

17 Ways to Prevent Bullying in Your Classroom

As an educator, you have a responsibility to create a safe and healthy environment in your classroom—one that protects every student from bullying. This means you must not only identify and address bullying on a consistent basis, but you also must create a culture of respect and dignity in your classroom.

From physical altercations to rumors and gossip, bullying can have lasting effects on an educational environment. As a result, preventing school bullying is extremely important for educators. Here are 17 ways you can create a safe and positive environment for all your students.

1. Talk About Bullying

Let your students know how people are affected by bullying. Work to instill empathy and emotional intelligence. Also, ensure your students know the consequences for bullying others at school. They should understand that bullying is not tolerated and will be addressed. It may even help to supplement your school's bullying policies with additional guidelines in your classroom that focus on respect and kindness.

2. Be Visible Throughout the Day

Make sure your students see you anywhere bullying might occur like the bathrooms, hallways, and even in the lunchroom. You also may want to make yourself visible near the buses in the afternoon and during recess if you can. Also, be sure your school has proper supervision in all the bullying hot spots. Remember, kids who bully others are opportunists. They know where the teachers are most of the time and will wait until the coast is clear to target another student. Make sure there are very few opportunities for students to bully others.

3. Become Familiar With Bullying Indicators

Be sure you are able to recognize the most common types of bullying as well as cyberbullying indicators. Also, be aware that boys and girls often bully differently. For instance, boys often resort to physical bullying and girls are more likely to use relational bullying like ostracizing another student. And finally, look for what is called "gateway indicators." These are initial behaviors that students display that are often gateways for more intentional types of bullying. Some possible gateway indicators include rolling eyes, laughing under their breath, making jokes, turning their back on others, and using sarcasm. If you see these behaviors, look a little closer. There may be subtle forms of bullying taking place already.

4. Teach Students to be Effective Bystanders

Strive to empower the bystanders in your class. Encourage them to stand up against bullying behavior or to report it to you or another adult. Remind them that research has shown that bullying ends when one person takes a stand. Then provide safe and confidential ways that they can report bullying incidents.

5. Keep Your Ear to the Ground

Victims of bullying are often afraid or embarrassed to come forward. As a result, you may need to rely on other students to let you know when bullying is occurring. Identify your class leaders early in the school year and check in with them. Let them be your eyes and ears when you cannot be present. Also, be sure you make it safe for them to alert you of potential issues. No student wants to be considered a snitch. So, make sure you implement ways for them to get information to you without the rest of the students knowing who it came from.

6. Maintain Open Communication With Students

Strive to build a rapport with all your students. Get to know them as individuals. Greet each student every day and ask how things are going. Watch for signs that they might be experiencing bullying. Do your best to find out about their interests and goals. And if they are struggling, offer support or direct them to school resources where their specific needs can be met.

7. Increase Bullying Awareness Among Parents

Engage parents in your bullying prevention programs. Increase awareness through PTA/PTO meetings, conferences, newsletters, and social media. Encourage parents to support school rules and bullying intervention strategies. If a parent reports a bullying incident, be sure to investigate it right away. Try to partner with parents to reduce bullying incidents in your classroom.

8. Prevent Cliques in Your Classroom

One way to prevent cliques in your classroom is to assign students to groups when they have a group project. When you allow kids to pick their own groups, this opens the door to bullying opportunities. It also allows cliques to strengthen, and it creates an opportunity for kids to ostracize other students. But when you select the group, you are ensuring that your students learn to work with those outside their circle of friends. Pre-selected groups also give students the opportunity to learn how to work with different types of people.

9. Be an Advocate for Anti-Bullying

Ensure that your school has effective anti-bullying goals and policies. Talk with other staff members about developing a culture that holds students who bully accountable and doesn't blame the victim. Some people mistakenly believe that victims of bullying bring it on themselves. But bullies must always own the bullying behavior. Encourage everyone to adopt this mindset.

10. Create a Sense of Community

Research indicates that fostering a sense of community in the classroom can lower the number of bullying incidents, improve school climate, and facilitate healing for anyone who has been impacted by bullying. When students feel connected to their school, their peers, and their teacher, they do better. Do what you can to create a sense of community among your students. Create a team atmosphere where everyone feels like they belong and the students learn to support one another.

11. Respond Quickly to Every Bullying Incident

When you spot bullying, address it right away. Avoid normalizing bullying with statements like "kids will be kids." If you minimize bullying, you are sending a message that bullying is OK. When you do that, kids are less likely to feel safe in school and the bullying will likely escalate. Bullies expect people to keep silent about their actions. Surprise them and call them out. Bullying is no longer an effective tool for them if they are disciplined when they engage in it.

12. Speak With the Victim Privately

Create an environment where your students feel safe talking with you. Empathize with how they are feeling and provide ideas for overcoming bullying. Make a commitment to help the victim resolve the issue. Also, don't try to talk to the victim in front of the bully. The victimized student won't be as forthcoming or truthful about what happened with the bully present. Fear of retaliation often keeps victims silent. Make sure you schedule a safe time to talk with the victim when the bully will not be aware of the meeting.

13. Speak With the Bully Separately

When you meet with students that bully others, don't allow them to blame the victim. Instead, encourage them to own their behavior. Address the bullying behavior and administer the appropriate discipline. Then, give them ideas for behaving differently in the future. You may even require them to research bullying and write a report about it. The key is to teach kids who bully others how harmful their behavior is to other people.

14. Develop Appropriate Interventions

Both the victim and the bully need intervention and support. For instance, the victim may need to speak with a guidance counselor to regain self-esteem. The bully also may benefit from speaking with the guidance counselor to learn better ways of communicating. But, do not have the bully and victim get counseling together. Bullying is not the same as a conflict. It is an unbalanced situation where one student has more power than the other and uses that power to intimidate, humiliate, and wound the other student. Peer mediation or other types of group counseling are not effective in bullying situations.

15. Keep a Close Eye on the Situation

Keeping tabs on both the bully and the victim is an important step in making sure the bullying ends. Watch how they interact in your classroom. Keep tabs on them at lunch and pay attention to what happens at recess. Make a few surprise visits to the bus area if you don't have bus duty. Observing how your students interact with each will help you ensure there are no more bullying incidents.

16. Check in With Both the Victim and the Bully

Ask how things are going and if they're having any problems. Give the victim tools for dealing with future bullying incidents and for regaining self-confidence. Encourage the bully to make good choices. Also, don't hold a grudge against students who bully. Give them an opportunity to put the past in the past. With the proper support and encouragement, they can learn to treat others with respect and kindness.

17. Establish Your Classroom as a Safe Place

When you have a bully in your classroom, this impacts the entire class, not just the victim. For many students, the classroom can suddenly feel like an unsafe place—even if they were never targeted by the bully. Not only do they experience fear and emotional distress, but they also may have trouble concentrating. For this reason, you need to re-establish your classroom as a safe place. This may mean going back to what you did during the first days of school when you talked about the importance of respect and kindness.

Taking steps to prevent bullying in your classroom will go a long way in improving your effectiveness as an educator. Not only does bullying distract your students from learning but it also hampers the learning environment, especially if students are anxious about becoming the next target. Take steps early to establish that you will not tolerate any type of bullying. You will have a greater impact on your students when you address bullying consistently and effectively. Turning a blind eye to bullying causes students to lose faith in you as an educator and as a person.