

# Identity-Based Bullying

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45–60 Minutes	Writing, Speaking & Listening, Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, Responsible Decision-Making
MS	HS		



## Web Related Connections

### LESSON PLANS

[Words That Can Hurt, Help and Heal](#)

[Twins, Digital Space and Cyberbullying](#)

### OTHER RESOURCES

[Important Books to Explore Bullying and Ally Behavior](#)

[What Bullying Is and Is Not](#)

[6 Ways to Act as an Ally](#)

### Key Words

(See ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).)

aggressor  
ally  
bullying  
bystander  
gender  
identity  
name-calling  
nationality  
prejudice  
race  
religion  
stereotype  
target

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Bullying is a major problem in our schools. When it targets aspects of a person's identity, it is called identity-based bullying, and it may include bias about appearance, race, culture, gender and gender expression, language, religion, socioeconomic status, disability and sexual orientation. According to the Cyberbullying Research Center (Patchin & Hinduja, 2020), 49.8% of tweens (9 to 12 years old) said they experienced bullying at school and 14.5% of tweens shared they experienced bullying online. The same study reveals that about two-thirds of tweens are willing to step in to defend, support, or otherwise assist those who are bullied at school and online when they see it.

This elementary/middle school lesson will help students define and understand identity-based bullying, reflect on experiences they have had and analyze scenarios and come up with potential solutions.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify important aspects of identity.
- Students will be able to define bullying and identity-based bullying.
- Students will understand the connection between identity and bullying.
- Students will share examples of identity-based bullying.
- Students will explore how to deal with identity-based bullying by reading, writing and discussing scenarios.

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- [Roles in Bullying Incidents](#) (for teacher)
- [Scenario Worksheets #1–5](#) (one per group)
- Chart paper and markers

## CLASSROOM GUIDELINES

**If you have** already set up classroom guidelines, review them. Because this lesson is about prejudice, identity and bullying, it is particularly important to go over terminology and remind students not to engage in stereotyping and name-calling, to listen well and to respect other points of view.

**If you do not** already have classroom guidelines, write "Classroom Guidelines" on a sheet of chart paper and ask students to suggest behaviors and attitudes

that will help everyone feel safe and that will promote a respectful discussion. Allow a few minutes for brainstorming and make sure the following guidelines are on the list:

- Respect each other's points of view.
- Listen to others.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Participate as much as you can (to your level of comfort) and ask questions.
- Respect confidentiality (don't share what others have shared).
- Be open to new ideas.
- Share air time so that everyone who wants to speak has an opportunity to do so.

## PROCEDURES

### Warm-Up Activity: The Great Wind Blows

1. Place all the chairs in a circle in the middle of the room and invite all students to sit in a chair in the circle. Explain to students that they are going to do an activity called "The Great Wind Blows," and the goal is for them to discover some of the differences between them and the similarities they share.
2. Explain that one person will stand in the center of the circle and call out a sentence that begins with, "A great wind blows for everyone who\_\_\_\_\_." The person in the middle finishes the sentence with a description that fits some, many or all of the students in the circle such as "A great wind blows for everyone who wears glasses." After the sentence is called out, everyone who fits that description leaves their seat and finds another in the circle that has been vacated. The person in the center will also take one of the seats, leaving a new person without a seat. The new person without a seat will now stand in the middle and call out a new description. While in the center, students are free to think up their own descriptors to complete the phrase.
3. Ask for a volunteer to start the activity by standing in the center of the circle. Eliminate their chair from the circle. If needed, provide suggested descriptions ("A great wind blows for everyone who is left-handed or is an only child or speaks Spanish."). Continue this process for 10 minutes while interest remains high.
4. After the activity is completed, ask students: *What new things did you learn about your classmates?*

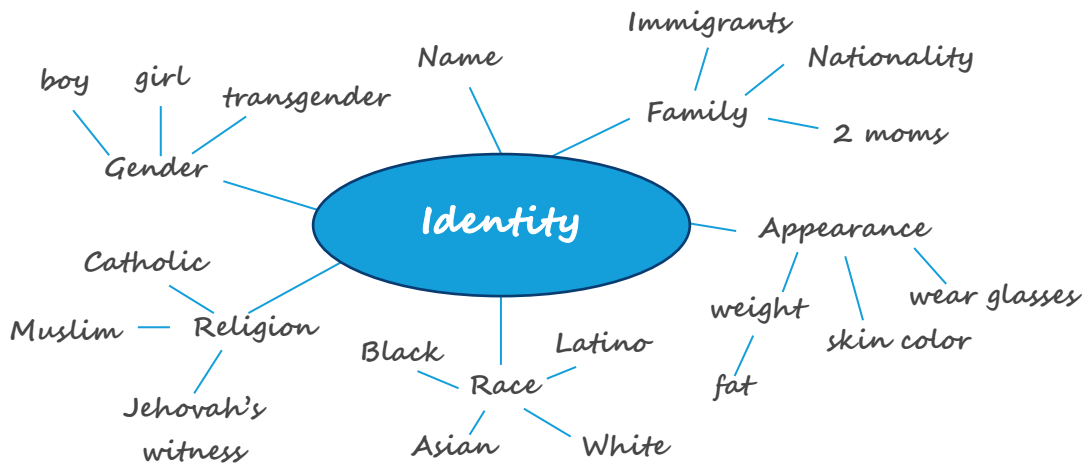
*[Note to Teacher: Be mindful that this activity is meant to explore similarities and differences, not to make students feel excluded or marginalized. If you notice that students are getting singled out or marginalized in any way due to an aspect of their identity, remind students about the goal of the activity. If they are unable to do the activity in a way that is inclusive, you can call out the categories instead of having them name the categories.]*

### [Alternate Warm-Up Activity]

Read aloud a children's book about identity-based bullying. A list of suggestions is included in the "[Additional Reading and Resources](#)" section.

### Defining "Identity"

1. Ask students: *What does the word "identity" mean? What are aspects of your identity?*
2. Define **identity** as the qualities, beliefs, etc. that make a particular person or group different from others. Share an example using yourself. For example, "My identity includes being Latina, a woman and Catholic." Explain that many things shape a person's identity and help determine who they are.
3. Ask students: *What are different parts of your identity? What does identity consist of?* Record their words, thoughts and phrases using a semantic web as illustrated below. Ask questions to elicit more ideas from the students.



4. After brainstorming, engage students in a large group discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What do you notice about the words and phrases on the web? As you look at the web, what thoughts and feelings come to mind?
  - Are there some things on the web that you had not thought of as being part of identity?
  - Which of these aspects of identity are important to you?

### Defining “Bullying”

1. Ask students: *What is bullying?* Allow extended discussion and give this definition:
 

**Bullying** is when a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed.
2. Write the definition on the board or on chart paper.
3. Ask students to share examples of bullying behavior they have seen or heard about. Keep this brief.
4. Explain the difference between name-calling (use of words to hurt or be mean to someone or a group) teasing (to laugh at and criticize someone in a way that is either friendly and playful or cruel and unkind) and bullying. Emphasize that the terms are related as teasing can start off as playful but lead to cruel behavior and bullying and name-calling is often an element of bullying.
5. Ask students: *Based on what you have learned about identity and what you know about bullying, what is identity-based bullying?*
6. Explain that **identity-based bullying** is when someone is bullied based on an aspect of who they are or are perceived to be: their identity. It can also be called “prejudice-based bullying” because the bullying is based on prejudice. Remind students that prejudice is when you make a decision or form an opinion about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge.
7. Point out to students that they should never blame the target of the bullying. A person is not bullied because she or he is Jewish or gay or blind. That person is bullied because others are biased against that group. For example, bullying a boy who is blind is not because the boy is blind; it is because others are prejudiced against him



### Turn and Talk: A Time I Was Bullied Based on My Identity

Explain to students that they are to talk in pairs about a time they were bullied based on their identity. Using the definitions above, have students think of a time they were a target of identity-based bullying. If they can't think of an example, they can share an example that they witnessed or heard about from a friend or family member. Give students 3–5 minutes per person to share. Instruct students to share (1) what happened, (2) how they felt and (3) what they did or wanted to do about it.

When finished talking in pairs, ask if a few students want to share their examples with the class.

*[Note to Teacher: Remind students that they should only share if they feel comfortable doing so and remind them that they should only share their own experience, not what their partner shared.]*



### Small Group Discussion: Identity-Based Bullying Scenarios

This activity involves students reading scenarios about identity-based bullying and analyzing them. If the particular scenarios do not resonate with your students or they hit too “close to home,” feel free to substitute them with scenarios of your own. Review definitions of bullying, target, ally and bystander.

1. Divide students into five groups. Explain that they are to choose one person to be the recorder to write their responses. Distribute a different [Scenario Worksheet](#) to each group. For younger students, you may want to read the scenario aloud to ensure that students understand it.
2. Invite the small groups to read their scenarios, discuss them and complete the worksheet by answering the questions. Allow 10–15 minutes for this process.
3. When students have completed their small group work, have them to come back to the larger group and have all the groups present their findings to the class.
4. Engage students in a large group discussion by asking the following questions:
  - How was it to work in your small group?
  - Did you discover anything new about bullying and specifically identity-based bullying?
  - What were some of the solutions or actions you came up with for dealing with the bullying?



### Writing Activity: Create Your Own Scenarios

1. Explain to students that they will be writing their own scenarios with an action step at the end. Have students think about all the situations of identity-based bullying that they discussed together, including what they shared and the written scenarios they discussed in small groups.
2. Invite students to write about a situation of identity-based bullying that they know about first hand or create a new one. Explain that they should include what happened, make clear the bias or targeted identity and then come up with one way in which an ally stepped in and helped. The ally could be another student, a teacher, a friend/family member or the school administration. Younger students can illustrate their story.

Explain to students that the scenarios they write cannot include names or specific details of a real-life incident of bullying. The scenarios can be written as “realistic fiction” which means they can be based on real-life situations, but they cannot include names of students in your class or school or details about the scenario that would disclose a real-life incident. This will help to defuse a situation where feelings about past incidents come to the surface and cause the lesson to get derailed.

**Alternative:** Assign this writing activity for homework.

3. When students complete their scenarios, ask a few to share aloud with the rest of the class. If time permits, have everyone read their scenarios aloud.

### Closing

Have students think about everything they learned in the lesson. Go around the room and have each student complete the following sentence out loud: “The way I can act as an ally to someone who is targeted through identity-based bullying is \_\_\_\_\_.”

### ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- *Bullying in North American Schools* by Dorothy Espelage and Susan Swearer
- *Bullying Prevention and Intervention: Realistic Strategies for Schools* by Susan Swearer, Dorothy Espelage and Scott Napolitano
- [Important Books to Explore Bullying and Allyship](#) (ADL)
- [Pacer’s National Bullying Prevention Center](#)
- [Playgrounds and Prejudice: Elementary School Climate in the United States](#) (GLSEN)
- [Tween Cyberbullying in 2020](#) (Cyberbullying Research Center and Cartoon Network)
- [Young Children’s Biases are Reflected in Bullying Behaviors](#) (Michigan State University Extension)

## Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Writing
W3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

## CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Self-Management: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

## Roles in Bullying Incidents

### **Ally**

Someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of bias.

### **Bullying**

When a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed.

### **Bystander**

Someone who sees bias or bullying happening and does not say or do anything.

### **Aggressor**

Someone who says or does hurtful things to another person on purpose and over and over.

### **Target**

Someone who is bullied or treated in hurtful ways by a person or a group on purpose and over and over.











