TALKING ABOUT BULLYING: CLASSROOM DISCUSSION STARTERS

How to use

Introduction

The *Talking about bullying classroom discussion starters* have been developed for the 2016 National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence. They use a community of inquiry approach to support students to collaboratively discuss their ideas about bullying, and what they can do about it individually and as a school community.

Aim

The aim of the classroom discussion starters is for students to share and develop their thinking about bullying.

Classroom discussion starters have been developed for Years 3–4, 5–6, 7–9 and 10–12. However, any topic can be adapted for any age.

The classroom discussion starters focus on:

- Years 3–4: The essence of bullying
- Years 5–6: Recognising and understanding bullying
- Years 7–9: Building respectful relationships
- Years 7–9: Identifying bullying
- Years 10–12: Building respectful relationships

- Years 10–12: Understanding misuse of power
- All years: Ensuring school is safe for everyone
- All year levels: Similarities and differences between bullying and fighting
- All year levels: Making distinctions between bullying and arguing
- All year levels: Exploring conditional reasoning: thinking about the consequences of an action
- All year levels: Exploring counter-examples of statements about bullying

Within the focus area, teachers choose one Inquiry question (or more if time permits) from a number provided. To promote students' thinking, teachers can then select from a range of optional Probing questions as appropriate.

As a short activity (approximately 20 minutes), the discussions provide only a brief foray into the topic. The need for additional work or exploration in the future may be indicated by students' comments. If so, the lesson plans on the Bullying. No Way! website provide more in-depth exploration of these topics (these require between 1 to 4 hours over several sessions). The lesson plans are Active bystanders; Ideas for a safe and supportive school community; Perspectives on bullying (senior students); The Allen Adventure (younger students); and Being reasonable and ethical online.

Community of inquiry

A community of inquiry is a group of people who construct personal meaning by collaboratively engaging in purposeful discussion and reflection (Cam 1995; 2006). Members of a community of inquiry explore big questions about life. Understanding the complexity of bullying requires deep thinking and questioning for all, and a community of inquiry provides a foundation for school communities to approach this exploration.

In a community of inquiry all members of the group work together to reach a rich, shared understanding of significant concepts and issues. Participants are required to think deeply, reason effectively and reflect on their own thinking and that of others. They are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and work collaboratively to come up with solutions to problems that are central to their lives.

The community of inquiry has three key elements:

- Concept under discussion (content)
- Process — ways of working (protocols)
- Use of intellectual inquiry tools (thinking, reasoning, reflecting skills).

For deep inquiry to take place, a balance of all three elements is needed during the inquiry.

The teacher's role in community of inquiry

The teacher's role is to facilitate the process, rather than provide their own views or solutions. Teachers should model inquiry processes, ensure the discussion remains on track, and ask open, probing questions that will assist the group to reach a deeper understanding of the concepts under discussion.

Guidelines for conducting a community of inquiry

During the community of inquiry, students and teacher sit in a circle so that all members of the community can see and respond to each other with ease.

At the beginning of the discussion, you may wish to remind students of the following discussion protocols:

- Listen attentively: this means listening carefully to what is being said or suggested by others.
- Build on and connect to ideas: adding to the ideas of others can develop everyone's understanding further.
- Respect others and their ideas: thinking carefully about the ideas of others is one way of showing respect for that idea; listening and building on ideas also demonstrates respect.
- Disagree reasonably and respectfully: we disagree with the idea, not the person; sometimes we may even change our mind after listening to another person give good reasons for their thinking.
- There may be no single correct answer: when we explore Inquiry questions, there may be many correct answers.

Ask a question to the group and use a 'talking tool' to ensure that only one person speaks at a time. Students share their ideas by raising their hands when they wish to respond.

Remind students to:

- Listen carefully and consider the speaker's ideas when any member of the group is speaking. When ideas are being shared, students should not have their hand up as this would demonstrate that they are not respecting or considering the speaker's thoughts. It can also distract the speaker
- Give reasons for their responses. This will provide the listener with a deeper understanding of the ideas presented and enable them to connect their own thoughts and suggestions.

A range of optional probing questions has been included in the discussion starters, some specific to the inquiry question and some more general procedural questions. Teachers do not need to ask all of the questions provided. They have been included to support discussion as needed. If the students are able to discuss a question at a deeper, sustained level, or ask questions of their own that build on the idea under discussion, then teachers will need to reduce the number of questions shared in the time allocated.

Each discussion concludes with time for reflection. If students are to reach deeper levels of understanding of the process and content and apply their learning in other contexts, it is important for them to be given the opportunity to think meta-cognitively; that is, to think about the thinking and reasoning that has taken place during the discussion.

Personal disclosure

Teachers need to be sensitive to the class mood. Recent interpersonal incidents or problems may impact on class discussion. In some cases, it may be better to delay the discussion until problems are addressed.

Acknowledge to students that bullying may be a sensitive topic to discuss and therefore respectful listening is particularly important. Teachers should emphasise that this activity is not the place for students to share or resolve current personal issues related to bullying, and instead that students are encouraged to speak with the teacher or a school support person after class.

Protective interrupting is a useful tool for teachers in these situations. Protective interrupting aims to protect students from the consequences of revealing inappropriate personal information in front of other students. It is possible a student will begin to disclose personal information, or a teacher might sense that a student is about to make such a disclosure. In such a situation, the teacher should acknowledge they have heard the student by using words like 'That sounds important', but stop them divulging any further details. The teacher should suggest the student talks privately with them after the formal discussion or, if possible, ask the student if they would like to leave the classroom then to continue the conversation.

If a student should make a disclosure of bullying currently occurring, your role is to listen calmly, show support for the student, acknowledge what they have told you and, once the student has finished, discuss with them what you could both do next. Ensure you are aware of your school's policy for dealing with bullying.

Links to key documents

Australian Curriculum

These discussion starters link to the Australian Curriculum – General capabilities:

- Critical and creative thinking
  - Inquiring — identifying, exploring and organising information and ideas
  - Generating ideas, possibilities and actions
  - Reflecting on thinking and processes
  - Analysing, synthesising and evaluating reasoning and procedures
- Personal and social capability
  - Self-management
  - Social awareness
  - Social management
- Ethical understanding
  - Understanding ethical concepts and issues
  - Exploring values, rights and responsibilities.

National Safe Schools Framework

The National Safe Schools Framework provides a vision and set of guiding principles for safe, supportive and respectful school communities that promote student wellbeing. The *Talking about bullying classroom discussion starters* link with the following elements:

- Element 6: Engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum
- Element 7: A focus on student wellbeing and student ownership.

The National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence

The annual National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence occurs on the third Friday in March each year. The National Day of Action is an opportunity for students, teachers, parents and the whole community to take a stand together against bullying and violence, and provides a focus for schools that want to say 'Bullying. No Way!'

The annual National Day of Action is organised by all Australian education authorities through the national Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group.

Feedback

A survey to evaluate the National Day of Action campaign will be sent to all registered schools from the Bullying. No Way! team. Teachers will be invited to provide feedback on the *Talking about Bullying classroom discussion starters* as part of this survey.

Alternatively, teachers can send feedback to Bullying. No Way! at bnw.website@det.qld.gov.au.

References

Key links

Australian Curriculum – General capabilities
   http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/generalcapabilities/overview/general-capabilities-in-the-australian-curriculum

Bullying. No Way! https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/

National Safe Schools Framework
   https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/PreventingBullying/Planning/Pages/National-Safe-Schools-Framework.aspx

Community of inquiry

Cam, P. (1995). *Thinking together: Philosophical inquiry for the classroom*. Alexandria, NSW: Hale and Iremonger Pty Limited.

Cam, P. (2006). *Twenty thinking tools*. Camberwell, Vic: ACER Press.

Cam, P. (2009). *Philosophy for children*.
   www.youtube.com/watch?v=tk_B32HtnWg

Cam, P. (2012). *Teaching ethics in schools: A new approach to moral education.* Camberwell, Vic: ACER Press.

Cam, P., Fynes-Clinton, L., Harrison, K., Hinton, L., Scholl, R. & Vaseo, S. (2007). *Philosophy with young children: A classroom handbook*. Deakin West, ACT: ACSA Inc.

Center for Philosophy for Children, University of Washington.
   www.philosophyforchildren.org

Davey Chesters, S., Fynes-Clinton, L., Hinton, L. & Scholl, R. (2013). *Philosophical and ethical inquiry for students in the middle years and beyond.* Deakin West, ACT: ACSA Inc.

Lipman – P4C (seven videos)
   www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp5IB3YVnIE&feature=related

Wartenberg, T. *Teaching children philosophy*. Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts.
   www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main_Page

Overview: Talking about bullying classroom discussion starters

Year level	Focus	Inquiry questions (choose one)	Download from the Bullying. No Way! website *Materials can be found on the Talking about bullying classroom discussion starter page.
Years 3–4	The essence of bullying	1. What are the main features of bullying? 2. How does a person feel if they are bullied? 3. What are the key differences between bullying and arguing/fighting with someone?	Make your own National Day of Action poster (find the poster in the School materials to download section) What is bullying? (Years 3–4) handout
Years 5–6	Recognising and understanding bullying	1. How can we identify bullying? 2. Why do some people choose to bully others? 3. How can our actions have an impact on bullying?	What is bullying? (Years 5–6; 7–9) handout
Years 7–9	Building respectful relationships	1. What do we mean by a respectful relationship? 2. How do we build respect within communities? 3. How can our actions have an impact on the relationships within our class/school community?	What is bullying? (Years 5–6; 7–9) handout
Years 7–9	Identifying bullying	1. Why do some people choose to bully others? 2. How do we recognise a bullying situation in our class or school community? 3. In what ways is bullying linked to power in classroom relationships?	What is bullying? (Years 5–6; 7–9) handout

Year level	Focus	Inquiry questions (choose one)	Download from the Bullying. No Way! website *Materials can be found on the Talking about bullying classroom discussion starter page.
Years 10–12	Building respectful relationships	1. What do we mean by a respectful relationship within a community/group? 2. How do we build respect within communities? 3. What might happen if you choose to be a passive bystander?	What is bullying? Formal definition (Years 10–12) handout What is bullying? Informal version of definition (Years 10–12) handout
Years 10–12	Understanding misuse of power	1. What do we mean by power in relationships? 2. What do we mean by a power structure within a classroom (or peer group)? 3. What do we mean by misuse of power?	What is bullying? Formal definition (Years 10–12) handout What is bullying? Informal version of definition (Years 10–12) handout
Years 5–6	Ensuring a safe school for everyone	1. How can we feel safe at school? 2. How can we stand together to ensure a safe classroom environment? 3. How can we build peaceful communities?	Definition suitable for year level
All year levels	Similarities and differences between the concepts of bullying and fighting/arguing – use a T-chart		Definition suitable for year level
All year levels	Making distinctions between bullying and arguing – create a Venn diagram		Definition suitable for year level
All year levels	Conditional reasoning: thinking about the consequences of an action – *If … then* sentence completion		Definition suitable for year level

Year level	Focus	Inquiry questions (choose one)	Download from the Bullying. No Way! website *Materials can be found on the [Talking about bullying](#) classroom discussion starter page.
All year levels	Testing the strength of reasoning with counter-examples – finding counter-examples to statements about bullying		Definition suitable for year level