

BULLYING: WHAT'S MY ROLE?

A session for youth

Leader's Guide

Session length: 30-60 min. – or more!

Important Notes to Teachers & Leaders:

1 - Please consider any information you already have, especially if a parent is known to have abusive behaviors being discussed. Sadly, a parent is sometimes the bully, and may not want his/her child participating in this kind of conversation, so use discretion.

2 – Remember that if you are leading this conversation or activity, you may be a Required Reporter. Know your county and state laws about reporting, and be prepared to discuss issues that arise, in confidentiality, with the Pastor or SPR Chair, if you feel reporting is necessary. Remind the youth that if they want to tell you (and/or the group) about being abused, that you are prepared to take additional steps to get help, if needed. If you have any reason to even suspect a child is being abused, you must report your concerns to the proper agency (& notify your Pastor).

This is a huge topic – It may be helpful to begin the discussion in Sunday School, and continue it the same day in youth group. Or, break it into 2 or 3 parts if needed.

Supplies needed:

A copy of the Understanding Terms list for each person in the class/group

Paper and pen for each person

Flipchart or large piece of paper to record answers (for Prevention section)

Markers

Preparation:

Notify parents of this topic of study, in advance. (See sample notice at the end of this session.) Be sure multiple adults are present and prepared to assist. If there are youth, or even adults, present who have been victims of abuse, this may be a very difficult topic to discuss. It may bring up memories or issues that are painful and follow-through conversations or even professional counseling may need to be advised.

THE PLAN

INTRODUCTION:

Bullying among youth is a very serious problem that leads to physical and emotional injuries, and all too often even causes despair and suicide.

Victims are of all ages, and bullies are children, youth and adults.

Everyone plays a role, if not multiple roles, when it comes to abusive behaviors. Some are abusers, some are victims, some are passive bystanders, some are reinforcers or encouragers.

Some, who are not in the midst of abusive behaviors, may hear about incidents and situations, and do nothing to learn more or respond.

Yet others may be advocates for change and are willing to take a stand or action against such abuse.

Bullying tends to be a repetitive behavior, so the pattern should be addressed as well as any specific incident.

Written by Marcey Balcomb,
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author, trainer & consultant in youth ministry.

ACTIVITY:

Understanding Terms and Roles:

Hand out a copy of this list for each person in the class/group. (see page 6 for version to copy)
Invite each person to take a turn reading one of these definitions, continuing through the group until they have all been read.

Bullying:

Aggressive behavior where the bully has power over the victim, and the bully intends to harm or upset the victim. The behavior occurs repeatedly.

Bully/Victims:

People who are both bullies and victims. Bullying, just like other behaviors, can be a learned behavior. Some people tend to treat others the same way they have been treated.

Bystanders:

- **Passive:** One who stands by and observes the bullying, but does not respond in word or action.
- **Reinforcer:** One who observes what's happening and encourages the behavior of the bully. They might even admire the bullying behavior and resulting hurt.

Emotional Bullying:

Where youth participate in teasing, gossip, calling hurtful names, intentionally demeaning others, rejecting, defaming, humiliating, isolating, and manipulating friendships. Sometimes relationships are used as a means to harm the victim, e.g. spreading mean rumors, excluding them from social events or groups, speaking ill of others, and ignoring others.

Physical Bullying:

Includes poking, hair-pulling, kicking, punching or excessive tickling.

Sexual Bullying:

Includes acts such as sexual harassment, propositioning, exhibitionism, and abuse which involves actual physical contact or sexual assault. May also include "sexting", where youth take photos of themselves or others and send them out by phone or similar device.

CONVERSATION - *It's a Fine Line:*

READ:

Awareness -

We have all experienced at least mild teasing, poking, tickling, etc. where it is, seemingly, being done in fun or where someone is trying to express affection (however awkwardly).

The difficulty is in knowing where that fine line is between having fun, or hurting someone's feelings.

One youth might be flattered at the attention. Another youth might be offended or hurt by the same kind of attention.

We CANNOT know, for sure, when the receiver of attention actually becomes the victim of attention.

And sometimes a bantering conversation or physical tussle that begins in fun, ends up being abusive.

Being aware of this can help us each make better decisions about our own behavior, and can also help us be more clear with others about where WE draw the line, where our comfort level is, and what we find acceptable and not acceptable.

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DISCUSS:

1 - Can you think of a specific time when you were teasing, poking, or tickling someone, thinking it was fun, but the other person ended up being upset about it?

2 – How did YOU feel about what happened? Were you surprised? Confused? Mad that they got upset?

3 – Can you think of a specific time when you were the recipient of this kind of interaction, and you ended up being upset or hurt by it? And, how did that feel?

4 – What did either of these experiences do to your relationship with that person? Was it a temporary issue? Or did it cause longer term discomfort or dislike?

READ:

It is the responsibility of each of us to be aware of how our actions are received and perceived, and to recognize when we have bumped up against that “fine line”, or even crossed it. And it is our responsibility to resolve the situation with an apology or promise to do better in the future.

Understanding Bullying:

Bullying is an intentional act done to hurt someone physically or emotionally. The bully finds some kind of sick enjoyment out of causing someone else to squirm, or cry, or run away, or make other attempts to protect themselves.

Bullies have a complicated emotional profile, but basically they want to be the controller, the king of the hill, the tough guy/girl, often pretending that nothing can hurt them, no one can beat them, and expressing that they don't care about the victim or their hurt.

Bullies like to be admired for their meanness and toughness. They sometimes try to get other youth to join them in picking on someone.

We can't know what causes them to want to do these things.

Maybe they are being abused, and they are taking it out on someone else.

Maybe they are retaliating for some small incident that offended them (even if the incident was unremarkable – i.e. someone didn't hold the door open for them, or someone didn't rise to the bait when they tried to taunt them, etc.)

Maybe they are unhappy, or even miserable, or depressed.

Maybe they are lonely and want attention, even if that attention is negative.

DISCUSS:

Ask for responses and thoughts about Understanding Bullying.

SILENT TIME: WHAT'S MY ROLE?

Invite everyone to silently think about the following four questions (& give them a specific amount of time – up to 5 minutes if you have the time.)

1 – Do you know someone who is a bully?

2 – Have you ever observed them picking on someone?

3 – Have you ever been the victim of a bully?

4 – Have you even been a bully yourself?

OR.....

Invite them to write their responses and thoughts (pass out a piece of paper & pen to each person – or have them write in a journal if they have them)

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PREVENTION:

(Have flipchart or large piece of paper & markers ready for writing answers.)

READ:

If we can think ahead of time about what we would do in a bullying situation, we will be better prepared to take steps if it happens to us, or to someone in our presence.

Let's brainstorm ideas about how to avoid being a victim of bullying, and what to do if someone is picking on you. (Remember that when brainstorming, we do not make comments on each answer or evaluate whether or not they are good answers – all ideas are welcome, as long as they are on task to what we're doing.)

(Write answers on large paper so it can be saved.)

Next: Brainstorm ideas about where to get help if you need it, or if you need to stop someone else from further abuse.

- If abuse is happening at school – who do you turn to for help?
- If abuse is happening at home – who do you go to for help?
- If abuse is happening out in public – who do you go to for help?
- If abuse is happening in church or youth group – who do you go to for help?

READ:

It is the responsibility of EVERY ONE OF US to help prevent both ourselves and others from getting hurt by abuse, if at all possible. If we allow abuse to continue, we become part of the problem, or we remain a victim. If we refuse to be part of it, hopefully we can get away from the situations and stop it from happening again.

SCRIPTURE Discussion:

Matthew 7:12 (RSV) So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the Law and the prophets.

Luke 6:31 (NIV) Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. (Also known as the Golden Rule.)

These two scriptures have the same message. As Christians, we are to follow these scriptures when we make choices about our behavior.

- *Can you think of a time when you chose NOT to do follow them, even though you knew it wasn't right?*
- *Were you or someone else hurt by this decision/action?*
- *How did you 'feel' about it afterwards?*

Wrap-Up:

The only actions we can truly choose, or change, are our OWN. We must be the ones to set the example for others so that they see the good (God) in us. We do this without even intending to, or thinking about it, most of the time. So, will our friends see GOOD in us? It takes intention and practice.

Prayer:

God of all good things, we ask for your guidance, your nudges, and reminders that our actions affect others around us. Help us to make good choices. Open our eyes to the ways we can help those in need of protection or intervention. Give us wisdom to avoid being victims of bullies. Thank you for our wisdom and our safety. Amen.

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Sample Notice to Parents:

The youth (Sunday School class) or (Youth Group) in our church will be studying the topic of Bullying on _____(date & time).

Bullying among youth is a very serious problem that leads to physical and emotional injuries, and all too often even causes despair and suicide. Victims are often other youth, but can be of all ages, and bullies are children, youth and adults.

Everyone plays a role, if not multiple roles, when it comes to abusive behaviors. Some are abusers, some are victims, some are passive bystanders, some are reinforcers or encouragers. Some, who are not in the midst of abusive behaviors, may hear about incidences and situations, and do nothing to learn more or respond. Yet others may be advocates for change and are willing to take a stand or action against such abuse.

Bullying tends to be a repetitive behavior, so the pattern should be addressed as well as any specific incident.

We encourage you to be prepared to ask your child about the discussion on bullying. After hearing their general response, here are a few questions you may wish to ask to initiate a conversation on the topic.

- Do you know who the bullies are at your school (or other settings)?
- Do you get picked on by others?
- Is there a way I can help you deal with the situation and help prevent it from continuing?

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