

BULLYING



CONVERSATION GUIDE

... for intentional conversations with students

Bullying is any time a person acts in a repetitive and aggressive way toward an individual they perceive as weaker than them. It's possible one of your few may be exposed to or the subject of this kind of behavior, and they may feel scared, ashamed, or defensive. When a kid opens up about bullying, it's because they know you're a safe place. It's possible they could be playing multiple roles—being bullied, being a bully, reinforcing a bully, or witnessing bullying. Keep this in mind when you start a conversation with one of your few and aim to have that conversation as soon as possible. Be sure to include people who can help—like the child's parent, a church leader, or a professional. When you begin this conversation, keep in mind that it should be the first of many. To help you get started, here are some words to say and not to say.

WHAT TO SAY:

WHEN THE CHILD IS BEING BULLIED:

- "I'm going to help you."
- "This isn't your fault."
- "How did it make you feel?" (Responses may include feelings like scared, angry, or worried. The younger the child is, the harder it may be for them to pinpoint their emotions, but it's a great step if they can articulate how they feel.)
- "I care about/love you, and I need to tell someone who can help us so we can stop this from happening again."*

WHEN THEY ARE THE BULLYING:

- “Thank you for telling me your story.”
- “This doesn’t change the way I feel about you. I want to help.”
- “These behaviors are bullying behaviors. They don’t make you a bully. It’s not who you are. You have a choice whether or not to continue acting this way.”
- “Let’s talk about what we should do next. We might need to bring other people into the conversation, and I’d love to check in with you occasionally to hear how it’s going being kind to others.”

WHEN THEY HAVE WITNESSED CYBERBULLYING:

- “Thank you for telling me. That was very brave.”
- “I’m going to help you make a plan. It can be hard to know how to help someone in this situation.”
- “We need to tell someone so we can help this person.”

WHAT NOT TO SAY:

- Words that communicate you’re freaking out. Try to remain calm.
- Words that shame. If they are being bullied, you don’t want to ask them anything that makes them feel like they’ve done something wrong.
- Words that condemn. Keep in mind they’re not the sum of their behavior or the behavior that has been done to them. Try to see them as a person who has done something wrong or has had something wrong done to them—they themselves aren’t the wrong thing.

Counselors, teachers, families, and other caregivers need to be informed of bullying.