TEACHER HANDOUT ON BULLYING

“Bullying can grow to become very serious or it can be nipped in the bud” (Sullivan, 2000). It is thus important that teachers feel concerned, confident and responsible for managing the bullying problem. Below are some strategies to help you feel the same.

Intervention and Prevention Strategies: Whole School

- Conduct assessments to uncover the extent to which bullying is a problem in the school along with where and when it occurs. It is advisable to use multiple methods to collect information. There are many questionnaires, surveys and checklists that can be used with both students and the staff to identify the problem areas. The school can also use open-ended interviews with students, analyze attendance records, and drop by unexpectedly to check on a particular class or track documented incidence and behavioral reports. Analyze the patterns of student discipline measures to check if a bullying pattern emerges.
- A single teacher alone is not likely to see enough student behaviour to be able to accurately pick out bullies and victims in his or her own classroom. Ask other school staff that interacts with your students (e.g., P.T. teacher/Singing teacher) whether they have observed bullying or victimization within your class or other classes in the same grade. Note the students whose names keep coming up as suspected bullies or victims. Monitor children thought to be bullies especially closely to ensure that they do not have opportunities to victimize other children.
- Get school staff to observe and record behavior that takes place in less supervised settings or ‘hot spots’ of bullying such as the playground, toilets and corridors.
- Monitor and track progress regularly; share results throughout the school community. To help the victims of bullying feel safe it is also important that the school act on the information and feedback received from the students.
- All the personnel in the school could reach a consensus about what the school defines as bullying behavior, when teacher intervention must be made and most importantly the consequences (both lesser and stringent). Remember harsh punishment is not effective for stopping bullying. Hence, assemble a list of appropriate behavioral consequences for bullying. Include lesser consequences for isolated instances of bullying and greater consequences for chronic or more serious bullying. Share those consequences with your class. (In fact, you may want to enlist students to help generate items on the list!) Whenever a student is observed bullying a classmate, intervene and apply a consequence from the list. For example, a student who bullies during lunch might be required to spend several days seated away from his or her friends at a supervised lunch room.
If a group or class participates in a bullying incident (e.g., children at a lunch time teasing and troubling a new student), hold the entire group accountable and impose a disciplinary consequence on each group member.
member. If one of your students takes advantage of unsupervised trips from the room (e.g., bathroom break) to seek out and bully other children, restrict that student’s movements by requiring that the student be supervised by an adult at all times when out of the classroom. When you are satisfied that the student’s behaviors have improved enough to trust him or her once again to travel out of the room without adult supervision, let the student know that he or she is ‘on probation’ and that you will reinstate these school ‘travel restrictions’ if you hear future reports of bullying.

- Maintain a ‘zero tolerance’ zone of bullying. Formulate a written anti-bullying policy and distribute to all staff and student. This would help send the message that bullying events would be taken seriously.
- After administering the anonymous survey to students, you should also share with them the names of trusted adults in the building with whom they can talk in confidence if they are currently victims of bullying.
- School counselors and school-based mental health professionals may assist teachers in these efforts.

**Intervention and Prevention Strategies: Whole Classroom**

- Ensure That the Class Understands the Definition of ‘Bullying’. Children may not always know when their behaviour crosses the line and becomes bullying. Two important goals in asserting control over bullying are to create shared expectations for appropriate conduct and to build a common understanding of what behaviours should be defined as ‘bullying’. To accomplish these objectives, a teacher can:
  a. Hold a class meeting in which students come up with rules for appropriate behaviours. Rules should be limited in number (no more than 3-4) and be framed in positive terms (that is, stating what students should do instead of what they should avoid doing). Here are several sample rules:
    i. Treat others with courtesy and respect.
    ii. Make everyone feel welcome and included.
    iii. Help others who are being bullied or picked on.
  b. Create a shared definition for bullying with the class by having them identify behaviours that are ‘bullying’ behaviours. List these behaviours on the board. If students focus only on examples of direct bullying, remind them not to overlook indirect bullying (e.g., gossip, excluding others from a group). Tell the class that when you see examples of bullying occurring, you (the teacher) plan to intervene to keep the classroom a safe and friendly place to learn.
  c. Curriculum efforts need to be put in the classroom with role-playing exercises and related assignments. These can teach students directly involved in bullying, alternative methods of interactions. Teachers are encouraged to use cooperative learning activities where students interact with their peers in the regular classroom to reduce social isolation. Students need to be taught how to interact, using modeling, coaching, prompting, praise and other forms of positive reinforcement. The school can also take a pro-active stance by facilitating student
focus groups and teaching them social skills, conflict resolution, anger management and character education.

**Intervention and Prevention Strategies: Students who Bully**

- Confront Students Engaged in Bullying in a Firm But Fair Manner. When a teacher communicates to the class that bullying will not be tolerated and then intervenes quickly and consistently whenever he or she observes bullying taking place, that instructor sends a clear message to students that bullying will not be tolerated. Bullies are often quite skilled at explaining away situations in which adults have caught them bullying. When confronted, they may say, for example, “I was just kidding around” or “Nothing happened”--even when the evidence clearly suggests otherwise. You can avoid disputes with students by adopting the ‘I-centered’ rule for evaluating misbehavior. Tell your class that it offends or bothers you when you witness certain kinds of hurtful student behaviors (e.g., teasing, name-calling). Emphasize that when you see such behavior occurring, you will intervene, regardless of whether the offending student meant to be hurtful. If you witness suspected bullying, immediately approach the child responsible, describe the negative behavior that you witnessed, explain why that behavior is a violation of classroom expectations, and impose a consequence (e.g., warning, apology to victim, brief timeout, loss of privilege). Keep the conversation focused on facts of the bully’s observed behavior and do not let the bully pull the victim into the discussion. If the bully’s behaviors continue despite your surveillance and intervention, impose more severe consequences (e.g. temporary loss of playground/sport privileges).

Here are additional tips to keep in mind when confronting students who bully:

a) When you confront a student for bullying, do so in private whenever possible. A private discussion will remove the likelihood that the confronted student will ‘play to the audience’ of classmates and become defiant or non-compliant. If you must call a student on his or her bullying behavior in public, do so briefly and in a business-like manner. Then arrange to have a private discussion with the student at a later time to discuss the bullying incident in greater detail.

b) Find an adult in the school with whom the student who bullies has a close relationship. Enlist that adult to sit down with the bully to have a ‘heart-to-heart’ talk. The adult should be willing to discuss with the student the problems created by his or her bullying behavior, to express disappointment with the student’s conduct and to encourage the student to stop his or her bullying. This conference is not intended to be punitive. However, the student should feel at the end of the talk that, while he or she is valued, the student’s bullying behavior hurts and disappoints those who care about the student.

c) Provide Appropriate and Consistent Consequences for Bullying. Schools should remember that the relationship between a bully and his or her victim is coercive in nature, and that the bully always wields power unfairly over
that victim. Strategies for addressing student conflict such as peer mediation, therefore, tend to be ineffective in bullying situations, as the bully can always use his or her power advantage to intimidate the victim. The most sensible disciplinary approach that teachers can use with bullies is to make sure that they are watched carefully and that adults follow up with firm consequences for each bullying incident.

d) When you observe a student engaging in a clear pattern of bullying, arrange a conference with that child’s parents. At that conference, share with them the information that suggests that the child is bullying other students. Enlist their help to stop the child’s bullying. (You will probably want the child to attend that conference so that he or she will understand clearly that the school is monitoring his or her bullying behavior and will impose negative consequences if it continues.)

- Develop a ‘reward chart’ for the student who bullies. Tell the student that you will put a sticker on the student’s chart for each day that you do not receive reports from other teachers or from students and do not directly observe bullying or ‘unkind behavior’. Let the student know that if he or she manages to collect a certain number of stickers within a certain number of days (e.g., 4 stickers across a 5-day period) for good behaviors, the student can redeem them for a prize or privilege.

**Intervention and Prevention Strategies: Victims**

- *Help the Victim to Develop Positive Connections With Others.* When choosing a victim, bullies typically target children who have few or no friends. If a child has at least one significant friend in school, he or she is less likely to be bullied—and is usually better able to cope with the effects of bullying when it occurs. The teacher’s goal, then, is to strengthen the social standing of the victim with classmates and other students and adults in the school. As people in the school community develop more positive connections with the victimized student, they may be willing to intervene to prevent the victim from being bullied. Through the above, a relationship of trust is built. This lays to rest the fear and suspicions in the mind and the heart of the students. Here are ideas that may promote positive connections between the victim and other students or adults:

  a. Train socially inept children in basic social skills, such as how to invite a classmate to play a game or to seek permission and from a group of children to join in a play activity.

  b. Pair students off randomly for fun, interactive learning or leisure activities. These accidental pairings give children a chance to get to know each other and can ‘trigger’ friendships. Consider changing the seating arrangements periodically to foster new relationships.

  c. If a child receives pull-out special education services, try to avoid scheduling these services during class free-time. Otherwise, the child loses valuable opportunities to interact with peers and establish or strengthen social relationships.
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- Enlist one or more adults in the school to spend time with the child as ‘mentors’ or Positive role models (Once these adults begin to spend time with the child, they will then be likely to actively intervene if they see the student being bullied!) Give these adults ideas for how they can structure sessions with the student (i.e., playing board games, having lunch together, etc.) Suggest to the student that he or she occasionally ‘invite a friend’ to these activities.

d. Train staff, older student volunteers, or adult volunteers to be ‘play-helpers’. Train them to organize and supervise high-interest children’s game and activities for indoors and outdoors. (When possible, select games and activities that are easy to learn, can accommodate varying numbers of players, and allow children to join in mid-activity.) Place these play-helpers on the playground, in classrooms, in a corner of the lunchroom, or other areas where students have unstructured free time. The play-helpers may also be encouraged to pay special attention to those children with few friends are likely to be socially excluded, making sure that these children are recruited to participate in organized play with adult support as needed.

- Encourage Victims to tell the truth and develop a strong character by teaching them assertiveness Skills: After a victim has been repeatedly bullied, he or she may find it very difficult to ‘stand up’ to the bully. One explanation for the bully’s power over the victim is that the bully has learned the victimized student’s vulnerabilities. If the victim then starts to resist being bullied, the bully is emboldened to persistently attack the victim (e.g., through teasing, social ostracism, or physical harm) until the victim is again overwhelmed and defeated. At the point where it has become chronic, bullying can be so ingrained that only decisive adult intervention can free the victim from this abusive relationship.

When a bully first approaches and attempts to dominate a potential victim, however, the targeted student still has manoeuvring room and may successfully fend off the bully by using basic assertiveness skills. The bully’s goal when targeting a student is to exploit the victim’s perceived weakness(es) in order to gain dominance over him or her. If the potential victim maintains his or her composure, stands firm, and continues to behave appropriately even when provoked, the bully will find that the supposed victim is not so weak as he or she first thought. A few simple assertiveness rules that you can teach to students are to:

a. Respond to taunts, insults, or teasing with a bland response (“Oh”. “That’s your opinion.”

b. “Maybe.”) Don’t let bullies see that they have upset you.

c. Get away from the situation if you start to get very angry.

d. Say “No” firmly and loudly if you don’t want to do something that someone tells you to do. Stand straight up and look that person in the eye when you say it.

e. Refuse to let others talk you into doing something that you will be sorry for--even if they dare you!

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f. Report incidents of bullying to adults.
   Teachers, it is important that your students do not confuse assertiveness with physical or verbal aggression. While the weaker victim will likely regret aggressively attacking the bully, he or she may well be successful by simply standing firm against the bully. And even if the potential victim is not entirely successful when using assertiveness skills during a particular episode, that student might still manage to stop the bullying from becoming chronic by showing the bully that he or she is not an ‘easy mark.’

**Intervention and Prevention Strategies: Bystanders**

To ‘win over’ bystanders as bully-prevention agents, the teacher should

1. Make bystanders aware that their own behavior can encourage or discourage bullying,
2. Teach skills that bystanders can use to intervene when they witness bullying
3. Hold bystanders accountable for their behavior in bullying situations, and
4. Structure classroom and school wide activities to encourage bystanders to develop positive relationships with potential victims.

Here are ideas for working with student bystanders:

- **Train Student to Play an Active Role in Intervening in Bullying.** An effective way to reduce bullying is to teach bystanders that they can (and should) intervene to support the victim when they witness bullying. Consider using the 4-step lesson plan below to train students to be proactive ‘bully-prevention’ agents:

  1. Introduce the term ‘bullying’. Ask the group to come up with definitions and write these definitions on the board. Then summarize the student contributions to compile a single working definition for bullying. (*An example of a simplified definition would be “Bullying is when one person or group hurts another person on purpose by using mean words, physically harming the person, or damaging their property.”*)
  2. Tell students that bullying hurts the entire school and that everybody has a responsibility to help prevent it. Ask the group to brainstorm rules that the entire class can follow to prevent bullying. Write these rules on the board. Then work with the group to condense these ideas into a final set of rules of conduct.

     **NOTE:** Limit the final set of rules to no more than 3-4 so that they are easy to remember.

     Also, if possible, state each rule as a ‘do’ statement (e.g., “Treat others with courtesy and respect”) rather than as a ‘don’t’ statement (e.g., “Don’t shout at or insult others.”).

     A sample set of ‘anti-bullying’ rules may be:

     - Treat others with courtesy and respect.
     - Make everyone feel welcome and included.
     - Help others who are being bullied or picked on.

- Tell students that, when they witness bullying, they should never encourage the bully or join in the bullying. (Remind them that bystanders who egg on or help the bully are considered to be as responsible for the bullying as the
bystanders need to take action to stop the bullying:

- In incidents of direct bullying, the bystander who feels safe confronting the bully should assertively remind the bully of the classroom rules for treating others and tell the bully to stop picking on the victim. If the bystander does not feel safe confronting the bully, the student should tell an adult about the bullying as soon as possible.

- In incidents of indirect bullying by an individual or group (e.g., malicious gossip), the bystander should not participate in the bullying in any way. If possible, the bystander should also point out to the individual or group that they are engaging in bullying behavior. If the bullying persists, the student should tell an adult about the bullying as soon as possible.

Have the group think of other positive ways that a student could respond if they witness bullying and list those ideas on the board. (TIP: You may want to have students take the best of these suggestions and turn them into colorful posters to be displayed in the classroom.)

- Hold Bystanders Accountable for Their Actions. Student onlookers need to understand that they are responsible for their actions when they witness a bullying incident. In particular, bystanders should know they will face negative consequences if they decide to join a bully in taunting or teasing a victim, cheer the bully on, laugh at the bullying incident, or otherwise take part in the bullying. (Help students to keep in mind that onlookers should side with the victim with a phrase such as 'Remember, bystanders should never become bullies'.)

Whenever you or another adult witness that a bystander is participating in bullying, schedule a private conversation with that student. Talk about the bullying incident and explain how the onlooker's actions (e.g., joining the bully in calling the victim names) were hurtful. Share your disappointment that the student bystander had not attempted to assist the victim and point out ways that he or she could have done so. Impose a disciplinary consequence that fairly matches the bystander's misbehavior.

- Build 'Bonds of Caring' Between Bystanders and Potential Victims. When bystanders already know, and have a positive attitude toward, a student being picked on by a bully, they are more likely to attempt to help the victim rather than to support the bully. Here are some ideas that teachers can use to build bonds of caring between bystanders and potential victims:

Older children often select younger children as targets for bullying. One proactive strategy to ‘energize’ student bystanders to intervene whenever they witness younger children being bullied is to promote positive relationships between older and younger students. You might consider assigning students to younger classrooms to serve as teacher helpers or peer tutors. Or you might train older students to be ‘playground helpers’, organizing and refereeing games and other outdoor activities. Or your entire class may ‘adopt’ another classroom of younger children and participate...
with them in various activities. The larger lesson to remember is that any
time that you can arrange a learning or social situation in which older
students interact in a positive manner with younger children under adult
supervision, you forge bonds between those age groups and give older
students a reason to wish to protect their younger counterparts from
bullying.

**Intervention and Prevention Strategies: Locations - Transforming Schools
from Bully-Havens to Safe Havens**

Bullies are opportunistic, preying upon students whom they perceive as weak.
Bullying cannot take place, though, unless the bully has a setting or location in
which he or she is able to exploit and hurt the victim. The far corner of a classroom,
a deserted hallway, the bathroom: these are all locations in which bullying may
happen. Places where bullying is common are frequently deserted or poorly
supervised.
The good news, though, is that when adults are present to supervise a particular
setting, intervene quickly when they witness bullying behaviour, and provide fair
and appropriate consequences to the bully for his or her misbehaviour, the rate of
bullying in that setting will plummet. A teacher can work with other school staff to
put locations off-limits to bullies by first identifying where bullying most often occurs
in the school and then providing increased levels of trained adult supervision in
those settings.

- **Uncover Bullying ‘Hot Spots’ in the School & Community.**
  In schools, a few locations tend to be the site of many incidents of bullying.
  Often, these locations are poorly supervised. When schools identify
  locations where bullying typically happens, they can take steps to make
  these places less attractive to bullies. Ideas that teachers can use to
discover bullying locations in and around a school are to:
  - Go on a school walking tour with your class. Ask students to identify
    ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ areas of the school, the times of day these areas
    are most safe or least safe, and the reasons that they are safe or
    unsafe. Record student comments. Or hand out maps of the
    school’s interior and ask students to color in red those places that
    are least safe and in blue those places that are the most safe. (Also,
    consider asking other teachers to perform similar activities with their
    classes and compare your results with theirs to see if shared or
dissimilar patterns are found.) Share these results with other
    members of your teaching team and your principal.
  - Give students street maps of the neighbourhood surrounding your
    school. (To make them easier for students to interpret, clearly mark
    well-known landmarks such as stores or fast-food restaurants on the
    maps.) Ask the class to identify any locations in the neighbourhood
    where bullying or other unsafe behavior tends to happen and to
    mark these locations on the map. Also, ask class members to
    identify places in the neighbourhood that tend to be more safeand
to mark those on the map as well. When the students share the results of the activity with you, record their comments regarding both the unsafe and safe locations. Share these results with other members of your teaching team and your principal.

- Put Strategies in Place to Make Locations Less Attractive to Bullies. After you have identified locations in and around your school where bullying tends to occur, you can take simple but effective steps to make these locations less 'friendly' to bullies. Among strategies to consider are to:
  
  ➢ Perhaps the most effective way to decrease bullying is to increase the level of adult surveillance in hallways, stairwells, and other settings where bullying is frequently reported—and during the time(s) when it is most likely to happen. You may also choose to enlist older, trusted students to monitor identified locations. Adult and student monitors should receive training about what bullying behaviors to look for and how to intervene effectively with bullies.
  
  ➢ Help hallway, lunchroom, and playground monitors to learn the names of students (e.g., by inviting them into classrooms at the start of the school year to be introduced to students). Adults can intervene much more effectively in bullying situations when they know the names of the children involved and their assigned classrooms.
  
  ➢ Separate older and younger students when they are in less-supervised settings (e.g., playground) to prevent older children from victimizing younger ones.
  
  ➢ Train non-instructional staff (e.g., lunchroom aides) to intervene promptly when they see bullying, or suspected bullying, occurring in their areas. Work with these staff to design a list of specific intervention strategies that are likely to be effective (e.g., set up a ‘time-out’ table in the cafeteria; after one warning, a student who bullies is sent to that table for a 5-minute timeout).
  
  ➢ Change your classroom layout or rearrange seating to eliminate any ‘blind spots’ where bullies can victimize students outside of your view. Circulate frequently throughout the classroom so that you can monitor student conversations and behavior.
  
  ➢ Have classrooms ‘adopt’ stretches of public space in your school (e.g., hallways) by agreeing to help keep that space clean and to put up posters that provide positive anti-bully messages (e.g., welcoming visitors, reminding students of appropriate behaviors, giving pointers on how to respond assertively to a bully). When a classroom asserts ownership over a public space, this action conveys the impression that the space is cared for and watched over, serving as a kind of extension to the classroom itself. As the public space ceases to be anonymous and impersonal, bullies no longer have the assurance that they can operate in that location unseen and unnoticed.