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# BYSTANDER REVOLUTION

## RECOMMENDED LESSON

### Verbal Bullying

This lesson outlines one simple way to integrate the Bystander Revolution Verbal Bullying video playlist and discussion questions into a middle school classroom setting.

**Grade Level:**  
Middle School

**Estimated Time:**  
45 minutes

**Common Core  
ELA Standards  
Grades 6–8:**  
R.7, SL.1.B,  
SL.1.C, SL.1.D,  
SL.2, SL.3, SL.5,  
W.2.A, W.2.B,  
W.2.C, W.2.D,  
W.2.E, W.2.F,  
W.3, W.4

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## OVERVIEW

Students will discuss what verbal bullying is, along with suggestions for actions they can take when they witness or experience it. Students will watch videos with personal advice from celebrities and students, share their own experiences, and debate the merits of different prevention, intervention, and coping strategies. The lesson concludes with an opportunity for the educator to discuss resources available to students at the school, and present an optional homework assignment.

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Define the term “verbal bullying.”
- Summarize solutions heard from celebrities and students.
- Compare and contrast different prevention, intervention, and coping strategies.
- Apply the strategies to help themselves and others when they encounter verbal bullying.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Computer & internet access
- LCD projector (optional)
- [Verbal Bullying video playlist](#)
- Pens/pencils & paper

## PREPARATION

- First, watch the Verbal Bullying video playlist.
- Familiarize yourself with the definition of verbal bullying.
- Copy the **Graphic Organizer** (pg.7), one for each student.

## PROCEDURE

### Introduction

*(5 minutes)*

**Introduce the topic by asking students the following questions:**

- What comes to mind when you hear the words “verbal bullying”?
- What sorts of things might people verbally bully others about?
- How does verbal bullying differ from other types of bullying?

Then explain to students that the definition of verbal bullying is: *using words with the intent to harm or gain power over another person, e.g., hurtful name-calling, malicious teasing, insults, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, inappropriate sexual comments, and other verbal attacks.*

### KEY QUESTION

How can students prevent verbal bullying and lessen its effects?

### DEFINITION

**Verbal bullying is:** using words with the intent to harm or gain power over another person, e.g., hurtful name-calling, malicious teasing, insults, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, inappropriate sexual comments, and other verbal attacks.

## Video Viewing

(15 minutes)

Introduce the video playlist by explaining to students that they are about to watch 8 short, unscripted videos from celebrities and students talking about their personal experiences with cyberbullying. Instruct students to keep in mind any incidences of cyberbullying they have experienced and to consider whether the solutions presented in the videos would work in those situations. Provide students with the **Graphic Organizer** to keep track of their reactions. Then show the following 10-minute **playlist**.



## FEATURED SOLUTION

### INTERRUPT BULLYING

If it feels safe to do so, consider saying something when you see bullying. Even one small comment is better than silence. If you can't speak up, you can always support the person who was bullied afterward.

## Discussion

(15 minutes)

Below are some sample questions you might use to lead a conversation, as time permits. Each sample question has several possible follow-up questions that may be useful in the discussion.

### 1. Why do some people use slurs or derogatory words?

- Could it be to gain power over other people?
- Do you think they sometimes don't recognize how harmful or offensive their words are?
- Could it be that sometimes people speak without thinking about the meaning of their words?
- Could it be a sign of immaturity, ignorance, or carelessness?
- Could it be because they think it's funny?
- Might they have been insulted or harassed themselves by others in the past? If so, might they view bullying others as a way of avoiding the pain of that role?

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## 2. Why is it important to call people out for using language you believe is hurtful?

- Do you think allowing insensitive words to go unchecked can perpetuate stereotypes?
- Do you think people sometimes underestimate the power of their words, both to harm and to help others?
- Do you think some people aren't even aware that certain words are offensive?

## 3. What are some things you can say to someone who verbally bullies others or uses offensive language, like racist or homophobic slurs?

- Can you point out that what they said wasn't acceptable or funny?
- Can asking someone to reflect on their words, and why they said them, be an effective strategy?
- Can you think of any tactics that would make them more likely to listen?

## 4. Why does Michael J. Fox think it's important to go up to someone after they've been bullied?

- Is it because people who are bullied often feel alone? Why or why not?
- How could even a small gesture of sympathy make someone feel supported?
- Should you wait for someone to come talk to you about how they feel, or should you ask them first? Why?

## 5. What are examples of things you can say to someone after they've been verbally bullied?

- Could you assure them that the insults aren't true?
- Can you compliment them to remind them of their positive qualities?
- Do you think it could help if you said something simple like, "I'm sorry that happened," "you didn't deserve that," or "I think you're awesome"?
- Is there anything you think you shouldn't say?

## 6. Do you agree with Frank that you should try to ignore verbal attacks directed at you?

- When is it right to ignore verbal bullying?
- How can it help to show those bullying you that their words don't have an impact on you?
- Is it ever a good idea to try to stop the bullying by standing up for your self? When is it not a good idea?

## 7. Is it easier for the target of bullying or bystanders to stop verbal abuse? Why?

- Do you think a bystander can positively impact the situation by trying to help the person being bullied?
- Do you believe one bystander can impact the situation?

### SUGGESTED STRATEGY

Tell someone who has been bullied that you see what's happening to them and feel bad about it. Help them see that they don't deserve the way they are being treated.

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- Should someone ever attack the person bullying by bullying back?  
Could that make things worse?

**8. How can having a positive self-image reduce the power of negative words?**

- Do you think what other people say about you is less consequential when you're comfortable with who you are?
- Can embracing and loving the things that make you unique help you brush off negative comments?
- Why might it be an advantage to be different from everyone else?

**9. Can you give me an example of how you might prevent verbal bullying from happening in the first place?**

- Can consistently speaking up when you hear something you disagree with make a difference?
- Do you think positive energy can spread to others and impact their behavior?
- Do you think it can help to make a personal effort to be less judgmental and more openly positive?
- Can one person promote a culture that doesn't accept hateful language? How?

**SUGGESTED STRATEGY**

Positivity is contagious. Compliment people in your friend group more, and try to focus the conversation on positive things like what you're excited about in the coming weeks, or something really awesome one of your friends did.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENT

*(5 minutes)*

Ask students to imagine that they go to the same school as Frank (video #2) and are bystanders in the group of kids shouting racist slurs at Frank and his friend. Ask them to write a paragraph about what they would do in that situation if their friends were verbally bullying someone else. If time permits, ask students to share what they've written with the class.

## CLOSING

*(5 minutes)*

Let students know that if they are being bullied or know someone else who is, there are free, anonymous resources listed on [bystanderrevolution.org/help](https://bystanderrevolution.org/help). If there are resources available within your school, like a guidance counselor or social worker, you can make students aware of those options as well. You should also emphasize that if students are in danger or are witnessing an emergency, they should tell a teacher or guidance counselor, or call 911.

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## OPTIONAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. Watch a video and reflect in writing

Have students visit [bystanderrevolution.org](http://bystanderrevolution.org) and watch another video of their choosing. Ask students to write a letter to the person in the video, telling them why they agree or disagree with the advice presented. Ask them to tell the person how they might apply what was said to their own life.

### 2. The Weekly Stand

The Weekly Stand is a list of 52 simple, fun, transformative actions bystanders can take to reduce bullying and improve school culture. Each action contains helpful background information, suggested strategies and phrases to use, and a video for inspiration.

Have students go to [bystanderrevolution.org/weekly](http://bystanderrevolution.org/weekly), choose one of the actions to complete, and then turn in proof that they did it through some creative means: a photo, a screenshot, a short video, an essay, or even a comic strip.

### ABOUT BYSTANDER REVOLUTION

Bystander Revolution is an online resource offering practical, crowdsourced advice about simple things individuals can do to take the power out of bullying.

As you watch these videos keep in mind any experiences you have had with verbal bullying. Consider whether the solutions presented in the videos would have worked in those situations. Use the notes column to keep track of comments, questions, or thoughts you may have.

VIDEO	NAME	NOTES
1 	<b>It Only Takes One</b>	
2 	<b>Frank</b>	
3 	<b>Akon</b>	
4 	<b>Michael J. Fox</b>	
5 	<b>Cindy</b>	
6 	<b>Danica Patrick</b>	
7 	<b>Jaquoi</b>	
8 	<b>Kenny Ortega</b>	