

Working Together to Stop Elder Bullying

Staff Training



Key Points

- What is Bullying?
- Types of Bullying
- Characteristics of Bullies
- Causes of Bullying
- Warning Signs of Bullying
- Bullying Cycle
- Staff Interventions
- Review of Code of Conduct

What is Bullying?

Intentional, repetitive aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power or strength.

Hazelden Foundation, 2008

Types of Bullying

- Verbal: name calling, teasing, insults, taunts, threats, sarcasm, or pointed jokes targeting specific individuals
- Physical: pushing, hitting, destroying property, or stealing
- Anti-social: shunning/excluding, gossiping, spreading rumors and using negative non-verbal body language (mimicking, offensive gestures)

Bullying

- Exclusion of individuals from social events or even the formation of cliques
- Harassment, meanness, insulting individuals, gossiping and racial and ethnic slurs
- Physical intimidation or abuse

Who Bullies?

- Some common characteristics of people who bully:
 - Seek to control others
 - Feel reinforced by:
 - Being powerful and controlling
 - Making others feel threatened, fearful or hurt
 - Causing and observing conflict between people
 - Have difficulty tolerating individual differences
 - Lack empathy
 - May have been bullied or abused in their lifetime

Causes of Bullying – Age-Related Issues

- Loss of independence, relationships, income and valued roles
- Powerless due to move to more “supportive” environments
- Seeking “control” at a time that they feel most powerless

Causes of Bullying

- Mental illness
- Dementia
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance abuse
- An individual may be irritable due to pain, medication, lack of sleep, grief, etc.

Signs of Depression

- Irritability or agitation
- Sleep disturbance
- Refusal of care or assistance
- Inability to make a decision
- Social isolation or withdrawal
- Sad mood or demeanor

Signs of Dementia

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
- Challenges in planning or problem solving.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure.
- Confusion with time or place.
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships

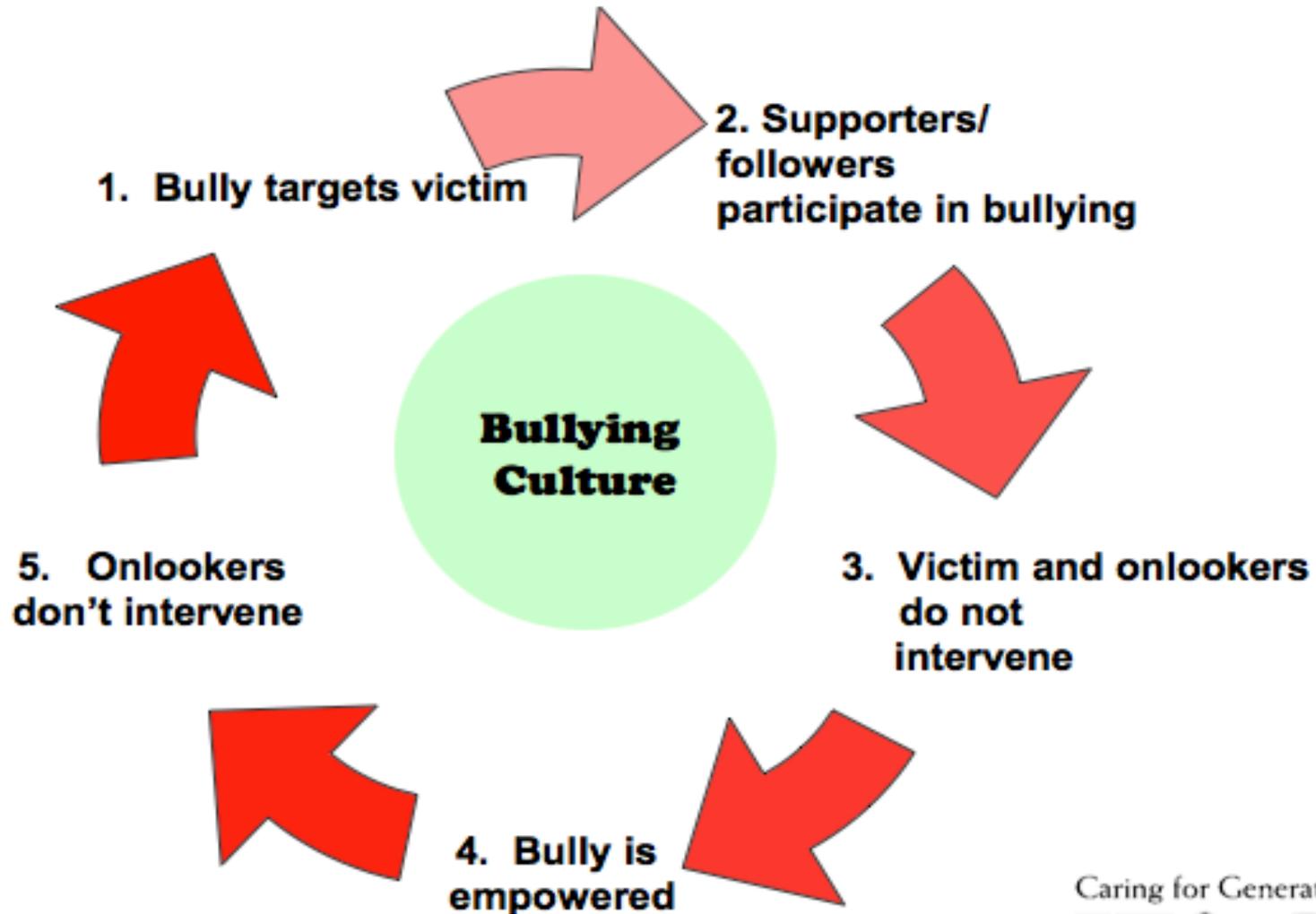
Bullying Warning Signs

- Individuals who are being bullied may exhibit these behaviors:
 - Anger, frustration
 - Self-isolation
 - Avoidance of specific areas or activities
 - Vague complaints “They don’t like me” or “They won’t let me be in their group.”
 - Depressed mood

Bullying Warning Signs

- Individuals who bully their peers may exhibit these behaviors:
 - Intimidate staff
 - Often tell others what to do using a bossy style
 - Criticize others or lack empathy toward them
 - Make repeated complaints about others

Bullying Cycle



Interventions for Bullying

- Preventing and minimizing bullying behavior requires intervention at multiple levels:
 - Community
 - Bully
 - Victim/Target

Steps to Prevent Bullying

- Set clear expectations and boundaries within the community that make elders and staff aware of the community's commitment to a respectful environment
- Conduct ongoing discussions with staff, residents, and families to identify problems
- Evaluate and implement changes that can decrease the power of bullies (isolated areas, reserved seating, etc.)
- Provide ongoing training for staff and elders
- Implement clear and easy reporting processes to encourage victims to report bullying
- Instate a “no-tolerance” policy for bullying
- Include a standard process for resolving bullying incidents such as mediation and consequences

Community Intervention

- Have older adults sign an “agency” contract that specifically addresses bullying behavior
- Remind individuals that all members are to be treated with consideration, respect and recognition of each individual’s dignity

Interventions for Individuals who Bully

- Consistently set limits on bullying behavior (Code of Conduct)
- Offer an appropriate outlet to vent frustrations
- Help them to:
 - Identify alternative methods to feel in control
 - Learn positive communication skills
 - Develop empathy
 - Expand their social network
 - Address feeling of loss

Interventions for Individuals being Bullied

- Focus on skill development to help them avoid being victimized:
 - Standing up for one's rights
 - Managing feelings of anger
 - Using direct communication strategies
 - Review the Code of Conduct

Staff Intervention - What Can You Do . . .

- Speak up calmly and with authority.
- Call them by name.
- Make your statements clear, but without any aggressive motions or behavior.
- **Never interrupt or provoke!**

Staff Intervention - What Can You Do . . .

- Listen attentively and express respect for their opinion.
- Always maintain eye contact.
- Seek true understanding of the individual's insecurities.

Code of Conduct Review





Code of Conduct for Service Centers

Be Respectful to All Individuals

No Bullying

No Gossiping

No Slandering

No Harassing Behavior

No Threatening Behavior

No Intimidating Behavior

No Violent Behavior

No Foul Language

No Weapons

No Drugs or Alcohol

Sources

- The National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center (NORC), www.ltombudsman.org
- Alzheimer's Association – alz.org
- “Who bullies and who gets bullied?” Robin Bonifax, PhD, MSW, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Arizona State University

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