



School Mental Health Communities of Practice

Micro-Skills to Support K-12 Students Involved with Bullying and Cyberbullying

Signs and Symptoms of Bullying and Cyberbullying:

| <i>Signs and Symptoms of Being Bullied and/or Cyberbullied</i> | | |
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| Unexplainable injuries, such as bruises, scrapes, or cuts | Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry | Difficulty sleeping or having frequent nightmares |
| Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals, binge eating, or coming home hungry because they did not eat lunch at school | Self-destructive behaviors, such as running away from home, harming themselves, engaging in risky behaviors, or talking about suicide | Psychological problems, such as anxiety, sadness, stress, irritability, panic, depression, helplessness, hopelessness, nervousness, and fear |
| Avoidance of certain social situations or certain places | Sudden loss of friends or isolation from peer group | Frequent complaints of headaches or stomachaches |
| Decreased self-esteem | Feeling sick or faking illness | Symptoms of eating disorders |
| Declining grades | Loss of interest in schoolwork | Not wanting to go to school |
| Impaired concentration | Recurrent intrusive memories | Poor academic progress |
| Inability to concentrate or focus on school work | Poor academic performance or achievement | Skipping school and/or dropping out of school |
| Difficulty with relationships | Difficulty making friends | Being less popular at school |
| Lack of trust in relationships | Feeling nervous and unsafe | Suicidal thoughts |
| <i>Signs and Symptoms of Bullying and/or Cyberbullying Others</i> | | |
| Getting into frequent physical fights or verbal altercations | Having a group of friends who engage in bullying others | Engaging in increasingly aggressive behavior |
| Engaging in antisocial and delinquent behaviors | Carrying weapons onto school property | Increasing use of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs |
| Not accepting responsibility for their own actions | Blaming others for their own actions or problems | Having unexplained extra money or new belongings |
| Getting sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently | Being competitive and worrying about their reputation or popularity | Complaining of psychosomatic issues, such as headaches and stomachaches |
| Lack of empathy for others | Symptoms of anxiety | Symptoms of depression |
| <i>Signs and Symptoms of Witnessing Bullying and/or Cyberbullying</i> | | |
| Being more sensitive in interpersonal situations | Increasing use of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs | Feeling powerless to change the situation |
| Feeling guilty for not doing something to help | Being afraid that they may be bullied/cyberbullied next | Diminished empathy for those who are bullied |

Action Steps (Micro-Skills) When You Recognize the Signs and Symptoms:

- **Educate students about how to recognize signs and symptoms in themselves and how to ask for help when they are involved with bullying and cyberbullying:** It is important for students to understand the signs and symptoms associated with bullying and cyberbullying so that they can accurately identify these concerns when they experience them. It is also important for students who experience bullying and cyberbullying to know how to reach out for help.
 - Use universal education approaches (e.g., Tier 1) to educate groups of students about the general signs and symptoms associated with bullying and cyberbullying. These general approaches, which should be developmentally appropriate to the age/grade of the students, can occur in a general education class setting (typically facilitated by a teacher or co-facilitated by a teacher and school-based mental health professional) or in specialized social-emotional-learning sessions (typically facilitated by a school-based mental health professional). Students should be given general information about who to go to and how to receive help, should they need it.
 - Use targeted education approaches (e.g., Tier 2) to educate students at risk of being involved with bullying and cyberbullying. Typically, this would entail small group sessions led by a school-based mental health professional and would include more detailed information about signs and symptoms, along with specific coping strategies that students could use to prevent and/or reduce concerns. Students should be given specific information about who to go to and how to receive help, should they need it.
 - Use individualized education approaches (e.g., Tier 3) to educate students who are known to be involved with bullying and cyberbullying. Typically, this would occur through individual counseling sessions provided by a school-based mental health professional and would include student-specific information about signs and symptoms, along with student-specific strategies to mitigate those concerns. Students should be given information about additional sources of help (e.g., crisis lines, community-based providers) in case they need support at a time that their school-based mental health professional is not available. Teachers and school-based mental health professionals should regularly consult about how to best support students involved with bullying and cyberbullying.
- **Intervene when students bully/cyberbully others:**
 - If you are a direct witness, immediately stop the bullying or cyberbullying. If necessary, stand between the student who is being bullied and the student who is bullying to block contact between them. For cyberbullying, remove access to the electronic means if it is happening during school.
 - Enforce the school's rules against bullying and cyberbullying by calmly, but firmly, explaining that the behavior you witnessed is unacceptable and you will



not allow it to happen.

- Do not allow students involved to 'argue their case' about why this situation was or was not bullying/cyberbullying or why their behavior was justified. The immediate goal is to stop the problematic behavior, and not to gather all the facts related to the situation. That can happen at a later time.
- Impose immediate consequences for the student who was bullying or cyberbullying. Schools should develop a rubric of consequences for breaking the anti-bullying rules so that all school personnel know what consequences to use.
- Do not use conflict resolution or mediation strategies. The student who has been bullied/cyberbullied may be further traumatized if forced to attend a 'meeting' with the student who is bullying/cyberbullying.
- **Support students who are bullied/cyberbullied:**
 - Support students who are being bullied or cyberbullied in ways that allows them to regain self-control, to 'save face', and to feel supported and safe from retaliation. Once the immediate threat of bullying or cyberbullying has passed, offer support in private to the students who have been bullied/cyberbullied.
 - Talk with the student about what is going on, explaining that the information will be confidential and will not be shared with the student who is bullying or cyberbullying.
 - Reinforce that what happened is not the student's fault, and that you are sorry that it occurred. Reinforce that the student is brave for telling you, and that you are there to provide support. Ask what the student needs to feel safe, and follow through on creating a safety plan to provide that support to the student.
 - Once a safety plan has been developed, communicate the details of that plan to other school staff to ensure that everyone understands how to best support the student who has been bullied or cyberbullied.
 - Encourage the student to report any further incidents of bullying or cyberbullying and to identify trusted adults both at school and at home that the student can talk to should bullying or cyberbullying happen again.
 - Encourage the student to develop a close network of friends for support.
 - Involve the student's parents and offer them concrete ways that they can be supportive to their child. Parents can talk with their children about bullying and cyberbullying; encourage positive values, attitudes, and beliefs about being a good person; and identify strengths in their children that they can use to stand up to bullying/cyberbullying.
 - Make any necessary referrals to ensure that the student who has been bullied or cyberbullied receives the support needed (e.g., mental health support).
 - Most importantly, *follow-up* and let the student know that you are offering your support in the long-term. Checking in regularly with the student will allow you to monitor whether or not the bullying/cyberbullying has ended.



- **Ensure that students who witness bullying and cyberbullying have the skills and knowledge to be able to help others:**
 - Remind witnesses that they have a responsibility to intervene appropriately whenever they observe bullying or cyberbullying by being a supportive friend or ally to the student who is being bullied/cyberbullied, telling the person who is bullying/cyberbullying to stop, and/or telling a trusted adult.
 - If anyone was observed trying to intervene, praise them for their efforts. This positively reinforces the student who helped, while also demonstrating to others how they could intervene to help in the future.
 - For those who did not act, provide them with possible strategies for the future (e.g., “Maybe you weren’t sure what to do. Next time, tell the person to stop or get an adult to help if you feel you can’t work together to handle the situation”).
- **Use micro-skills daily in the class and the school settings to support students who are involved in bullying and cyberbullying:** Students who are involved in bullying and cyberbullying can benefit from being in a supportive class and school environment.
 - Clearly state that there are school rules against bullying and cyberbullying, and that students are expected to treat everyone (including those who not their friends) with dignity and respect.
 - Encourage students to refuse to participate in any aspect of bullying or cyberbullying. It is important for students who witness bullying or cyberbullying to understand that seemingly innocent behaviors (e.g., watching the bullying, laughing when someone bullies someone else) contributes to the problem.
 - Reinforce prosocial, positive behaviors. When students engage in behavior that helps to prevent or reduce bullying and cyberbullying, it is important to acknowledge and praise those actions.
 - Increase supervision of students in ‘hotspots’ for bullying and cyberbullying. Whenever possible, look for patterns in reported bullying and cyberbullying behavior and determine where it is happening most often. Increase the amount of adult supervision in those areas.
 - Encourage students who are bullied/cyberbullied and students who know that someone else is being bullied/cyberbullied to tell a trusted adult. It may be important to explain the difference between “tattling/snitching” (which is done to get the person engaging in bullying behavior into trouble) versus “telling” (which is done to help protect the person being harmed).
 - Seek immediate professional help if anyone’s safety is at risk (e.g., law enforcement, medical help, and/or mental health professionals).
- **Advocate for students to visit a mental health professional, if needed:** If symptoms become overwhelming, it may be important for students to visit a mental health professional to help alleviate their symptoms and identify coping strategies that work for them. School professionals can share referral information with students and their families about options for mental health treatment at school or in the local community.