

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

What is Identity-Based Bullying?

Lesson Plan and Overview

Lesson Plan: Identity-Based Bullying

Bullying is a major issue in our schools today. When the bullying behavior targets aspects of a person's identity, it is called identity-based bullying. This means the incident is based on bias about the target's identity. Because identity-based bullying targets who the student is—a core part of their identity—it can be especially harmful. It impacts not only the individual student but others around them who identify in the same way and who worry that they may be the next target.

Grade Level

Grades 6–8

Learning Objectives

- Students will reflect on their own identities and the identities of others.
- Students will understand the connection between bullying, bias and identity.
- Students will explore examples of identity-based bullying.

Materials Needed

[6 Ways to Be an Ally](#) (English and Spanish)
[Children's and Young Adult Literature about Bullying Awareness and Prevention](#) (from Books Matter, ADL's online bibliography)

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.

Core Activity

First, engage students in a discussion about identity. Ask students: *What does the word “identity” mean?* Define identity as “the qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.” Share an example using yourself (e.g. “My identity includes being Latina, a woman and Catholic.”) Explain that many things shape a person’s identity and who they are. Ask students to share different parts of their identity by recording on 4–5 post-it notes different aspects of their identity and then display them on the board or a wall. (Alternatively, have students share their identity words out loud and record them on a semantic web.) Give all students the opportunity to look at the board. Then discuss the results by asking:

- *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?*
- *Which of these aspects of identity are important to you?*

Next, define bullying as: “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.” Ask students: *What do you think identity-based bullying means?* Explain that identity-based bullying refers to any form of bullying related to the characteristics considered unique to a person’s identity (or perceived identity), such as their race, religion, sexual orientation or physical appearance. Point out to students that they should never blame the target of the bullying; a person is not bullied because they are Jewish or gay or blind. They are bullied because of bias or prejudice. Have students talk in pairs about a time they were bullied, teased or name-called based on an aspect of their identity (i.e. identity-based bullying). If they don’t have an example, they can share an example of one that they witnessed or heard about from a friend, family member or online. In their pairs, 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 with partners, engage students in a discussion about the harm that identity-based bullying causes. Ask: *Why is identity-based bullying harmful? Why is it harmful to bullying someone based on their identity?* Elicit responses and explain that when someone is targeted because of their identity/group membership, it sends a message to others with that same identity that they could be next.

Finally, 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. Have students then 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. In their writing, they should include what happened, what they did (or wish they did) as an ally and how they felt about it.

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 a small group of students and staff or the NPFH school committee work together to create a survey (to be distributed to all students) that seeks information about the extent to which identity-based bullying is an issue at their school. The survey can include questions about bullying/cyberbullying and also ask specific questions about the participants' membership in certain identity groups and whether they have been targeted based on that identity group. The results can then be compiled and shared with the students and staff with recommendations for addressing identity-based bullying.
- Have students, working alone or in pairs, create picture books for younger students (elementary-age) about identity-based bullying. Students can look over some picture books that already exist (or use ADL's [Children's and Young Adult Literature about Bullying Awareness and Prevention](#)) as inspiration or mentor texts. They should have a younger child (ages 5–10) in mind as they create it. They should keep in mind the following items: include 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. If possible, a group of students can go to a neighboring elementary school or children's library and read their picture books to the students.
- As a class or in small groups, have students create PSAs (public service announcements) about identity-based bullying. The PSAs should have the following components: (1) a clearly stated message, (2) succinct background information, if needed and (3) a concise and inspiring "call to action," which is what you want the viewers to do. The PSAs can be created as a whole class, with small groups taking responsibility for different parts (i.e. script writing, props, set design, acting, etc.) or by having students work in small groups to create the PSAs. These can 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 a person 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

(optional)

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 to act as allies for targets of bullying. This will contribute to a classroom and school climate that is more safe, inclusive and respectful.