share thoughts on one or all three quotes.

Expert Voices

- Bullying is a relationship problem in which power and aggression are used to cause distress to a vulnerable person.—*Wendie M. Craig and Debra J. Pepler, Professors of Psychology*
- Bullying is when someone does or says something to hurt someone else. It is always on purpose. ... Bullying is about making someone feel small and powerless.—*Kids Help Phone*
- Being bullied is...a public health problem. ... People who were bullied as children are more likely to suffer depression and low self-esteem well into adulthood, and the bullies themselves are more likely to engage in criminal behavior in later life.—*Duane Alexander, Director for the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*

Defining the Bully

It is important to consider how bullying is different from other areas of conflict. In defining the concept of *bully*, choose vocabulary you think is relevant and try to articulate the behaviors inherent in bullying situations.

ACTIVITY: BULLY IN THE DICTIONARY

1. You have been assigned the job of defining the word “bully” for a dictionary. Consider the characteristics, behaviors, and intentions of someone who is a bully. Write a definition of 25 words or less.
2. In pairs, combine your definitions. Negotiate ideas and devise a new definition of the word.
3. In groups of four, share definitions to compare similarities and differences. Collaborate to write a definition that is exactly 25 words in length.
4. As a class, collaborate to create a class definition of the word “bully” of 50 words or less.

Extensions

- Investigate definitions of bullying in a dictionary, on the Internet, or in other resources.
- Consider this definition of bullying by Barbara Coloroso:

Bullying is a conscious, wilful, and deliberate hostile activity intended to harm, induce fear through the threat of further aggression and create terror. (2002: 13)

What words from your definition are similar to Coloroso’s? How might you alter her definition?

Let’s Talk About...the Media

- What movies or TV shows have you seen about the bullying issue?
- What stories have you read in newspapers or magazines about bullying incidents?
- What novels or picture books have you read about bullies and their victims?

Key Issues

ACTIVITY: ON THE LINE

As a class, form a line for each of these statements. If you strongly agree, move to the left of the line; strongly disagree, to the right. If you mildly agree, stand centre left; mildly disagree, centre right. Give reasons for your choice.

Statement #1: The best way to stop bullying is to stand up to the bully.

Statement #2: Cyberbullying is not a school problem.

Statement #3: All bullying incidents must be reported to an adult.

Statement #4: Not responding to a mean message on Twitter is the best way to deal with it.

Extensions

- It is important to hear everyone's opinions. Have a discussion with others who have different opinions about the issue.
- Repeat the activity with the option of changing positions on the continuum after listening to the arguments of others.

Let's Talk About... Key Issues

- What do you think are the three top reasons why people bully?
- What advice would you give someone with bullying behaviors?
- How can these behaviors be changed?

ACTIVITY: THE BULLY, THE BULLIED, THE BYSTANDER

1. Record your answers to these five prompts on a file card:

- One word to describe a bully is...
- One word to describe a target is...
- An animal I think a bully can be compared to is... Explain your choice.
- An animal I think a target can be compared to is... Explain your choice.
- If I saw someone being bullied I would...

2. Work in groups of five or six to share your responses to the prompts. Work as a class to share answers.

Just the Facts

Statistics about bullying are often made available through surveys. The numbers are powerful, and often shocking, indicators of the prevalence of bullying among young people.

ACTIVITY: CONSIDERING STATISTICS

Discuss with a partner which of these statements surprises you most.

- 71% of teachers say they intervene in bullying episodes; 25% of students say teachers intervene. (Pepler & Craig, 2000)
- Each day, more than 160,000 North American students miss school for fear of being bullied. (National Education Association)
- One out of every four kids is abused by another youth. (American Justice Department)
- Even though bystanders don't like to watch bullying, less than 20% try to stop it. (Family Resources Facilitation Program)
- 58% of kids admit someone has said or done something mean to them online; about 50% claim it has happened more than once. (i-Safe America)

ACTIVITY: IS THAT TRUE?

One of these statements is false. Work with a partner and share your reactions to each of these facts.

- 90% of all cyberbullying incidents go unreported to adults.
- Bullying occurs once every 7 minutes on the playground and once every 25 minutes in the classroom.
- Most bullying incidents happen in secondary school.

ACTIVITY: GATHERING FACTS

On the Internet find 5 to 10 recent statistics about bullying and cyberbullying. Prepare a True/False quiz to share with others.

Example: When a friend steps in, bullying stops half of the time in ten seconds. T F

Answers

Is That True? C is false. Some of the top years of bullying happen before high school: 90% of 4th- through 8th-graders have been reported as victims of some kind of bullying.

Gathering Facts True