Lesson 5: Bullying towards students with special needs

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Introduction

To whom is this lesson directed?

To you and all of your school buddies!

When we talk about bullying at school, we can clearly see that it is a growing problem for all students in our educational centers… Bullying is one of the biggest problems in schools, and students with special needs are especially vulnerable to it as, unfortunately, they are more likely to be bullied-

Through this section we will talk about the importance of preventing bullying, about its impact, ways to prevent and help.

But, before anything, let’s see how do you react to those statements (there is no right or wrong answer):

1. It is fun to boss other people around.

- Yes.
- No.
- Sometimes.

2. It is ok to take advantage of people who seem weaker than you.

- Yes.
- No.
- Sometimes.

3. Some people deserve to be treated badly or called names.

- Yes.
- No.
- Sometimes.

4. It is none of your business when other people are treated badly or left out of the group.

- Yes.
- No.
- Sometimes.

5. It takes courage to stick up for a person who is treated badly or left out.

- Yes.

- No.
- Sometimes.

When dealing with Students with Special Needs…What is the role of Young Ambassadors?

As we studied at the beginning of the module, Ambassadors are amazing role models…demonstrating kindness, care, and respect towards others, setting a positive example for all. Young Ambassadors also fulfill the important role of raising awareness, advocating against bullying, and enlightening fellow students about its detrimental impact on others. Additionally, they educate on the significance of inclusivity and acceptance, ensuring that everyone feels embraced and valued within our school community.

Going beyond that, Young Ambassadors extend their support and assistance to students with special needs, offering friendship, a listening ear, and a strong defense against bullying or challenges. Their ultimate goal is to create a safe and joyful school environment where every student can thrive

Ambassadors make sure that everyone knows how important it is to be nice to each other.

But wait, there's more!

If someone is being bullied or facing challenges, Young Ambassadors are there to be their friends, to listen to them, and to stand up for them. They want to make sure that every student feels safe and happy at school.

Another really cool thing that Young Ambassadors do is mediate conflicts. Sometimes, people might have disagreements or arguments, and Ambassadors help them work things out peacefully. They want everyone to feel respected and heard, so they step in and help find solutions that make everyone feel better.

Bullying towards students with special needs

Did you know that students with disabilities are 63 percent more likely to be affected by bullying than their peers? (Iqbal, bin Nordin and Hasyim, 2021).

Students with special needs are more likely to be bullied than other pupils. This can happen because they might have difficulty when talking, because of his/her appearance, or how well they work in school… Sometimes, they might not understand social rules or have trouble expressing themselves. This can make them more vulnerable to bullying.

In some cases, students with special needs may be isolated or excluded from chatting with class colleagues, making them even more vulnerable to bullying. Bullying can also hurt their ability to learn and grow. It's important to know that bullies often target those kids who they think are weaker and won't fight back.

It's important for everyone to stand up against bullying and support each other! Remember that EVERYONE deserves to feel safe and respected at school.

What is the Impact of Bullying on Students with Special Needs?

Have you ever felt feelings of sadness, of fear and/or shame when talking or going to school? Have you ever felt very lonely or excluded socially ? Have your sleeping and dietary habits changed at any time ? Have you ever experienced a lack of interests or passions for different activities?

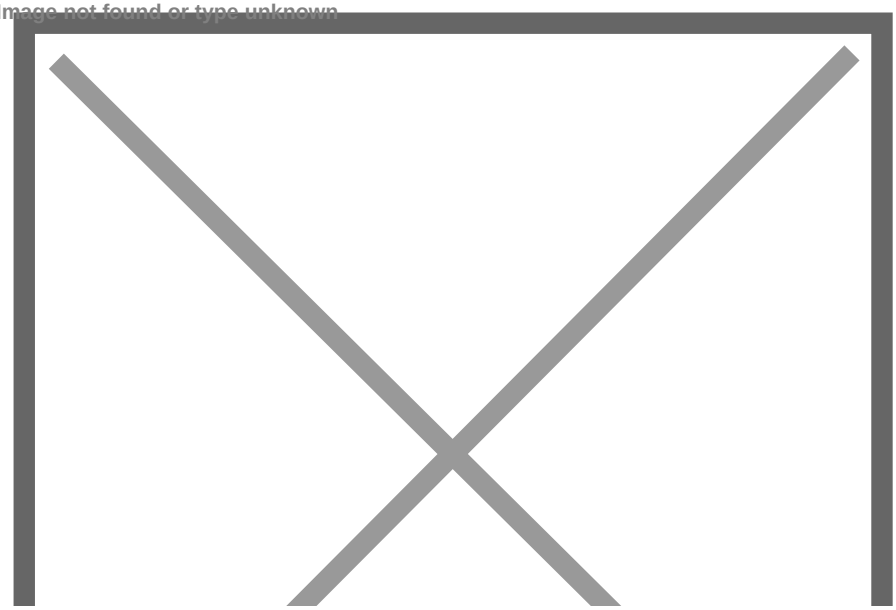
All of these unpleasant feelings and changes of habits can be consequences of bullying. Bullying can also make you feel increasingly anxious, can worsen your self-esteem and your confidence, and negatively impact your concentration and your motivation for any activity or task that you are supposed to do. You might be aware that bullying causes a decrease in academic achievements and school attendance, as well as depression, violent moods, substance abuses, stomach aches and headaches, suicidal thoughts, self harm and even suicide…

Now, think how bullying affects a student with special needs.

Here is a video for you to understand the impact of bullying on students with special needs: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38mZLDWMNe4

Bullying can occur ANYWHERE, from school to social media. If you think that it is not bullying because it does not happen in the cafeteria, or in the classroom or in the hallways… your thoughts are not right ! it is important to be vigilant in all circumstances to prevent and avoid that your mates are being bullied, especially if he/she has special needs.

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When we see someone being bullied, it's important to remember what **empathy is**. Setting yourself in other shoes and imagining how they might be feeling. If you've ever felt sad, scared, or excluded, you know how much it can hurt. Students with special needs may already face unique challenges, and bullying can make things even harder for them. By showing empathy, we can understand the impact bullying has on them and support them in a kind and caring way.

Remember, empathy is a superpower that allows us to understand and share the feelings of others. Let's use our superpower to show kindness, support, and acceptance to all students.

Activity: Empathy and Relationships

In this activity, you will find some phrases that describe a person who has the ability of expressing empathy and a person who does not express empathy at all. Please, try to categorize the sentences in the table below.

1. “If I were you, I would (...)”
2. “I completely understand how you are feeling (...)”
3. “I just felt the same way as you are feeling right now, you are not alone (...)”
4. “Come on, get over it, there is no single reason to keep thinking about it”
5. “Oh my God, that’s a shame”
6. “Please, if you need someone, you can always count on me”
7. “I will solve the problem for you”

8. “Do you want to tell us what happened yesterday?
9. “Anything you need, let me know”
10. “It is completely ok to feel that way”

Express empathy	Do not express empathy

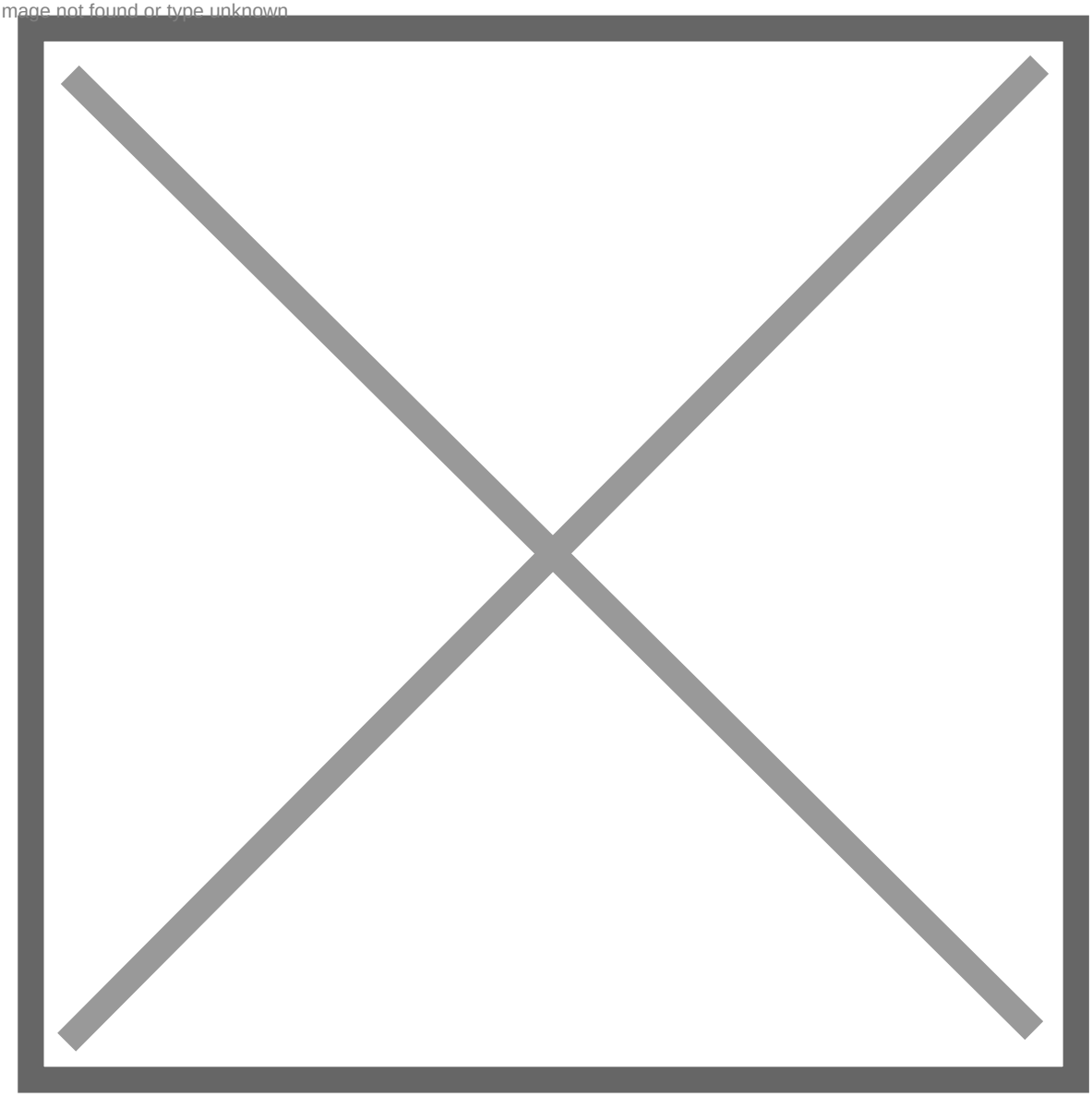
How can we intervene to address Bullying toward Students with Special Needs?
At this point, you are probably wondering how you can intervene or do something to help your mate with special needs to stop being bullied. We are here to give you tips and techniques to do so in the best way possible!
First, you have to know that everyone in the school environment is responsible to stop bullying from occurring. If you are bullied or you witness it, it is normal, and even a very good thing, to talk about it to your teacher, your supervisor or any school staff member and to ask for their help. You can also discuss it with your parents or adults in whom you trust to ask for their advice or intervention. It is very important to talk. Please, NEVER hesitate to say something and to ask for help. Some ways of becoming an defender is to include the student (with or without disability) within your group of friends, communicate with him/her as you do with everyone, create a trusting relationship with him/her and make him/her understand that he/she can talk to you about anything, including negative feelings and bad moods. This can really help and benefit the student with disability to feel included and confident in the classroom. Moreover, you can ask him/her to explain his/her disability, preferably in front of the class, in order for everyone to understand the condition and consequences of the disability, and later on be more equipped to help. Another good tip that we can give you is to advocate for your bullied classmate. This basically consists in providing support for classmates who are being bullied, are vulnerable to being hurt, or are isolated from other students.

Having this in mind, what can you do in practice to advocate for your freind? Well, it is simple. It only consists in speaking up on behalf of each other when witnessing an act of bullying.

It is also very important to help your mate to develop self-advocacy, the ability to speak up for himself/herself. You will surely agree that this is extremely complicated, especially when being bullied and

with low self-esteem. Therefore, what you can do is create a safe place and a relationship of trust with your mate, so that he/she feels supported when denouncing the bullying situation.

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If you are an ambassador against bullying, your role in helping students with special needs who are facing bullying is super important! Here is what you can do to support them:

1. Be a friend: show kindness and invite your buddies to join activities, games….
2. Speak up!: If you see someone being bullied, don't just stand by… speak up! Report the bullying to any trusted adult.
3. Spread awareness: talk to your classmates about the importance of being respectful with students with special needs.
4. Be a role model: Show others how to treat people with respect and kindness. Your actions can inspire others to do the same!

Remember, being an ambassador against bullying means you have the power to change things, to make a positive difference. You can help students with special needs who are facing bullying to feel happier, included and supported.

Don't hesitate to check this website !https://www.early-years.org/respecting-differenceI
Here you will find six media messages. The media messages are cartoons exploring differences associated with race/ethnicity, cultural differences associated with sectarianism, physical differences and disability, helpful and hurtful behaviors, inclusion of students from the Traveller Community and rural living, inclusion, transition, shared education, sporting and community activities.

Exercises

1. Let’s see what you have learned in this lesson…

Imagine that Mary, who is in a wheelchair because of a genetic condition which prevents her from walking, is being bullied by Thomas, and Marcus sees it.

In this situation, try to put yourself in their shoes and describe the feelings, based on the following questions:

- How would you feel if you were Mary?

_____

- How would you feel if you were Thomas, who is bullying Mary?

_____

- How would you feel if you were Marcus, who sees Thomas bullying Mary?

_____

Then, could you find 5 ways to promote positive relationships with your schoolmates, which could help Mary, Thomas and Marcus to get out of this negative situation?

1. _____
   _____

2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

2. Workshop idea

Finally, here is an idea of an activity that you could do with your classmates to sensibilize them and to improve relationships among all of you. This activity can be realized with a group between 10 and 30 people and should last about 60 minutes.

This activity is useful to understand that we are all equals, and to develop empathy for everyone. To conduct the activity, you will need role cards, an open space, and a hat. You will need to create one role card for each participant, with a role they will have in a simulation of a bullying situation. Examples of role cards can be:

- Tom, age, student with a physical disability (paralyzed, genetic condition, blind, etc), is being bullied because of his difference.
- Beatrice, age, student with ADHD syndrome, she has being bullied
- Clara, age, student with disability who has a great group of friends who listen to her, make her feel safe and confident.
- Jack, age, student with autism who has one or two friends. He feels lonely but is not being bullied.
- James, age, is bullying Tom.
- Several cards for James' friends, who help him in bullying Tom.
- Martha, age, is bullying Beatrice.
- Several cards for Martha's friends, who help bullying Beatrice.
- Ronald, age, and his friends (several cards), are witnesses of those bullying but do not say anything.
- Etc.

Then, ask all the participants to pick up a role card in the hat, and to enter in the character's personality and situation. Once it is done, ask everyone to read their role card, and then to form a line.

Once it is done, you will read a series of situations, one by one, with a break in between, and each time the character can answer with a "yes" to those affirmations, they will walk one step ahead. If they answer no, they do not move. Examples of situations can be:

- You feel isolated in the school environment.
- You do not have self-confidence.
- You have dark thoughts.
- You have difficulties in focusing in class and have good grades.
- You have trouble sleeping.
- Etc.

At the end, invite everyone to observe their final position, come back to the circle and then, ask them about their experience during this activity.

- How did you feel when moving a step ahead?
- For those who often stepped forward, at what point did they begin to notice that others were not moving as fast as they were?
- For those who did not step forward quite often, how did that make you feel?

Discuss with your classmates about the possible improvements that can be made in order to avoid this situation.

Conclusions

Before we finish with this important Lesson…

It is crucial that EVERYONE at school feels included and welcomed, no matter if they have disabilities or not. Students should feel that they belong and they are part of the school community. EVERYONE should be able to join and be involved in all the fun things that happen at school, just like everyone else.

To make this happen, schools have special rules which are called policies. These policies are like guidelines that tell everyone how we should behave and treat each other. One very important rule we must not forget is: never bully or be mean to anyone.

Schools celebrate plenty of events such as Friendship Week where we make new friends, School Trips where everyone goes outside the school and explores together… All these activities are part of a huge idea which is called INCLUSION. Inclusion means to make sure that everyone is included and treated equally. Imagine that we all create a big group where everyone feels that they are valued, accepted, happy and part of! That 's it! If we achieve this… it will mean that we have understood the importance of inclusion.

Now, it’s your turn to act for everyone to feel good in the school environment !

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