**Topic:** Peers as Allies

**Black text:** script

**Purple text:** lesson planning

* 1. In Canada, at least 1 in 3 teens report being **bullied**. When we say bullying, we are talking about a destructive relationship where one person or a group of people holds power over another, and intentionally acts aggressively to harm them. This is often done repeatedly. Bullying can happen in person or online.
  2. **Identity-based bullying** targets people based on their identities. People’s identities include many things, such as body size, race, ethnicity, citizenship status, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability, among others. Identity-based bullying means repeatedly targeting someone because of these identities, for example by calling someone hurtful names because they are gay, excluding someone because they are of a different race, catcalling someone because they’re a girl, making a hurtful social media post about someone based on their physical appearance, or making fun of someone because they are in a wheelchair.
  3. Bullying happens when there is a difference in power between people. Someone has **power** when they have the ability to act in ways that can impact the lives of others.
  4. The differences in power that are at the root of identity-based bullying have been created by society, by oppressing some groups and privileging others over time. Because of this, some groups in society continue to have more power as compared to others (for example, heterosexual youth hold more social power than queer youth).
  5. Youth who are bullied are more likely to experience mental, physical, academic, and social challenges. They are also more likely to experience other types of harm later in life, like **dating violence** or **sexual harassment**, compared to people who are not bullied.
     1. **Facilitation guidance**: The content from the beginning of the video until now has already been covered in videos 1 – 3. If you feel you and your students are familiar with this information, you do not need to repeat it all. However, if you feel your students need a refresher, you can remind them of this information. Alternatively, you can present the information in a more engaging way, by asking students to define the terms. For example, “Previously we talked about identity-based bullying. Does anyone remember what that term refers to?”
  6. This video focuses on identity-based bullying, specifically. Although many youth in Canada experience identity-based bullying, most youth say it is not right and identify it as morally wrong. What’s more, most youth say they are willing to intervene in some way to stop bullying. Youth are more likely to intervene if they have a relationship with the person being bullied, if they want to help, if they want to make a difference, and if they feel that stopping bullying is everyone’s responsibility.
  7. However, even though many youth are willing, youth still do not intervene very often. Why is that?
     1. **Facilitation guidance**: At this point, you may want to stop and ask your students about barriers to intervening might exist in your school. For example, fear of retaliation, feeling it was not their business, not wanting to get into trouble, feeling no one would do anything if they reported it, feeling as if it would not make a difference, and not wanting to get involved.
  8. Well, there are are certain things that make it difficult for youth to speak up and stop bullying. Today we’re going to talk about what makes it hard for many youth to take a stand against bullying, and what we as educators can do about it.
  9. There are 5 steps youth can take to intervene in identity-based bullying.
  10. First, youth need to notice the event. That means they have to be able to identify identity-based bullying. Second, they have to interpret it as an event where someone needs help from others. After that, they need to feel responsible to help. Fourth, they need to know what to actually do to intervene. And then finally, they need to take action.
  11. So first, how do we make sure youth can identify identity-based bullying? If they can’t notice the bullying, they can’t take any action to prevent it!
  12. Many people (youth and educators alike) struggle to know the difference between playful teasing that happens between friends and identity-based bullying.
  13. First, we must consider the content of what is being said. Even if something is said in a playful way, if the content itself is harmful to the recipient, then it’s not teasing.
      1. If someone *from a dominant group* is making fun of someone *from a marginalized group* because of their identity *with the intent to hurt them,* it is always harmful.
  14. Second, think about whether a power differential exists. Playful teasing occurs between two friends who are equals, and it demonstrates closeness and affection between friends. On the other hand, identity-based bullying is not reciprocated.
      1. If you see students from a group that holds less power being made fun of by students from a group that holds more power, for example because of their gender, race, ethnicity or ability, it inherently involves a power imbalance, and therefore always causes harm.
  15. In addition, it’s important to understand that identity-based bullying can take any form. It could take the form of physical, verbal, social, and/or cyber bullying. Regardless of the form, it always involves someone from a dominant group making fun of someone from a marginalized group because of their identity with the intent to hurt them. As a few examples, it could look like:
      + 1. Hitting someone because they are from a marginalized ethnic background (physical)
        2. Calling someone names because of their body size (verbal)
        3. Excluding someone from a group because they have a disability (social), or
        4. Making mean posts on social media about someone because they are bisexual (cyber)

1. Second, youth must interpret the event as an emergency. When we say an emergency, we mean an event where someone needs help from others.
2. All events of identity-based bullying should be considered an emergency. This is because identity-based bullying targets a core aspect of who someone is, making it always harmful. However, there are certain times when youth will not interpret identity-based bullying as an emergency. We need to understand why this might be, so we can help youth correct their thinking and interpret all events of identity-based bullying as emergencies
   * 1. For example, youth are more likely to intervene when they see physical bullying as compared to other types like verbal or social bullying.
        1. This might be because youth tend to think physical bullying is more serious as compared to verbal or social bullying.
        2. However, all types of identity-based bullying are serious and harmful. For example, think of the tragic case of Ottawa youth Jamie Hubley.
           1. Jamie was a 15-year old gay boy, who was relentlessly bullied about figure skating and being gay. He was constantly verbally assaulted, and he felt very alone about being the only “out” gay student in his high school and feeling that no one accepted him. This led to an intense depression, and Hubley ultimately ended up taking his life.
           2. This is one example of an extreme case that ended in suicide. Even though suicide is a rare outcome, this example demonstrates that all forms of identity-based bullying can be harmful.
   1. As another example, some youth are more likely to think that when a girl does the bullying, it’s not very serious. Because of this belief, youth may be less likely to intervene when they see a girl engaging in bullying.
      1. Consider the example of Addison, one of the popular girls in high school who is White. She’s been creating social media videos every week to call out all the boys in her class as ‘hot’ or ‘not’. When she gets to Michael, an Indigenous boy, she makes fun of his braids and says he is ‘definitely not hot – his hair is like a girl’s!”. Other classmates then comment their agreement, with one stating “Eew I know – does he even wash it?”
      2. These comments cause Michael to feel shame about his braids. His braids are part of expressing his culture, and so he also feels shame about his culture. Michael feels very sad and like he will never be accepted and starts to disengage at school.
      3. This is an example of identity-based bullying where a White girl (someone from a dominant group) is making fun of someone from a marginalized group because of their identity with the intent to hurt them.
      4. It should be seen as an emergency that requires action. However, some youth will be hesitant to intervene because they also hold beliefs that when girls do the bullying, it’s not very serious.
   2. So, the message is that all kinds of identity-based bullying are serious and harmful. Understanding this helps us and the youth we work with interpret all identity-based bullying events as emergencies.
3. After youth identify identity-based bullying and then interpret it as an emergency that needs help, they need to actually feel like it’s their responsibility to help. But what could get in the way of that?
4. Youth might fear personal consequences if they step in and defend the person being bullied. For example, someone might lose status with their peers if they challenge someone publicly who has a lot of social power and status in the school. This is a valid fear, as losing social status can be very serious for youth. So, we need to consider alternative options for some youth when losing social status is a potential repercussion.
5. Youth may also fear retaliation. Sometimes, when someone defends another person, they may then become a target for bullying. This legitimate fear can be enough to stop them from stepping in.
6. Also, youth who have repeatedly experienced identity-based bullying or youth who hold less social status in the school may not be in a safe place to directly intervene. For example, these youth may experience increased distress or negative emotions like anger and guilt if they engage in direct defending. So, we shouldn’t ask all youth to speak up and intervene directly, as there are many valid reasons for why it could end up actually harming them.
7. However, there are some students we can ask to speak up and directly intervene. In fact, it’s actually youth who hold power and status in the school that are in the best positions to speak up when they see identity-based bullying. So, we should encourage peer leaders to speak up against comments that are racist, homophobic, ableist, etc. In addition, they can be vocal about valuing everyone, for example by saying things like “It’s ok to be whoever you want to be”.
8. Students with social power also have a lot of say over the norms of the peer group. High status youth have a lot of influence of their peers. So, if powerful and high-status youth intervene when they see identity-based bullying, their peers will also be more likely to intervene. Thus, powerful and high-status youth in the schools can act as peer leaders, being the ones to send a powerful message that identity-based bullying is not ok.
   1. **Facilitation guidance**: See “Strategies to Help Students to Become Allies and Prevent Identity-Based Bullying” below (end of script) for specific ways to help peer leaders build their capacities to stand up against identity-based bullying.
9. In addition, many youth may have thoughts like “there are so many other people who see this happening, and those people probably know the person being bullied more than I do…so I’m sure someone else will do something about it”. When this happens, we call it the bystander effect, or the belief that because so many other people are around, someone else will surely do something to help. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. As more people observe the event, the likelihood of someone intervening goes down. So, we need to tell youth about the bystander effect so they can change this tendency to believe someone else will step in. We can instead encourage them to do something, on their own or with their peers, even if they see others witnessing the identity-based bullying.
10. Taken together, all of these things can make it hard to step in and defend the person being bullied. Because defending is challenging to do and tied to things like someone’s own popularity, status, and power, not all youth are in a position to defend others directly.
    1. **Facilitation guidance**: Many youth have been socialized to “stay out of other people’s business”. So, when we talk to students about ways to be allies (including ways to directly intervene), it can feel counterintuitive. Be prepared to have conversations about how there is a difference between “being nosy/getting into other people’s business” and “being an ally”.
    2. Remember that the message we are sending is this: everyone has the right to be respected and safe, and that we have a collective responsibility to be inclusive and act as allies for people who experience identity-based bullying. There are many ways to act as an ally, and we only suggest that students intervene if they feel safe to do so, and if they have a way to intervene in a way that keeps everyone safe.
11. For youth who are not in a position to directly defend someone, there are various other strategies they can engage in -all of which are helpful!
12. For example:
    1. They can ask an adult to help. This is something that can be done privately and confidentially. It’s critical for educators to make it clear that if a student comes to you with a concern, you will take it seriously and address the situation without ‘outing’ the student who came to you. This will protect them from being retaliated against.
    2. The youth can also comfort the person who was bullied. For example, they could ask if that person is ok, and communicate that they don’t agree with the bullying they saw.
    3. Similarly, youth can connect with the person who was bullied. This might look like walking with them in the hallway, asking them to sit together at lunch, inviting them to join a club, or even starting a new club (for example, a Gay Straight Alliance).
13. As an educator, you can help youth figure out which strategy is best for them, and the specific way(s) they can be an ally. Being an ally means being a helper, and in this context, a helper who is looking out for people from marginalized groups specifically.
    1. **Facilitation guidance**: See “Strategies to Help Students to Become Allies and Prevent Identity-Based Bullying” below (end of script) for various strategies you can use with your students.
    2. So far, we’ve talked about:
       1. How it’s important to be able to identify identity-based bullying and the various forms it can take
       2. Recognizing all instances of identity-based bullying as harmful
       3. Encouraging your students to feel a responsibility to do something when they see identity-based bullying
       4. The various reasons that make it hard for students to intervene, and
       5. Different ways for youth to act as allies, recognizing that not all youth are in a position to defend others directly
    3. To help you and your students think of the various ways they can become allies to prevent identity-based bullying, see “Strategies to Help Students to Become Allies and Prevent Identity-Based Bullying”.
       1. **Facilitation guidance**: “Strategies to Help Students to Become Allies and Prevent Identity-Based Bullying” is below (end of script).

**Strategies to Help Students to Become Allies and Prevent Identity-Based Bullying**

What can you do at the individual level?

These strategies are for any and all students! It can be helpful to encourage students to develop empathy, as that helps them connect with peers who have experienced identity-based bullying. Building empathy can also help them understand that all instances of identity-based bullying are harmful, and that we all have a responsibility to help.

* + - 1. Help students develop empathy
         * Link: <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/parents/how-to-encourage-empathy>

We can also encourage students to develop equity literacy, or the ability to recognize biases, respond to them, and find solutions to them. This will increase their capacity to intervene when they hear biased remarks, should they feel safe to do so.

* + - 1. Help students develop the ability to recognize biases, respond to them, and find solutions to them
         * Link: <https://www.equityliteracy.org/educational-equity-resources>

What can you do at the peer level?

*Help students learn how to defend targets of identity-based bullying directly[[1]](#footnote-1). Remember that not all youth will be in a position to defend others directly. Although you can teach all students how to do this, we should not ask all students to actually do it. Those with social status and power are in the best position to act as peer leaders.*

1. Name it/make the invisible visible

This means we learn to call out the comment.

For example, saying “You called him violent just because he’s Black.”

* + - 1. Challenge the stereotype

This means we make it clear the stereotype is not true.

For example, saying “You seem to be saying that because he is autistic, he must be socially awkward. That’s not true.”

* + - 1. Re-educate

This means to explain the root cause of the comment (ableist/racist/sexist/homophobic/etc.).

For example, saying “I know you didn’t realize this, but that comment you made was homophobic. Even though they are your friend, calling them gay is telling anyone who is gay that that it is a bad way to be.”

* + - 1. Seek external support

This means to tell a trusted adult what happened, so they can take further action.

For example, telling a teacher so they can follow up with the person who was bullied and with the person who did the bullying.

Also talk with students about indirect ways to be an ally. For example,

Reporting

Students can report the identity-based bullying to an educator, guidance counselor, etc.

Students should write down what they saw, and/or take a screenshot of what they saw online

Make it clear you will support any youth who comes to you, and that you will maintain confidentiality

Comforting

Students can say something to the person who was bullied. For example:

I saw what happened

Are you ok?

I don’t agree with what they said

Do you want to sit with me at lunch?

How do you want to handle the situation?

How can I help?

Students can connect with the person who was being bullied. For example:

Walk with them in the hallway

Sit with them at lunch

Invite them to a club

Start a new club [such as a Gay Straight Alliance]

What can you do at the classroom level?

Review your curriculum and make sure it is inclusive of the learners in your classroom. Even better, choose curriculum that helps youth develop critical consciousness. For more, see:

<https://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/cultivating-critical-consciousness-in-the-classroom>

Create culture of respect and address social norms in your classroom

For example, “We will be inclusive to all”, “We will respect all”, “We will label behaviours that are not inclusive”, and “We will support those who are not included”

Also, see “Intro to Series” document for more [LINK: <https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/intro_to_series_final.docx>]

Create shared identity of the classroom

What do we value? (respect, diversity, defending, morals, etc.)

Make rules/code of conduct, ensure it is youth-led

Create inclusivity in the classroom

Hanging pride flags; posters with representation; accessibility for all

However, just hanging a pride flag won’t make change – we need to also utilize the other strategies to ensure we are creating inclusive spaces where we don’t tolerate identity-based bullying.

What can you do at the school level?

Doing work at the individual, peer, and classroom levels is critical to preventing identity-based bullying. But, a lot of the social norms that lead to identity-based bullying are things that we also need to simultaneously address at the school level. Although this series is focused on you and your students, it is important to remember that efforts to prevent identity-based bullying will not succeed without changes to school norms, policies, and practices that are rooted in beliefs that continue to give dominant groups power over other groups. To prevent identity-based bullying, all students need to be fully included and know they belong in the school.

For example, do you have events that emphasize boy-girl romantic pairings as ‘normal’ (e.g., dances)? This tells students that heterosexual relationships are what is expected, and anything else is a deviation. Are most clubs, groups, and teams segregated by gender? This tells students that being either a cisgender girl or cisgender boy is what is expected to fully participate in school life. Do any of your school mascots or events draw on Indigenous stereotypes? This tells student it’s okay to make fun of Indigenous culture, as it doesn’t need to be taken seriously. Does curriculum only present Black Canadians as ‘victims’, without discussing their strengths, creativity, and contributions, while curriculum on White Canadians presents full stories? What other examples can you think of? How can you work to address these?

Thank you to partners and collaborators!

Financial contribution from Ontario Ministry of Education

1. These instructions are based on: Sue, D. W., Alsaidi, S., Awad, M. N., Glaeser, E., Calle, C. Z., & Mendez, N. (2019). Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, White allies, and bystanders. *American Psychologist*, *74*(1), 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)