



Controlling the Climate and Creating Connections: Confronting Bullying Head-On

Bullying has no place in our public schools and most all school districts have policies (FFI LOCAL) that prohibit bullying against students. However, the reality is that it happens and teachers need to be prepared to deal with it. Teachers need to deal effectively with it because it has profound impact on student. Students who are bullied are more likely to:

- Have high rates of absenteeism
- Suffer depression
- Experience high levels of anxiety
- Become juvenile delinquents
- Entertain suicidal thoughts
- Engage in promiscuous behaviors

Successful students are connected to their environment in such a way that they make the right and responsible choices to be in school and engage in learning and school activities while they are there. School connectedness is a concept founded on creating school and learning environments that students and educators want to be a part of. If a school environment seems oppressive to even teachers, then it may experience higher incidences of bullying and other disciplinary issues. Positive school environments foster a positive mindset among students and reinforces the sense of school as a learning community where everyone holds one another accountable for actions.

School and Classroom Environment

Sometimes, the school environment may actually encourage bullying even though it is unintentional. When the school climate is not supportive of the people who work and learn there, then bullying and the issues it creates may be more prevalent. Conversely, schools that have a high incidence of bullying are often schools that have a punitive school climate. Lastly, schools that dismiss bullying as “kids being kids” may also see an increase in school bullying.

One of the most effective ways to deal with and minimize bullying in your classroom is to ensure effective classroom management. If bullying is happening in your classroom, check to see if any of these characteristics are prevalent:

- **Negative peer relationships.** Groups of students do not like other students.
- **Poor teacher-student relationships.** Everything in the classroom seems like a struggle.
- **Lack of self-control.** The majority of the students are not able to self-control their behavior
- **Poor problem-solving among students.** Students tend to resolve problems and issues through aggressive, often physical, means
- **Unchallenged and unmotivated classrooms.** The content and learning activities do not engage students and amount to little more than worksheets and busy work.
- **Absence of a connection to the class/school.** Students lack a sense of connectedness to the school and this often leads to making wrong choices and decisions.

Family Characteristics

As you create your community of learners, it is possible to identify students who may be predisposed to bullying - especially as they open up to you about themselves. Students whose families exhibit the following characteristics may demonstrate tendencies to bully:

- **Frequent arguments.**
- **Physical abuse.**

- **Hostile mothers**
- **Absentee fathers**
- **Alcoholism**
- **Drug abuse**

When your students talk to you or tell you things about their personal lives (especially younger children), listen for comments that raise a red flag and decide how to deal with it appropriately. If intervention is warranted because the child’s life or well-being, make sure you make contact with the appropriate person or agency. Most of the time, it may warrant more observation and interaction to confirm any suspicions. It is important to act with prudence rather than haste unless you sense the child’s life may be in jeopardy.

Cycle of Bullying

Bullying begins with an imbalance of power that leads to a malicious intent to hurt and/or humiliate another person and it is a cycle that consists of four primary actions [think SPAR]:

- The bully **SELECTS** a target or targets.
- The bully **PLANS** the action to take.
- The bully **ACTS** against the target.
- The bully **REPEATS** the action.

It is important to note that what separates bullying apart from an act of aggression is the repetitive nature of the act. The bully repeats the act because he or she derives pleasure from the act. If a student acts aggressively against another student once, it is not an act of bullying; however, if the same student repeats the act of aggression a second time or more often, then the student is engaging in bullying activities.

The following page includes a table that illustrates differences in children who bully and those who do not.

The Child Who Bullies	The Healthy Child
Thinks bullying pays.	Realizes bullying doesn't pay.
Is aggressive and impulsive.	Displays strong social skills.
Has aggressive role models.	Chooses positive role models.
Feels low levels of empathy.	Feels high levels of empathy.
Demonstrates a high level of boredom.	Experiences a high level of enjoyment.
Displays generalized hostility.	Internalizes moral principles.
Replaces lack of success with anger.	Experiences frequent and episodic success.

CREATE Safe Environments for Learning

Having an awareness about your students, listening to what they say, and monitoring your school environment are all things you can do to create a bully-free environment but TSTA recommends a more proactive manner to minimize or even eliminate the threat of bullying on your campus. That's why we developed **C.R.E.A.T.E** - a list of strategies designed to help members and local associations spearhead bully-free environments on their campus and in their classrooms.

Create

- Strategies to foster an environment of school connectedness to help students make the right choices (staying in school, studying, participating in class, avoid using drugs, etc.).
- Alignment between school connectedness and elements of social justice.
- Dominant characteristics of your campus environment relative to bullying using the School Assessment and Reflection tool.
- Effective non-consequential strategies to minimize/eliminate specific incidences of bullying.
- Safe environments to discuss bullying in the workplace (adult and student) among staff and students.
- Climates and cultures that support the school community.

Reinforce

- Site-Based Decision-Making Committees so teachers are active partners in the planning and decision-making for their schools and the district.
- Anti-bullying language in policy and professional/students' codes of conduct to identify specific actions and sanctions when incidents of bullying occur.
- Support for students.
- Respectful behavior.

Educate

- Professional development for teachers, administrators and other stakeholders every two-years.
- Semi-annual/annual sessions for students, parents/guardians, and community members.
- Professional learning communities for staff and administrators to learn about and discuss student and adult bullying.
- Professional development to help teachers identify examples of bullying in content areas, especially English/Language Arts and Social Studies.
- Curricular materials to support learning about bullying and how to identify it in class, in school activities, and in the school environment.
- Instructional resources to help students

identify characters in modern culture and literature who demonstrate bully-like behaviors.

Advocate

- Anti-Bullying Tips posted/publicized in school/district publications, including e-publications.
- Discuss and review incidents of bullying via established in-school/cross-district committees, including a strengthened site-based decision-making committee.
- Behavioral norms that promote RESPECT across the campus/district and consequences for violation of these norms.
- Anti-bullying policies that end the cycle of bullying.

Target

- Resources to support victims of all types of bullying in the school environment.
- Time to dialogue about bullying and the impact it's having on students and staff.
- School activities where hazing-like activities may occur to monitor and, if necessary, address issues of bullying.

Eliminate

- Characteristics that enable a bullying environment to exist at school or in the district.
- Barriers to social justice and school connectedness at the school and in the district.
- Practices that do little more than play lip service to it.
- Hazing practices that may exist among athletic teams or other extra-curricular groups.