IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE: BULLYING ROLES

Minimum Time Required: **75 min**

Slide #2: Perpetrators – Who and Why

Characteristics:

▸ Tend to have average or better self-esteem / sense of self (this is not intuitive, but what the research demonstrates)

▸ Often they have negative attitudes for school and are "disconnected"

▸ Learned behaviors from role models about how to get their needs met

▸ Have a lot of power over others and often want to be "cool"

▸ Very often these are "popular" students

▸ They may have been targets themselves and want to turn the tables on others

▸ They lack empathy toward those they target

Slide #3: Targets – Who and Why

Characteristics:

▸ They are "vulnerable" and exude a sense of "hit me…I won't hit back"

▸ They are often loners and isolated from others and not "likable" and because of this relate better to adults than to their peers

▸ They tend to have lacking or inappropriate social skills, sometimes irritating

▸ They can be quiet, shy, withdrawn

▸ Sometimes these children are poor at sports

Slide #4: Bystanders – Who and Why

Characteristics:

▸ They experience a sense of guilt over what they witness

▸ Often feel powerless to do anything

▸ Often afraid to tell someone who could help for fear of making it worse or putting themselves in the middle

▸ They lack the practice in telling or confidence in the adults who they could tell and likely would help

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- ▸ They feel they don't have permission to step in and become an "upstander / ally"
- ▸ They've learned that when they share information they are accused of tattling and should mind their own business

Slide #5: Known Risk Factors

Often it is believed that it is just the targeted students who are affected by any kind of mean spirited behavior, including but not limited to bullying and harassment. Everyone is affected. Perpetrators are much more likely to experience failure and become involved in criminal behavior. Targeted individuals are much more likely to be socially isolated, be depressed and absent from school. And, those bystanders who do not become upstanders / allies experience guilt and, at times extreme trauma over feeling powerless to help and intervene. 100% of a school community is affected when there is not a positive climate and individuals are not treating one another respectfully.

Slide #6: Known Needs and Remedies

Targets…Interventions needed:

- ▸ Must improve social skills
- ▸ Need to develop strong and true friendships
- ▸ They don't have to "own" what is being said about them
- ▸ They should not have to change who they are/look like to be accepted

Bystanders…Interventions needed:

- ▸ Must be able to trust adults so that they will "tell"
- ▸ Need to practice standing up for others
- ▸ Be given permission and empowered to become "upstanders / allies"
- ▸ Become the "caring majority"

Perpetrators…Interventions needed:

- ▸ Isolate from others since they want and need social access until they can earn the right to join the social group
- ▸ Must learn to be empathic/caring/compassionate
- ▸ Be closely supervised

<u>Slide #7: Deal With the Individual Who Is Being Mean</u>

Often educators have it "backwards." The immediate reaction is to protect and supervise the targeted individual so that no one can get to him/her. The target is often isolated enough (few friends, etc.). A better way to manage this is to put the supervision on the perpetrating student(s). They need social access to hurt others and if they are watched closely (which he/she/they do not like), they cannot be mean to others. They must earn their way back into the group and prove that they can interact appropriately without supervision. This is a natural consequence, and generally one that works. Long term, helping those who hurt others develop empathy is an important piece.

Some Additional Background:

Critical Steps In Dealing with Peer Cruelty/Bullying Behaviors

1) Recognize that it exists

Children hurting others with words and actions are real. It is relatively easy to intervene and hold children accountable when something happens that is easily seen (hitting, kicking, shoving, pushing, slapping, punching, etc.) It is not as easy, when the hurt is covert (rumor spreading, eyes rolling, exclusion, cold shoulder, name-calling under ones' breath, etc.). These actions are just as real, we know they are happening and must be acknowledged. It is often easier to "pretend it didn't happen." If it "didn't happen," then nothing can/should be done. However, cruelty of a covert variety has a longer lasting negative impact than the physical overt manifestations. No longer is it acceptable to ignore the more silent forms of hurtful and mean behaviors; they *are* occurring, and no one is fooled, child or adult alike, by claiming that nothing is going on.

2) Put a name on it

All children understand the term "mean." When something happens that is hurtful to someone else, it is important to "go public," and let everyone know that the overt or

covert action was mean. As children get older, "bigger" words such as "relational aggression" or "verbal abuse" can be used. Once an action is labeled, it is a powerful start toward managing and diminishing the amount of peer cruelty that exists.

3) Clearly articulate standards of treatment

Most children know what it means to treat someone kindly, fairly and respectfully at some level. It is important to make these implicit understandings, explicit. Work with children in open and public forums to articulate clearly the boundaries of appropriate treatment with each other and with the adults who work with them. Make it clear verbally, as well as in writing, what it really means to live by the Golden/Platinum Rules and create true "climates of respect." Post "codes of conduct" that are simply stated, easy to understand and consistent throughout the school. And, when there are lapses, and children "forget" how to treat one another…Remind, remind, remind. Do so publicly, without sarcasm or embarrassment. The value of doing so in this way is to put everyone on notice that the particular behavior/word in question is not acceptable. Simultaneously what you are also doing is letting anyone else who might be thinking that they are the next target, that you "get it," and are a safe person to go to, if necessary.

4) Create a "Climate of Respect" in confined places

Start small. There is no need to tackle the whole school at once initially. Whether you choose to have your classroom, playground, or another place your first respectful environment, begin there. Make sure that everyone knows clearly how they will treat others and have an attitude that violations will be dealt with *the first time* they happen. Dealing with violations need not be punitive; changing habitual behaviors are not easy. Public reminders will go a long way toward realizing the kind of respectful environment you are trying to create. There will be times when reminders are not enough. In these cases, have a fair and clear procedure for discipline. Importantly, discipline should be educative. Young children need to be taught and reminded things over and over and over. They do not "get it" the first time around. And, if role models outside of school compete with the standards you are establishing, the task is even more important, if not much harder.

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5) Create Climates of Respect in every area of the school

Whether you began with your classroom, the playground or some other location, children are capable of understanding that treating others kindly and respectfully should happen everywhere in the school: in classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, lunch rooms, busses, and everywhere else. Children want to work, play and socialize in respectful places. They are infinitely capable of understanding and living by the respectful codes that are established. They can also understanding what the boundaries are and know when they've crossed the line. Children do "push the limits" and test our ability to be fair and consistent. If the adults in the school are all on the same page, are respectful of one another and are the positive role models for them, creating true "climates of respect" are very doable.

Make sure that whatever disciplinary measures are used are fair and appropriate for the contextual circumstances. Too often, students perceive that some powerful/popular students are "above the law." Fairness is paramount. Additionally, immediate response is essential. If the behaviors are intentional, make it very clear that any retaliatory actions toward targets or any witnesses are forbidden; make this explicit. When there is inconsistent application of discipline, then students have greater senses of distrust in faculty/staff, cynicism about adults in school caring about their safety and well-being as well as a significant decrease in obedience of school rules. These qualities decrease the chances of students being "connected" to school, which is a critically important aspect to realize a positive school climate and ultimately a mission/vision sense of culture.

Slide #8: Isolate the Individual

Typically, when it is discovered that individuals are targets of mean-spirited behavior, adults in school provide specialized supervision for the targeted student, isolating that individual even further. This is backwards. The individual who is being socially inappropriate is the one who needs to be monitored and supervised. In order for an individual to hurt another, he/she needs social access to do so. If the person(s) who is being mean is the one(s) that is being removed and isolated and is only allowed back to

the social setting when he/she can treat others appropriately, this is a very powerful incentive to do so. This is a shorter term solution and consequence. Long term, those who hurt others need to develop empathy so that they can stand in others' shoes. The last thing that ought to happen is to blame the target for the situation. No matter how different an individual is, every single person should be treated appropriately.

Slide #9: Isolate the Individual Learning Task

In a small group, sort the provided cards: Which represent appropriate ways to isolate (Not punish) perpetrators of mean-spirited acts? Remember – Our goal is to have the person

re-join the group. The following are the main points that should be outcomes of the large group discussion/processing that happens after all tables have sorted and come together to see where there is consensus and where and why there is not.

⏩ *We need to intervene and stop mean-spirited behavior, but then we must teach perpetrators how to appropriately interact with others.*

⏩ *While targets need our support as well, the focus should not be on pulling those individuals who are targeted out of social activities and situations. They should not be punished for being who they are.*

⏩ *Perpetrators need to learn that they will not rewarded for engaging in mean-spirited behavior, while at the same time provided with the skills they need to interact with others in a respectful way. Once these skills have been learned, they can then be re-introduced into the social community in a graduated process.*

Slide #10: "Empathy" as a True Antidote for Meanness

Those who are mean ("bullies") lack the ability to be empathic toward those they hurt, which includes animals and property. People don't hurt or deface those/the things they care about. So, having compassion or caring about something or someone is the remedy for being mean. Empathic thinking is a central element for overall intelligences (in the sense of multiple intelligences).

Slide #11: Teaching Empathy

Empathy is a key skill that perpetrators of mean-spirited behavior lack. There are numerous ways to encourage students to develop empathy, not sympathy.

Slide #12: Teaching Empathy Learning Task

In a small group, brainstorm additional, specific strategies for teaching empathy to students at your assigned grade level: Elementary School, Middle School, or High School. Write your responses on a piece of flip chart paper. We will process as a large group.

⏩ *Encourage groups to be as specific as possible.*

⏩ *While processing, have group consider which strategies are specific to the assigned grade level and which could apply to others.*

⏩ *Empathy is a key skill that perpetrators of mean-spirited behavior lack. It is not always easy to identify ways to teach empathy, but it is critical.*

Slide #13: A Critical Distinction

There is really no such thing as an "innocent" bystander. This phrase is an oxymoron; a contradiction in terms. Bystanders can be passive or active. They can stand by silently watching and by their silence quietly condone what is doing on. Or, they can be active; egging on the aggressor or laughing out loud with the person(s) who are engaging in inappropriate behavior. Bystanders who become "allies" or "upstanders" are the only people who can "close the peer cruelty show down." It is no longer good enough just to stand by and watch. They must be active participants in the solution by becoming allies/upstanders. Peer cruelty (bullying) is a very public activity. Even if someone is targeting another in a place where there are only the two of them, there is bragging and sharing of what went on. Until the transformed bystanders-to-allies are vocal in their statement of disapproval, the cruelty will continue. The peer cruelty "show" will "close" when there is no audience (bystanders). Students and adults must be empowered to

assume this role; when they do, peer cruelty (bullying) can truly be managed and diminished, if not all together eliminated.

Slide #14: Tattling and Telling

When children first enter school, they seem to be able to report just about anything to the adults with whom they come into contact. Very soon, however, they are given constant messages that what they are sharing is "tattling," or not important enough to share. Or, the fact that they are the source of the information comes back and "bites" them. The consequences of these adult reactions yield a very palatable student "code of silence." Tattling is giving information to get others in trouble or to tease. Telling is about sharing information that needs to be heard to help avoid problems and to provide information that adults do not have access to. Unfortunately, children often learn that if they 'tell,' the situation will probably get worst, at least for them. They learn that there is a real penalty for 'going public' with their observations and often a real 'double violation' for both the initial telling and then the requisite aftermath. They learn to fear the retribution that is commonly experienced meted out from the person they are "telling" about. As children get older, they share information less frequently and consequently, many real problems are just not reported. Beyond the pain of reporting, they are not unfamiliar with the cold reception they experience from the adults with whom they confide; hoping to get help, but not being successful. One of the biggest errors that adults make, which perpetuates the "code of silence," is that when students do take the courageous move and "tell" an adult, the adults do not communicate back to that student that his/her "telling" was helpful, appreciated, acted upon, etc. If this extra step can be taken, the "code" is broken down. When a child hears back that his/her "telling" made a positive difference, he/she is validated and supported for telling, learns that there was no negative impact on him/her personally and is more likely to continue telling in the future. This 'code of silence' creates a student body of bystanders. Folk wisdom says that as long as a person just "doesn't get involved" in situations that are mean or hurtful toward others, that this is perfectly acceptable behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth. Their words should be heard and not merely the tone of their voices, because this is often a false indicator (whining does not always mean that children are tattling!). When children do *tattle*, instead of turning them away by saying, "you're

tattling, and I won't listen to that!," help them learn the distinctions between the two by making it a learning experience and use that teachable moment by saying, "Wait a minute…do I need to hear that?" Help them understand what information is appropriate to share and what is not. This healthy kind of reminder helps children learn what is the difference between tattling and telling and ultimately helps break down the student "Code of Silence."

Slide #15: Skill Building for Upstanders Learning Task
In a small group, brainstorm a list of skills that a student needs to be assertive and stand up for others when they witness mean-spirited behavior.

⏩ Provide each table with a piece of flip chart paper and flip chart markers.

⏩ Allow time for the groups to discuss and brainstorm their list.

⏩ Once groups have created their lists, post the results together on a wall and process the results.

⏩ Are their overlaps? Does anyone notice a strategy that they did not think of that they particularly like? How will they take these strategies and put them into action?