

TALKING ABOUT BULLYING: CLASSROOM DISCUSSION STARTERS

Years 10–12: Understanding the misuse of power

Steps to run the discussion

This discussion starter supports teachers to scaffold a collaborative discussion with students as a whole class or in small groups. The discussion requires about 20 minutes and consists of five steps. (Refer to [How to use](#) for more information.)

1. Present the definition of bullying

Share the [definition of bullying](#) with your students. Explain that this is how bullying is generally defined by society; however, in order to fully understand bullying, we need to unpack the ideas.

2. Choose one Inquiry question

Choose from one of the three Inquiry questions. Think about the current level of understanding and specific needs of your class when selecting the question.

Allow about 20 minutes for the discussion of one Inquiry question (including reflection). The Inquiry questions are designed to encourage students to think deeply about many issues surrounding the concept of bullying. Your students may come up with a variety of responses. As the students provide their responses, listen carefully and consider the key ideas underpinning these responses.

3. Ask students to provide justification for their answers

When students respond, it is essential that they always give reasons for their responses. Some questions may be grammatically closed (yes/no), but the student's justification for their response will enable the ideas presented to remain conceptually open for ongoing discussion. If students provide a 'yes/no' answer, ask: 'Why do you think that?'

The provision of justification enables all participants to gain a deeper understanding of the reasoning underpinning the responses. This in turn gives opportunity for students to build on the ideas of others, make considered connections and explore disagreement respectfully.

4. Use one or two appropriate Probing questions (more if you have longer than 20 minutes)

Use one or two appropriate probing questions to deepen the students' line of inquiry. The probing questions are based on the response, or you can use the general 'procedural' questions of inquiry. You can also use a probing question to encourage students to think about alternative perspectives.

5. Reflect on thinking and learning

At the conclusion of the discussion, take five minutes to reflect on the learning:

- How did we work as a community of learners?
- What new thinking and learning has taken place for our class community today?
- How can we apply this new thinking and learning to our relationships with peers at school and beyond?

Three inquiry questions

Inquiry question 1: What do we mean by power in relationships?

Probing questions:

- Is it important for people to have power in relationships?
- What do we mean by power in online relationships?
- What factors contribute to an imbalance of power in a relationship?
- Should one person ever hold more power than another in a relationship?
- In what ways is power connected to respect?
- How can we maintain a reasonable balance of power in our relationships?

Inquiry question 2: What do we mean by a power structure within a classroom (or peer group)?

Probing questions:

- What forms might power structures take within classrooms?
- What forms might power structures take in online environments?
- How can we identify an unbalanced power structure within our classroom?
- What factors might have contributed to this imbalance?
- How might this imbalance impact on the class community?
- What can individual class members do to ensure the balance of power within the class community remains reasonable?

Inquiry question 3: What do we mean by misuse of power?

Probing questions:

- In what ways do people misuse power in relationships?
- Why do some people feel the need to misuse power?
- What do we mean by misuse of power online?
- What is the 'ripple effect' of misuse of power? (unpack the metaphor if required)
- If someone misuses power, is it then possible for them to regain the respect of others?
- What message are you sending to those who bully if you choose not to take action?
- What action should we take if we notice misuse of power within our class/school community?
- In what ways could you take positive action within your class or school community to prevent bullying?
- If we take positive action, how do we know that the action has been effective?

Additional probing questions (procedural questions)

- Why do you think that? (justification)
- Can anyone build on that idea?
- How are these ideas connected?
- In what ways are these ideas similar/different?
- Does anyone have an alternative suggestion/different possibility?
- Can you clarify that?
- Could there be another way to think about this?
- Does anyone have a different reason?
- What might someone say if they disagreed with this?
- How can we know this is accurate/true?
- What might follow from this?
- Can you think of a time when that wouldn't be the case?