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 Participation Agreement
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

1. Bully targets victim
2. Supporters/followers participate in bullying
3. Victim and onlookers do not intervene
4. Bully is empowered
5. Onlookers don’t intervene
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 a “participation agreement” that specifically addresses bullying behavior and other behaviors.
- Support individuals to treat all members with consideration, respect, and dignity.
Interventions for Individuals who Bully

- Consistently set limits on bullying behavior (Code of Conduct – Participation Agreement)
- 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 Participation Agreement
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.
Review Participation Agreement
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.ltcombudsman.org](http://www.ltcombudsman.org)

- Alzheimer’s Association – [alz.org](http://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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