

Lesson Plan and Overview

Lesson Plan: Identity-Based Bullying

Bullying is one of the ways that bias happens in schools. When the bullying behavior targets an aspect of someone's identity, it is called identity-based bullying. This means the bullying is based on prejudice or bias about the target's identity (e.g., appearance, race, culture, gender, religion, etc.). Because identity-based bullying targets a core part of who the person is—their identity—it can be especially harmful not only to that person but others around them who identify in the same way or who worry that their identity group may be the next target.

Grade Level

Grades K-5

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand what identity is and reflect on aspects of their and others' identities.
- Students will consider the connection between bullying, bias and identity.
- Students will explore what identity-based bullying means and how to address it.

NOTE: For each section of the activity, there are variations for students in grades K-2.

Materials Needed

- [6 Ways to Be an Ally](#) (English and Spanish)
 - [Children's Books about Bullying Awareness and Prevention](#) (from Books Matter, ADL's online children's literature collection)
 - [What Can I Do about Bullying Among Young Children?](#)
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Words You Might Use

Bias: An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment. Bias can be conscious (explicit or overt and intentional) or unconscious (implicit or unintentional and based on assumptions and “norms”), but both are potentially harmful regardless of intent.

Bullying: Repeated actions or threats of action directed toward a person by one or more people who have (or are perceived to have) more power or status than their target in order to cause fear, distress or harm.

Identity: The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.

Prejudice: Judging or having an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them. Prejudice is often directed toward people in a certain identity group (race, religion, gender, etc.).

Teasing: Laugh at and put someone down in a way that is either friendly and playful or mean and unkind.

Core Activity

[If possible, begin the activity by reading aloud a picture book such as [Lunch Every Day, I Walk with Vanessa](#), [Each Kindness](#) or [I Talk Like a River](#). Reading a book aloud to open the activity is highly recommended, especially for students in grades K-2. After reading, engage students in a discussion that delves into bullying, identity-based bullying and allyship. Each of these books contains a discussion guide on ADL’s Books Matter website.]

First, engage students in a discussion about identity. Ask students: *What does the word “identity” mean?* Elicit/explain that identity means “the qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.” Share an example of someone’s identity by using yourself or another teacher. Ask students: *What are some words to describe my identity?* After students share identity characteristics, add to what they’ve shared and say something like, “My identity includes being Latina, Mexican (or “my family is from Mexico”), woman, teacher, adult, curly hair and plays guitar.” Explain that many things shape a person’s identity and who they are. For a few minutes, have students call out words or phrases to describe parts of their identity, and record those responses on individual post-it notes. Then, distribute 4-8 post-it notes or index cards to each student and have them write one aspect of their identity on each post-it note/index card. When completed, display all of the notes/cards on the board or a wall. (For younger students who are not writing yet, see the K-2 variation note below.) Give all students the opportunity to look at the board or wall of identity notes. You can also put them on a common wall at school (i.e., entrance to building)

with all the students and their identities with a title such as “Who We Are” or “This is Us.” After looking at all the identity notes, engage students in a discussion by asking:

- What words and phrases do you see? Are there words you don’t know (in this case, share what they mean.)?
- What do you notice about the words and phrases you see?
- Are there some things on the web that you had not thought of as being part of identity?
- What surprised you?
- Which parts of your identity are most important?

[Variation for students in grades K-2: Define identity for students. Share with students the aspects of your identity rather than eliciting those descriptors from them. Write the words for the students on the post-its or instead of writing the words on the notes/cards, have students draw pictures about their identities.]

Next, ask students: *What is bullying? How does bullying make you feel? What words or phrases come to mind when you think about bullying?* As students share words and phrases, create a semantic web with all the words or phrases students use and connect related words/phrases. Engage students in a discussion by asking: *What words do you see? How do you feel? Is bullying common or not common? Do we know a lot about bullying?* Elicit a definition of bullying as follows: “when one person or a group of behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed.” You can break down each part of the definition to explain in more detail (i.e., one person or group; behaves in ways; on purpose and over and over; makes someone feel hurt, afraid of embarrassed). Divide students into small groups of 3-4 each and have them share about a time they experienced bullying, either something that happened to them or something they witnessed or heard about from a friend or family member. Remind students not to use names of students in the class. In their groups, they should share (1) what happened, (2) how they felt and (3) what they did or wish they could have done. After students have shared in small groups, reconvene the class and engage in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- How was it to share your story with others?
- What did you learn about bullying by hearing about other people’s stories?
- What ways did people help when they saw or experienced bullying?

[Variation for students in grades K-2: Explain what teasing and name-calling are and say these are often elements of bullying. Instead of having them share their own stories, use puppets to tell a story about

bullying and invite students to act out using puppets. Or invite older students in grades 3-5 to come into class and explain what bullying is.]

Finally, discuss identity-based bullying by combining students' understanding of identity and bullying. Ask students: *Now that you know what identity is and what bullying is, what do you think identity-based bullying means?* Explain that identity-based bullying is when you bully someone based on an aspect of who they are or who you think they are: their identity. Explain that it could be someone who is bullied based on their appearance, or their religion or who has a disability. Point out to students that they should never blame the target of the bullying; a person is not bullied because of their identity; they are bullied because of other people's bias or prejudice. Ask: *How does identity-based bullying make people feel hurt, embarrassed or afraid? Why is it harmful?* Elicit responses and explain that when someone is targeted because of their identity, it is extremely hurtful because they are being targeted for who they are, and that they are not valued or appreciated for who they are. It could also make other children feel scared that they will be next. It can also make the school or community less safe for people of that identity group. As a culmination, have students create posters describing what identity-based bullying is and why it's harmful. They could also create a poster with a slogan (memorable word or phrase to get people's attention) and an image about identity-based bullying and hang those around school or create a video with all students holding their posters or slogans.

[Variation for students in grades K-2: Have students create a picture with a caption (instead of slogan), or create their own puppet show with a message about bullying and share the puppet shows, or a video of them, with their class or the whole school.]

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

NOTE: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- Engage students in discussions about the roles we play in identity-based bullying (target, bystander, aggressor and ally) and emphasize that acting as an ally is a way to do something about the bullying you see or experience. Talk with students about what it means to act as an ally. Hand out and discuss the [6 Ways to Be an Ally](#) handout (available in English and Spanish). Elicit and/or provide examples for each of the six ways as you review the handout. For older students, have them write a short paragraph about a time they acted as an ally in an identity-based bullying incident or saw someone else act as an ally. Younger students can draw a picture or can share verbally.
- Read aloud book(s) about bullying or identity-based bullying (see

above). After reading aloud, have older students (in grades 3-5) create books about bullying to share in classes with younger students. Emphasize ally behaviors that students can write into the story so that the bullying is addressed. Students can look over some picture books that already exist (or use ADL's [Children's Books about Bullying Awareness and Prevention](#) as inspiration or mentor texts. They should have a younger child (ages 5-7) in mind as they create the book, keeping in mind the following components of a good story: an engaging plot with a story arc, a clear message and theme around identity-based bullying, illustrations that help to tell the story and characters that are diverse and non-stereotypical. When the books are completed, have each upper grade (e.g., grades 3-5) class partner with a lower grade (e.g., grades K-2) class and have the older students read and discuss their books with the younger students.

- As a class or in small groups, have students create videos with a message about identity, bullying and identity-based bullying. As a group or class, you will have to decide on the following components in advance: (1) the message you want to convey, (2) background information for your audience and (3) a concise and inspiring "call to action," which is what you want the viewers to do. These videos can then be shared with the whole school community in an assembly and/or online.

NOTE: For all of these activities, make sure students do not use names of specific people or scenarios that reflect a real-life situation of bullying that could potentially hurt, harm or highlight someone or a group of people at their school. While it's helpful to use real-life situations as inspiration for stories, it is important that those scenarios do not disclose names, people or situations that are too close to home.

Home Connection

Share ADL's Table Talk [What Bullying Is and Is Not](#) with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will reflect on their own identities, engage in discussions about bullying and identity-based bullying and explore what they can do about bullying, including allyship. This will contribute to a classroom and school climate that is more safe, inclusive and respectful.