

Five Critical Skills to Reduce Bullying & Limit Its Harms

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The majority of young people, especially at the secondary level, do not report bullying or harassment to adults. This is likely because they want to be able to resolve these situations on their own or they do not trust adults to make things better. The majority of these hurtful situations occur in the presence of other young people, not adults. This is especially true when young people use digital technologies.

The majority of young people think that those who engage in bullying are “popular.” This is an assessment of the social status of these young people in the eyes of other young people. But young people do not personally like to see bullying behavior and do not admire those who are hurtful. Thus, there is a significant misperception of the actual norms.

Many young people engage in bullying to gain social status, by demonstrating their power over those who are “different.” Other young people are lashing back because they have been treated badly. We often tell young people they should speak up to stop bullying. Publicly confronting someone engaged in bullying presents major risks of retaliation or humiliation.

Young people who are bullied, especially chronically, often present themselves as lacking self-confidence and personal power. These young people can suffer long term emotional harms.

Many young people would like to help when they see someone being hurtful. When young people do intervene, they are often successful in getting the hurtful situations to stop. Bullied young people who have supportive friends experience less distress. Young people highly admire those who step in to help. But when bullying situations do occur, most young people do not step in to help.

To more effectively reduce bullying and limit its harmful effects requires addressing two critically important issues: perceived peer norms and effective skills.

When young people truly understand that the majority of their peers really do not like to see bullying, then the motivation to engage in bullying to achieve social status will be significantly decreased. When young people know that their peers truly admire those who step in to help, positive intervention will increase. But young people also require effective skills to enable them to respond effectively if they witness bullying or other hurtful situations, they need to know why and how they should stop and make things right, and they need to know how to gain self-confidence and resiliency in response to hurtful situations.

There are five critically important skill areas:

Reach Out. Reach out to be kind to a person being hurt or help friends resolve conflict.

Reaching out, in private, to a student who has been treated badly by another is the absolute best thing other young people can do. Young people already know how to do this. They need to know how important this is. The other key Reach Out skill is helping others resolve conflict. This requires a process that allows each to talk about what has happened and how this had made them feel, followed by brainstorming of possible resolutions, and agreement on a resolution.

Say, "Stop." Safely tell a person being hurtful to stop in private or publicly. Young People should know that they should only say stop if it is safe to do so, to keep their intervention brief, and not to engage in retaliation. To say stop publicly, it is safer to work as a team. Young people should be strongly encouraged to privately tell a friend who is being hurtful to stop. They can ask their friend what he or she was trying to accomplish, how he or she would feel if someone did this to them, and what others likely think--then they should encourage their friend to make things right.

Report Concerns. Tell an adult who can help about situations that are serious. Young People must know when it is important to tell an adult--any situation where violence is a

possibility, where groups of student are involved, or where the harm has not stopped, despite efforts to stop it.

Stop & Make Things Right. Stop yourself from being hurtful and make things right if you were. Too often, we brand young people as “bullies,” punish, and exclude them. This will not stop their hurtful behavior. Everyone has been hurtful from time to time. Student must learn why and how to stop themselves, think things through, and take steps to make things right.

Be Positive & Powerful. Reduce the potential others will be hurtful to you and respond effectively if someone is. All young people, but especially those who are bullied, can benefit from guidance on how they can become more self confident and respond if someone is hurtful. Young people who have positive connections with peers and adults, engage in positive activities, focus on future opportunities, and contribute to others are more resilient in the face of any challenges.

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age introduces **Be a Friend ~ Lend a Hand**, an innovative new, research based program for teens and pre-teens that reinforces positive norms and teaches these effective skills.