



Defining and Identifying Bullying

Today's educators are proactive in dealing with bullying in their schools and districts. Arguably most challenging tasks they face are 1) to define what is and is not bullying, 2) to use that definition to develop a workable district policy on bullying, and 3) to identify what is and is not a bullying incident.

To facilitate these tasks, educators have called for a clear, concise rubric. *The Bullying Rubric* is based on the following definition of bullying garnered from US Department of Education data and the most current research available.

Bullying occurs when a person or group with greater power causes significant distress for another. The distress can be physical, social, or emotional and may not be intentional. A first incident should be carefully evaluated before being proclaimed a bullying incident.

The Bullying Rubric includes this definition, the four categories of bullying behaviors, criteria for a severity score, and a consequence level. This document uses the term "aggressor" for those with greater power and "subject" for those with lesser power. We find these terms don't label the students and promote more normal social relationships after the incident is resolved. The following pages include: 1) The Bullying Rubric, 2) An explanation of the rubric's elements, and 3) Brief case studies to illustrate how to use the Bullying Rubric.



The Bullying Rubric

**** The letters in brackets [A-H] indicate the letter in the “Explanation” section that describes the previous sentence.**

1. Is this a bullying incident? Check the statements that are true regarding this incident:

_____ The incident involved a person or group with **greater power** (physical, social, or emotional) than the other/s involved. [A]

_____ The incident caused significant **physical, emotional and/or social distress** for the subject. [B]

**** If both are checked, this is a bullying incident; you should continue the Rubric.**

2. What acts of aggression occurred? Check each **type** of aggression that occurred in this incident:

Threat of harm, damage, or release of embarrassing information. 1) _____

Violence, Harassment: Physical, sexual, theft, or property damage. 2) _____

Lie, Accusation, or Rumor: may regard ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexuality. 3) _____

Mocking, Discriminating, or Excluding: May allude to appearance, social group, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. 4) _____

3. How severe was the incident? Check each of the following criteria that are true of this incident:

* It is reasonable to conclude that the aggressor/s **intended to harm** the subject. [C] 5) _____

* This involved **multiple aggressors**. [D] 6) _____

* This is known to be a **repeat incident** involving this/these aggressor/s. [E] 7) _____

* This is known to be a **repeat incident** involving this/these subject/s. [E] 8) _____

* This was a **public incident** others could see and become involved in. [F] 9) _____

* This incident involved **cyberbullying:** Posting or circulating damaging or hurtful information via electronic media. [G] 10) _____

Incident Severity Score: [H] Put the total number of checks in #1-10 **Total** _____

Consequence Level: [I] *Level 1* = 1-2 checks; *Level 2* = 3-4; *Level 3* = 5-7; *Level 4* = 8-10



* (Administrator) Should you call local law enforcement? [J] Yes _____ No _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Date of incident: _____



BOX OUT BULLYING

Explanation:

(The letters of the following paragraphs correlate with the bracketed [] numbers in the rubric)

- A. If the incident was **not** done by one or a group with **greater power** (physical, social, or emotional) than the other, this may be retaliation by the subject for previous bullying incidents. If so, investigate the reason for the aggressor's action and determine if previous bullying occurred. Use this rubric to evaluate previous incidents.
- B. Determining **emotional or social distress** is the most difficult task in this rubric. The subject, the aggressors, and even the adult community often minimize or overlook student's hurtful words and behavior. Subjects fear that showing their pain or fear will worsen the situation. Aggressors carefully hide this behavior from adults to avoid consequences. Adults don't want to believe students would be so aggressive and mean. The adults are responsible to prevent or intervene in bullying incidents. Awareness of the signs of student social-emotional problems is essential: Social withdrawal, decreased academic performance, and changes in mood (agitation, anxiety and/or depression), patterns of behavior (to avoid contact with aggressors), and appearance.
- C. Just because the aggressor did not have the **intent to harm** the subject does NOT mean it wasn't bullying. Bullying is defined as an incident where one or more with greater power cause emotional and/or social distress on another. Sometimes those with greater power tease, criticize, and berate others but are not aware of the harm they are causing the subject. *The behavior is bullying even if the aggressor is unaware of the subjects pain.* In such cases, the aggressor needs Developmental Intervention [H]to enhance awareness of the effect of their actions on others.
- D. Students who commit the aggression are the primary aggressors. Students who are with the aggressor are accomplices to the aggression and thus are secondary aggressors. Both primary and secondary aggressors should be given **developmental interventions** (character lessons on fairness and respect, reflective writing on the incident and their actions, etc.).
- E. A **repeat** incident means it is at least the second time in the previous two years that one of the aggressors and/or subjects have been involved in a bullying incident. The federal definition of bullying says that bullying is repeated or has the potential of being repeated. The point is that a first bullying incident should be dealt with but the administration can use restraint. Over-reacting to a bullying incident decreases the district's effectiveness. A repeat incident is more significant and should have more severe developmental consequences as it shows a pattern of bullying.
- F. Some emotionally distressing incidents are **between two individuals** and not dependent on others witnessing or supporting it. For example, one student is upset with another and impulsively threatens, mocks, or hits the other. Though others may see or hear the incident, the aggressor was not attempting to get others to watch or be involved. This may not be considered a public but rather a private incident. As with intent to harm, this is a judgment call that is best made by more than one adult. *When in doubt,* it is better to believe a student's innocence yet also to give them developmental interventions.



G. **Cyberbullying** is by definition both public and multiple because a) each person receiving the information has the capacity to circulate it to a new group of people and b) no means exist to stop circulating the information once it is released.



H. The **Incident Severity Score** provides an objective measure by which administrators can evaluate an incident and compare it to others.

I. The theft of \$3 may indicate the need to contact authorities in some communities. Each district must establish their protocols in consultation with local law enforcement.

Examples:

Example 1: *(Explanations are italicized in parentheses)*

Sixth-grader Adam was confronted at his locker by eighth-graders Lex, Bono, and Syd who asked if he could loan them some money. When Adam said he had only his lunch money, Lex pulled out Adam’s wallet, took the \$3 in it, and shoved Alex down, yelling, “Don’t ever lie to me again, Nerd, or I’ll bust your face!” Alex now wears a huge backpack with all his books in it to avoid going to his locker.

1. Is this a bullying incident?

Check the statements that are true regarding this incident :

The incident involved a person or group with **greater power** (physical, social, or emotional) than the other/s involved. [A] *(3 older boys to one younger)*

The incident caused significant **emotional and/or social distress** for the subject. [B] *(Alex changed his school routine to avoid them. This indicates distress: Fear that the event will recur.)*

2. What acts of aggression occurred? Check each **type** of aggression that occurred in this incident:

Threat of physical harm, theft, release of embarrassing information, etc. 1)

Violence, Harassment: Physical, sexual, theft, or property damage. 2)

Lie, Accusation, or Rumor: may regard ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexuality. 3) _____

Mocking, Discriminating, or Excluding: May allude to appearance, social group, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality. *(Lex called Adam “Geek.”)* 4)

3. How severe was the incident? Check each of the following criteria that are true of this incident:

* It is reasonable to conclude that the aggressor/s **intended to harm** the subject. [C] 5)

* This involved **multiple aggressors**. *(Lex was primary; Bono and Syd were secondary)* 6)

* This is known to be a **repeat incident** involving this/these aggressor/s. [D] 7) _____

* This is known to be a **repeat incident** involving this/these subject/s. 8) _____



* This was a **public incident** others could see and become involved in. [E] 9) _____

* This incident involved **cyberbullying**: Posting or circulating damaging or hurtful information via electronic media. [F] 10) _____

IncidentSeverityScore: [G] Put the total number of checks in #1-10 **Total** 6

ConsequenceLevel: *Level 1* = 1-2 checks; *Level 2* = 3-4; ***Level 3 = 5-7;*** *Level 4* = 8-10

* (Administrator) Should you call local law enforcement? Yes _____ No _____

Example2: (*Explanations are italicized in parentheses*)

Fourth graders Tricia and Megan had been friends since kindergarten but were in different classrooms. Erin moved into their neighborhood, rode their bus, and was in Megan’s class. One day at recess, Megan didn’t meet Tricia at their usual place but was talking to Erin. When Tricia approached, Megan gave her a hard look and turned away. Erin said to Tricia, “We don’t want to play with someone who is so hateful and mean! Come on, Megan,” and they walked away. Her teacher found Tricia crying in the bathroom. Tricia had no idea what Erin was talking about but later learned that Erin told Megan that Tricia had said Megan was “a hick.”

1. Is this a bullying incident?

Check the statements that are true regarding this incident (The letters in brackets [] indicate the letter in the “Explanation” section that describes the previous sentence):

The incident involved a person or group with **greater power** (physical, social, or emotional) than the other/s involved. [A] (*Two girls excluding one*)

The incident caused significant **emotional and/or social distress** for the subject. [B]

**** If both are checked, this is a bullying incident.**

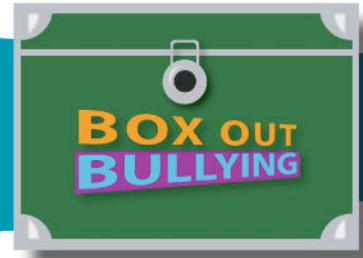
2. What acts of aggression occurred? Check each **type** of aggression that occurred:

- Threat** of physical harm, theft, release of embarrassing information, etc. 1) _____
- Violence, Harassment:** Physical, sexual, theft, or property damage. 2) _____
- Lie, Accusation, or Rumor:** May regard ethnicity, religion, disability or sexuality. 3) _____
- Mocking, Discriminating, or Excluding:** May allude to appearance, social group, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality. 4) _____



3. How severe was the incident? Check each of the following criteria that are true of this incident:

- * It is reasonable to conclude that the aggressor/s **intended to harm** the subject. [C] 5) ____X____
- * This involved **multiple aggressors**. (*Erin was primary; Megan was secondary*) 6) ____X____



- * This is known to be a **repeat incident** involving this/these aggressor/s. [D] 7) _____
- * This is known to be a **repeat incident** involving this/these subject/s. 8) _____
- * This was a **public incident** others could see and become involved in. [E] 9) _____
- * This incident involved **cyberbullying**: Posting or circulating damaging or hurtful information via electronic media. [F] 10) _____

IncidentSeverityScore: [G] Put the total number of checks in #1-10 **Total** _____ 4 _____

ConsequenceLevel: Level 1 = 1-2 checks; **Level 2 = 3-4;** Level 3 = 5-7; Level 4 = 8-10

* (Administrator) Should you call local law enforcement? Yes _____ No x _____

Note: This could be viewed as a private incident since it is Erin's first incident and it was between only three girls. If so, it would have an Incident Severity Score of 3. It could be argued that the Consequence Level should be 1. However, it is a dangerous incident socially and emotionally for not only these students but for the school. This type of behavior can spread, infecting other groups and poisoning a healthy school culture. Thus it should be dealt with carefully and the students should be helped to resolve the conflict and be taught better social skills.

How would this have been different if Erin had posted the lie on her Facebook page?