



*But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.  
—Genesis 37:4*

## Introduction

Bullying is not a new phenomenon or reality in our schools, homes, and communities. As you begin this study, you can most likely recall a specific incident during your childhood. Within minutes most adults can feel freshly an embarrassing, humiliating, frightening, or painful incident from middle school or high school. No one has avoided being singled out, teased, threatened, or made to feel powerless. Take a minute, even if it's uncomfortable, to remember an experience of bullying from your past...

- What happened?
- How did you feel?
- What was the name of the person involved? How would you feel if you saw that person today?

As you lead this session and the sessions to come, don't lose touch with this memory and the feelings that accompany it. Remember how strong and deep these emotions run, deep enough to be recalled in great detail ten, twenty, even fifty years later.

The goal for this session is to provide a clear definition of *bullying* and help youth see how common and pervasive it is. If you were to begin the session by simply asking the class to define *bullying*, they might struggle to give a clear and concise definition. That is why this and all sessions begin with a non-threatening game, personal reflection (in journals), and a brief Scripture study. Once youth can provide examples of bullying, they can understand how their personal experiences fit within the definition.

Be aware that bullies may not recognize themselves as bullies. Even if their behavior is clear to teachers, authorities, or the persons whom

they are bullying, they may respond by saying, "I was just kidding," or "She should have known it was just a joke," or "That's nothing compared to how my dad treats me."

Those being bullied may also be reticent to admit that they are victims and feel very alone. Since bullies have already singled them out, they may be unwilling to admit further weakness, or they may be coping for now but need strategies to break the destructive cycle in which they find themselves.

Before you begin the session, use the following activity to create a safe and respectful environment where youth feel comfortable talking about what they see in their schools or have experienced themselves.

### A Word About Ground Rules

If your group does not already have a Group Covenant or an established set of ground rules for respectful conversation, take time in the opening session (approximately 15 minutes) to develop this covenant.

**You will need** a large sheet of paper and marker.

1. Explain that, because they will be discussing sensitive issues, the group should agree on some ground rules.

- Ask them to establish ground rules for their group, ones they all will agree to follow. List the ground rules on a large sheet of paper. Ask the participants for clarification, when needed, to be sure that everyone understands all the ideas.
- Suggest any of the recommended ground rules (below) that the youth didn't offer. They are important for establishing safe space.

**Respect:** Give undivided attention to the person who has the floor (permission to speak).

**Confidentiality:** What we talk about in this group will remain in this group.

**Openness:** We will be as open and honest as possible without



disclosing others' (family, neighbors, or friends) personal or private issues. It is OK to discuss situations, but we won't use names or other ID. For example, we won't say, "My older brother . . ." Instead we will say, "I know someone who . . ."

**Right to pass:** It is always OK to pass (meaning "I'd rather not" or "I don't want to answer").

**Nonjudgmental approach:** We can disagree with another person's point of view without putting down that person.

**Taking care to claim our opinions:** We will speak our opinions using the first person and avoid using "you." For example, "I think that kindness is important," instead of "You are just mean."

**Sensitivity to diversity:** We will remember that people in the group may differ in cultural or economic background, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity or gender expression and will be careful about making insensitive or careless remarks about these and all personal variances.

**Have a good time:** It is OK to have a good time. Creating a safe space is about coming together as a community, being mutually supportive, and enjoying one another's qualities.

2. Keep your list of ground rules posted prominently throughout all the activity sessions dealing with safe space. Refer to the ground rules if someone is not adhering to them and remind everyone of their agreement to follow the rules. Eventually the participants will begin to remind one another of the rules if disrespectful or disruptive behavior occurs.

### From the Experts

Dr. Dan Olweus is generally recognized as a pioneer and founding father of research on bully/victim problems and as a world-leading expert in this area both by the research community and by society at large. He has conducted research and intervention programs for over thirty years in the area of bully/victim problems in school-age children and youth.

Dr. Olweus' definition of *bullying* is:

**"A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself."**

He goes on to say that bullying has key characteristics. Details such as patterns and repetition of behavior; unwanted, negative actions done with malice; and outward experiences of power struggles all define bullying.

Dr. Olweus' website clarifies the many forms of bullying by highlighting that it is not always physical harm. Bullying can be verbal—both directly cruel comments and the spreading of lies, non-action oriented—purposeful isolation of an individual, or action based through stealing or damaging property and forced behavior to avoid more acute bullying. Bullying has many motivations that are societal in nature but personal in result. Racial and sexual bullying are common as is cyber bullying, a new and growing method of destructive, painful, manipulative bullying.

To a great extent, much of what Dr. Olweus states in his research, training materials, and website seems to be common sense. However, if we look at just one factor, we may brush it aside as one person making a mountain out of a molehill. All of these factors, motivations, characteristics, and methods are bullying. You are encouraged to become more educated about bullying itself and professional methods of response.

It is often beyond the scope of professional duty, training, or appropriate boundaries for you as a youth worker to handle all of the cases that may present themselves during this study or at another time in your ministry. There will be times a youth in your care needs professional help. When that time comes, seek the help in your community; but before then, become aware of the resources at your disposal. For more on the work of Dr. Olweus and the professional resources he provides, visit the website <http://www.olweus.org/public/bullying.page>.





## In This Session

Youth should come away from this session with . . .

- a clear definition of bullying;
- an understanding that bullying touches a large cross section of youth;
- a firm belief that God’s desire is that we love ourselves and one another.

## Getting Ready

As you prepare for this session, read the article on pages 8–11. Additional Scripture references and resources are listed on pages 79–80 and at [www.burst.abingdonyouth.com](http://www.burst.abingdonyouth.com). Review the activities and gather or prepare needed supplies.

In each session you’ll find an activity called “Going Deeper.” This is an **optional** activity put in place to challenge and encourage those youth who are mature enough and willing to, well, go deeper. It will fall at slightly different times in each session, depending on the appropriate place to ask youth to face the more difficult aspects of that week’s conversation. The lessons themselves are written to last approximately an hour without counting the time for “Going Deeper.” Be sure to make allowances for that period of time when preparing your lesson if you expect to use it any particular week or every week.

BURST: BULLIES AND MEAN GIRLS is written for use by all age levels in youth ministry. And while it is left to your discretion, “Going Deeper” is targeted at senior high youth who may have more experiences from which to draw emotion and example, or who may be better capable of appreciating the importance of listening with compassion and respecting rules of confidentiality.

**Getting Ready:** Read the article on pages 8–11. Also review the following activities and gather or prepare needed supplies.

Before beginning this session, you may choose to take some time to prepare a group covenant regarding behavior during and between sessions. A detailed explanation is on pages 9 and 10. Again, this activity may take some extra time, but is important to the sense of community necessary for topics such as those studied in this book.

ACTIVITIES	SUPPLIES
🌀 Playing Around (5–8 minutes)	
🌀 Let Me Tell You (12–15 minutes) Preparation: Preview the movie clip you chose.	Journals, a box or crate to store journals, pens or pencils, movie clip, DVD player, TV
🌀 An Age Old Story (7–10 minutes)	Bible
🌀 The Way It Is (5–8 minutes)	
🌀 Another Way (8–10 minutes) Preparation: Write on a large sheet of paper the definition of bullying on page 18 and post in the meeting space.	Large sheet of paper, markers
🌀 Going Deeper (10–12 minutes) Preparation: Draw a copy of the chart on page 18.	Large sheets of paper, markers, paper, pens or pencils
🌀 Into the World (7–12 minutes)	Bible, markers, markerboard, small pieces of paper





### Playing Around

Begin this session by playing the children’s playground game, Red Rover, Red Rover.

Divide the group into two teams and instruct each team to form a line and hold hands (persons may not link elbows, only hands). The two teams should face each other across a large room, gym, or outside space. Also, linked hands cannot be used to “clothesline” an opponent by stopping them neck high.

The first team decides who they want to come over to their side and calls out, “Red Rover, Red Rover, send (*name of person on opposing team*) right over.” The person named then runs across and tries to break through the opposing team’s line.

- If the person breaks through, then she gets to choose one person to take back to her team.
- If the person fails to break through, then he must stay with that team.
- Teams continue to alternate calling until one team has captured everyone from the opposing team or until a designated time period has elapsed. The team with the most players wins.

When the game is finished, gather all the youth together and ask the following questions:

1. What are the strategies to winning this game? (*Choose the smallest and the weakest and try to break through the weakest point of the line.*)
2. What were you thinking when the other team was talking about who they would choose? (*Please, don’t pick me. Yeah, I dare you to pick me. They will never pick me.*)
3. When does life feel like two teams competing against each other?
4. How do people decide who they want on their “team”?

### Let Me Tell You

Give each youth a journal. Explain that there is great value in telling our stories. It helps us to remember certain experiences, to reflect on them after the fact, and to recognize patterns in our behavior or in others’ behavior. Even if youth have never written in a journal, encourage them to try. They may even want to draw pictures to help tell their stories. Tell them they do not need to write complete sentences or worry about spelling and grammar.

**You will need**  
journals, a box or crate to store the journals, pens or pencils, movie clip, DVD player, and TV.

Assure youth that their journals will remain with you during the next six weeks and that no one will read them. At certain points during the study, they may be invited to share with one other person or to give examples to the group, but only as they feel comfortable.

Ask youth to turn to the first page of their journals. Ask each person to write his or her name at the top of the page and to draw four columns on the page and label them: “Session,” “Please Read,” “Do NOT Read,” and “Call Me.” Explain that, after each session, the student should check the column “Please Read” OR “Do NOT Read” or “Call Me.” The leader will check ONLY the first page after each session and read only if the student wants him or her to read.

Show the crate or box that you have prepared to hold their journals. Explain that, after each session, everyone will place his or her journal in the box, and you will keep the box in a safe place until the next meeting. Ask if there are questions about the journals, then watch one of the following movie clips that you have already previewed.

- *The Grinch* (Scene 6—31:14)
- *Matilda* (from 5:00–13:52; short scene is 6:30–11:10)

Do not spend too much time explaining or debriefing the scene. Simply ask: “Who is/are the bullies? Who is being bullied?”

Now ask each person to write about recent incidents of bullying in his or her home, neighborhood, or school, using the questions: “When have you been bullied? (Include details of whom, where, what, and when.) When have you been the bully?”





### An Age Old Story

Read **Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28** as an impromptu drama. Choose students to act as Jacob (the father), Joseph, the brothers (Rueben, Judah and others), man at Shechem, Midianite traders. Read the passage slowly, allowing time for the students to act out the scene.

You will need a Bible.

Say: "From the beginning of time, persons have been bullied. And often it starts within our own families—brothers, sisters, and parents all trying to figure out how to live together." Ask:

- Who is the bully—Joseph or his brothers?
- How does Jacob make the situation better or worse?
- Why do the brothers turn on Joseph?
- Why do you think Rueben and Judah had second thoughts?
- Does this story remind you of your own family? How?

**Optional:** Ask students to read **Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28** again, silently. Ask each student to choose one character to whom he or she can relate—Joseph, older brother, Reuben or Judah, or the silent brothers—and write a letter to that person in his or her journal, starting with, "I know how you feel . . ."

### Option for Older Youth

Assign students to groups of four or five. Hand out paper and pens and ask groups to draw flow charts of the actions in today's Scripture.

- Where does the bullying begin?
- How does it move through the family?
- Where does it end? will it end?

### The Way It Is

Ask all the students to arrange their chairs in a circle. Explain that you will be reading statements that begin with "Stand up if . . .," and if they have experienced the action named, then they should stand up in their seats. No one will be asked to explain or give examples. Then everyone will sit down and you will read the next statement.

*Note:* Assure the group that no one is required to stand. If a particular statement makes someone uncomfortable, he or she does not need to stand. But encourage students to be as honest as they can be in their responses.

Stand up if . . .

- you have been called a name
- you have been teased about your body
- you wonder who are your real friends
- you are afraid of someone at home or at school
- you have been hit, kicked, or spit on
- you have had an embarrassing picture shared via mobile phone or Facebook
- you have been picked on because of your race
- you have had possessions taken from you
- you have been left out or excluded by friends
- you have been the subject of rumor or gossip
- you have ever received an anonymous and mean e-mail
- you have been embarrassed at school

When everyone is seated again, lead a discussion using the following questions:

- Are you surprised by how many people stood? or didn't stand?
- How does it make you feel to see others stand with you?
- How does it feel to see your friends stand?

Remind the group of the covenant agreed upon earlier in the session and commit not to do these things to one another during the group time.





### Another Way

Write Dr. Dan Olweus' definition of *bullying* on a large sheet of paper or markerboard:

**“A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself.”**

**You will need** a large sheet of paper and markers.

Ask the group if they have questions about the definition. Make sure everyone understands the meaning of *bullying*. If the group is in agreement, you may alter the definition.

Now read each of the statements again from the previous activity. Ask the class to vote on whether or not they consider each example to be bullying. If not, why not? Conclude by pointing out how each example is indeed an example of bullying.

### Going Deeper

To further help youth understand the definition and scope of *bullying*, draw a chart similar to the one below on a markerboard.

	Verbal	Non-Verbal
Threat of Action		
Action		

As you discuss each statement from the previous activity, write a short description in the appropriate space. For example, “name calling” would be VERBAL and ACTION. “Being excluded” by friends could be NON-VERBAL ACTION. Ask for descriptions to help you list them in the correct space.

**You will need** a markerboard, markers, writing paper, large sheet of paper, and pens or pencils.

When you have finished, ask youth to talk about which type of bullying is the most common and which is the most hurtful. Ask how bullying can cause people to change.

Finally, ask the youth to describe a bully-free environment. Hand out paper and ask them to draw two columns labeled “Looks Like” and “Feels Like.” Give each student a few minutes to brainstorm what a bully-free environment would look and feel like to him or her, then list his or her ideas on the chart.

Ask for volunteers to call out one or two items from their lists, while you write them on another large sheet of paper. When you have finished, ask the youth to grade their schools or your youth group: Is it bully free? Would it receive an A+ or F, or somewhere in between?

### Into the World

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 12:28-31**. Say, “These are the two greatest commandments and possibly the most difficult to live out.”

**You will need** a Bible, markers, markerboard, and small pieces of paper.

Draw a cross inside a heart on a markerboard, then draw a larger heart around the first. Say: “Christ is at the center and is the source of our love—allowing us to love ourselves. Only then can we truly love others.” Ask:

- What does a person act like who does not love him or herself?
- How might that person be vulnerable to bullies or become a bully?

**Optional:** If you have time, provide mirrors (several people might share a large mirror, or hand out small pocket mirrors for everyone). Ask youth to look at themselves in the mirrors and try to see themselves as God sees them—beautiful, talented, and unique. Then ask youth to pair up and tell each other what he or she saw in the mirror, asking: “Do you love yourself? Why or why not?”

Ask each person to write the words from **Mark 12:31** on a small piece of paper and decorate it. Encourage youth to post papers on a mirror in their homes or in their school lockers. As they get ready for school or check their lockers between classes, the verses will remind them to love themselves and to love one another.

