

# The Big, Bad "B" Word

## Study and Discussion Guide

1. Reflect on your time as a staff member at your current school. If you have worked at any other schools throughout your career, reflect on that time as well. Also, reflect on your time as a student - elementary, middle, and high school. How have the terms "bully" and "bullying" changed over time and in those various environments?
2. How is bullying viewed by your staff, students, and parents, respectively? Are there any differences or is everyone on the same page?
3. Today, so many are experiencing something called "bully fatigue." Meaning, they are sick and tired of EVERYTHING being thrown under the umbrella of bullying. Things as insignificant as a mean face and as horrific as physically disabling someone with violence are often all thrown under the "bully umbrella." I heard one elementary teacher tell her students that bullying behavior included anything from a mean look to the holocaust. To what degree have you experienced the overuse, misuse, or abuse of the word "bully" or "bullying" in your school?
4. Review the history of the word "bully" (pages 13-15). What, if anything, surprised you?
5. Look at the cycle of aggression on page 17. When someone is mean to us, the more upset we get. The more upset we get, the more fun they have. The more fun they have, the more they do it. Over and over. For so long we've been trying to stop the cycle at the mean behavior. Noble as those efforts have been, the truth is, there will always be mean people and mean behaviors. We've been missing one aspect that is just as, if not more important. Where should we focus our efforts in the cycle of aggression? Why?
6. Almost every law and policy regarding bullying says that there have to be 3 criteria present in order for something to be considered bullying. How can each of these points be considered subjective, making it very difficult to prove that a certain behavior actually falls under the legal definition of bullying (pages 31-32)?
  1. Imbalance of power
  2. Intent to cause harm
  3. Repeated over time
7. If we're honest, very few conflicts are clear cut, black and white, aggressor vs victim. If we follow the trail of conflict, we often find that things have been "back and forth," and the one that breaks first gets the label as victim, leaving the other person, by default, with the label of malicious, evil, bully. In fact, the very act of calling a student a "bully" is name-calling - a behavior that many consider bullying. Notice the hypocrisy? What are some better ways to view conflicts between students?

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8. As time has progressed, we're finding that many of the traditionally recommended strategies to handle mean behavior don't work. Discuss each of these traditional methods and why they could cause things to get worse, rather than better.
  1. Walk away
  2. Ignore it
  3. Say "STOP" in a firm voice
  4. Report it/Tell an adult
  5. Fight back
  6. Bystanders
9. The history of the "Sticks and Stones" saying is crucial (pages 86-88). That saying and philosophy is under incredible attack these days. However, many believe that it's one of the greatest emotional and mental health lessons ever handed down. If we're honest, we've all been hurt by someone else's mean words or behavior. How can the power behind a simple saying like "Sticks and Stones" impact and protect the minds and hearts of students today?
10. Review the ABC of emotions (pages 85-86). Almost everyone falls into the trap of blaming their feelings on the things that happen to them. We all do it. We say things like: "That person upset me." "That thing you said really made mad." "That event made me happy." But the truth is, it's not what happens to us that determines how we feel. It's what we think about what happens to us - how we process it - that determines how we feel. In other words, our thoughts control our feelings. Or, as I tell the younger grades, in order for someone to break your heart, they have to go through your brain. How can you start to incorporate this into your school's policies and philosophies regarding mean behavior?
11. One chat session at an elementary school revealed to me that the real meaning of the Golden Rule has been forgotten. Some people think it means "be nice to nice people." Or, "I'll be nice to them if they're nice to me." That's not it. What's the difference between reciprocity and the Golden Rule? Why is the Golden Rule the superior way to handle mean people?
12. Review pages 103-104. What would be an effective strategy for your school to use when helping targets of mean behavior?
13. The word "discipline" comes from the word "disciple." Generally thought to be a religious term, "disciple" in its now form simply means student. In its verb form it means "to teach." While a negative consequence is often appropriate, people care about how they are disciplined. Considering the fact that many students who act mean and aggressively toward others often have a reason or an underlying issue behind their actions, how can you use

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discipline, in its true meaning, and restorative practices to deliver an appropriate consequence while still providing the student an opportunity to get the help they need to deal with the underlying reasons behind their behavior?

14. After working with a school in Kansas, I was packing to leave when I saw the counselor walking down the hall, ripping posters off the wall. She said that all of the posters had the word "bully" or "bullying" on them. Even though they were messages against the behavior, she said that she didn't want that word in the school's vocabulary anymore. Another school in North Dakota has changed the culture of their school by replacing the word "bullying" with using specific language about the behaviors that are taking place. Granted, the change took nearly 2 years to filter through the staff, students, and parents, but it's happening! The result? Less angry emails, less angry phone calls, less confusion, less misuse, overuse and abuse of that big, bad "B" word. If your campus is tired of that word, what can you do to start moving in the right direction?
  
15. Kindness programs are wonderful. Nearly every school in the country has some sort of kindness program. However, very few give any attention to the other side of the equation: resilience. What can your school do in order to give just as much attention to resilience education as you do to kindness education? What would be the benefits of doing so?