

Loving Our Brothers and Sisters: A Study for Youth on Bullying, Violence, and Prevention in a Christian Context



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Welcome!

Statement of Purpose-Bullying Education

The purpose for Pennsylvania Council of Churches' *Loving Our Brothers and Sisters* is twofold: 1) To promote awareness of bullying in our churches and communities; and 2) To engage children ages 12-15 on effective ways to address bullying in those spaces and to help youth identify and engage local, state and federal resources that will assist them in advocating for change. We seek to teach youth how to model behaviors that exhibit tolerance and openness for others in the religious community, schools, the wider community, and to enlist the support of leaders who are in a position to effect change as this presents possibilities for cultural exchange and expression that are representative of the diversity and fabric of God's great design and love for us.

It is important for adults and those in church leadership to respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior in order to send the message that it is not acceptable. Research shows that consistent intervention procedures can stop bullying behavior over time, whereas doing nothing at all will make the bullying infinitely worse. There are simple steps adults can take to stop bullying on the spot and keep children safe.

Features and use of the Curriculum

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is excited to engage congregations with addressing the critical issue of bullying with our youth. We encourage each person to engage in authentic and meaningful interactions during the course of our time spent together. Bullying is a sensitive topic for many youth, their churches, families and communities. While engaging together, group facilitators should be mindful of the emotional intensity that this topic can generate and be prepared to intervene and offer guidance as needed.

This curriculum is intended for youth ages 12-15 in a congregational or other church-related setting. However, it may be easily adapted for use in other community settings. It is designed to be intersectional and address issues of bullying from various social and cultural contexts including race, age, class, ethnicity, cultural identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability and body image.

Participants will help to first develop a safe space for sharing and learning before the facilitator introduces the curriculum by talking about acts of violence and intolerance as seen in many different communities across the country. Group participants will be reminded that it is important to respect each person's story no matter how they relate being bullied or experiencing bullying in their own lives.

By participating in ongoing discussions around the topic of bullying participants will hopefully gain insight into inequality and injustice as experienced in other contexts and not just their own. They will learn how to become advocates for themselves and victims of bullying.

This curriculum of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches is designed for presentation in three separate workshops of 60-75 minutes in length and a time for wrap-up and reflection at the end ("What we know for sure") but can be adapted differently based on organizational need.

Some Caveats...

While we are pleased to offer this guide for use by congregations, we are compelled to note the following:

- This is not a study guide which attempts to present all the answers to questions about bullying. In fact, at times, the materials presented in and actions suggested in this guide may stir up some unsettling feelings within us.
- The search for truth sometimes leads us through questioning the assumptions we make in order to teach us to ask better questions and seek more faithful answers.
- Some of our deepest, most long-held assumptions about how we live with others will be challenged.
- This guide attempts to reorient us to seeing and analyzing the world, people, and how we treat each other more from God's perspective—from the principles of justice, compassion, and love. Asking better questions will lead us toward more creative solutions and beginning to address some of the root causes of bullying and violence which we may never have otherwise considered.

And Our Hopes...

As with any statement, the message and potential power remains hidden if no one reads it. This study guide is intended to help in fostering important conversations within the study group. Even more important, we pray that it opens doors for respectful discussion within your entire congregation, and throughout the wider faith community. We hope that it will:

- Open your community to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit, and learn to be led by the Spirit's promptings;
- Create a stronger sense of community that creates a safe space for sharing—more authentically—individual and community joys and concerns;
- Open a greater understanding that we are all persons created in God's image—and as such, deserving of love, respect, and compassion; and
- Engage in action—in community—to bring health and healing to those who are experiencing bullying and abuse, and to work to change the conditions that create these situations.

We hope that this resource will help youth, congregations and individuals throughout the Christian and wider faith community. We believe it will help to bring many disparate voices to bear in finding a common voice that can speak truth to power, confronting hatred and discrimination against God's children, and seeking to make their lives better. In the process, we may find that our world and all of our lives will be better.

Thank you for considering this guide.

Daily Goals

- **Day One:** To develop and understand the definitions of bullying and cyber-bullying.
- **Day Two:** To define and understand the word “empathy” and its importance; to identify bullying behavior in ourselves and others and begin to discuss ways to deal with the behaviors
- **Day Three:** To motivate youth to become advocates for others and to find ways to decrease bullying behavior in their environment

Session One: What is Bullying?

Materials Needed for Day One:

1. POST-IT Poster paper
2. Holy Bible (Common English Bible)
3. Markers (several colors are helpful)
4. Notebook paper
5. Pens and/or Pencils
6. Laptop with a Large Screen or an Audio Visual System
7. Medium sized Metal Fireproof Container
8. Matches or Lighter

Activities for the Day:

1. Introductions of Staff and Youth
2. Declaration of Safe Space and Ground Rules (see Appendix for suggestions)
3. Opening Prayer
4. Scriptural grounding for the day: *Luke 10: 25-37, CEB*
5. **Activity: Bullying—Defining the Problem** (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/>)
 - A **bully** is someone who directs physical, verbal, or psychological aggression or harassment toward others, with the goal of gaining power over or dominating another individual. Research indicates that bullying is more prevalent in boys than girls, though this difference decreases when considering indirect aggression (such as verbal threats).
 - A **victim** is someone who repeatedly is exposed to aggression from peers in the form of physical attacks, verbal assaults, or psychological abuse. Victims are more likely to be boys and to be physically weaker than peers. They generally do not have many, if any, good friends and may display poor social skills and academic difficulties in school. (NASP Website—see *Appendix*)

🎵 **Staff Note:** While the youth involved will give varying definitions of bullying, please review the above website to make sure you have listed all the

types that will give more meaning to the goal for today. Be participative with the youth and not the sage in this activity, it will help the discussion to be one they can embrace and enliven. If it appears they are getting stuck or need help, give just enough assistance to get them going. Make sure participants help you to post each of those definitions and that they stay posted during the entire length of this workshop. You may use them often in your discussions with the youth.

- Break into groups of 4-5 and create a definition of bullying
- Share and refine definitions as a whole group
- Post group definition of bullying once consensus is gained

6. Activity: Stereotypes up in Ashes

After you've defined and discussed some definitions for bullying, give a piece of paper and a pencil to each participant and ask them to think of the types of people that are victims of bullying behavior. Ask them to name those common stereotypes that are derogatory or names they've heard other people



called that were hurtful. Once they have written these names and stereotypes down, proceed to a safe location where you will need to take a metal fire proof container and ask the kids to throw each of their pieces of paper into the metal container. An adult should then make sure that youth are located a safe distance away from the metal container and proceed to ignite the paper in the container and watch all those stereotypes and negativity go up in smoke! This is a good time for discussion and/or asking for their feelings about this activity. After you are done please proceed back to the classroom for other discussions.)

7. Discussion: Cyber-Bullying

Definition and discussion: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/>

🎵 **Staff Note:** Ask participants if and how they've experienced cyber-bullying or if anyone else they know has been cyber-bullied.

8. Activity: Listen to Sam's Story (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5YFANVQpjs>)

Sam's Story is a short clip about how someone had to endure the hateful and hurtful things that were posted about him on social media. The most important things to remember about cyber bullying is that it causes stigmatization and pain within peer groups. This is an area where youth can actively choose not to engage a cyber-bully and/or to provide encouragement to the one who is being bullied. Sometimes kind words, helpful acts and including others in their circle of friends can be all the action needed to stop a bully.

9. Discussion: Why Cyber-Bullying is Different

Let's talk about cyber-bullying (see information about "Why Cyber Bullying is different" in above website). Do you know a cyber bully? What can you do to stop cyber bullying?

10. Discussion: The Spiritual Lesson (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

"The parable of the Good Samaritan is a powerful story. One of the things we learn from is that each of us in our own way is like the lawyer who asks the question, "And who is thy neighbor?" We want to narrow our circle of friends and limit those for whom we care. Jesus will not stand for this limitation. He blows the doors of our definition of neighbor to include anyone who is in need. In Christ, our circle of friends is very broad indeed! It extends to all of humanity, even to those with whom we are not personally comfortable – we get to expand our definition of neighbor. It may very well be the most life changing thing we do." (Rev. David Eck)

11. "What we know for sure" and questions:

Participants should be able to state some concrete things they learned today about bullying. They should have a working definition of bullying and be able to recognize bullying behavior when exposed to it. The aim is that they know we have choices and those choices need to be influenced by stories like the Good Samaritan-learning to be helpful and not hurtful.



Session Two:

What is Empathy? What Does Bullying Look Like?

Materials Needed for Day Two:

1. POST-IT Poster paper
2. Holy Bible (Common English Bible)
3. Markers (several colors are helpful)
4. Notebook paper
5. Pens and/or Pencils
6. Generic Church Maps
7. Copies of the “Empathy Quiz”

1. Review safe space and ground rules
2. Opening Prayer
3. Scriptural grounding for the day: *Matthew 5:14-16, CEB*

🎵 **Staff Note:** As a resource for you before discussion with participants, please read Sue Shellenbarger’s article before class begins: “Teens are Still Developing Empathy Skills” at the link below:
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304561004579137514122387446>

4. Discussion: Defining Empathy

Have participants take the empathy quiz (print out and copy from <http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/are%20you%20empathetic.pdf>).

Define **Empathy**, ask others if they are empathetic and allow them to express their feelings. Be prepared to write down the participants’ responses on POST-IT poster paper after taking and discussing the quiz. Have them help you post responses around the room for later referencing or review.

5. Discussion and Activity: Defining Violence and Bullying Behavior

- Pull out the previous’ days definition of bullying and now define violence.
- **Question:** What is the difference between violence and bullying and how are the two connected? (see staff note)
- Describe behavior that looks like bullying using role plays (next page) or create your own.

🎵 **Staff Note:** Explain to the participants that violence and bullying are connected because violence occurs in a continuum. This means that they may not seem very severe at first but if they are tolerated, they can move from offensive jokes and language to forms of physical intimidation (i.e. pushing and shoving or even hitting and fighting). Ultimately at the center of all of this is the victim or the one who is experiencing the bullying.

Following the Role Play, take a 5-10 minute break to set up for the next activity (hand out generic maps and writing supplies). Participants might want to stretch or eat a snack. If you brought snacks for the participants just make sure that not too much time lapses before you continue.

6. Activity and Discussion: Mapping Where Bullying Occurs (generic map of building)

Have participants map and discuss places in their churches or places of worship where bullying occurs (bathrooms, hallways, classrooms, parking lots and/or other spaces within and outside of the building). Ask the following questions **before handing out the map** and once you have made sure participants know who to contact within their place of worship to report bullying behavior.

- Have you seen bullying at your church in the form of exclusion, shunning or purposefully leaving people out?
- Have you seen verbal bullying at your church?
- Have you seen physical bullying at your church?



Role-Playing Activity

Roles: Monica, Devin and Campers

Scenario A: Monica is constantly teasing Devin about his weight. During youth camp, she says hurtful things under her breath or makes a comment about “fat” people and how much they eat. At lunchtime, Monica makes jokes about what Devin is eating for lunch, so that many other campers can hear. Some campers laugh, some join in, and some pretend to ignore the situation and not hear the comments being made. Devin is beginning eat by himself, out of humiliation.

Roles: Amir, Hector, Christine, Students/Youth

Scenario B: Amir, Hector and Christine attend the same church and are in the youth group. Amir and Hector have recently been harassing Christine online after church and school. They post messages on Facebook that make fun of Christine and constantly instant message Christine with ridiculing comments. They send messages to her at such a rapid rate that Christine has been forced to block their messages. Still, though, the messages on Facebook are viewed by a large number of students at their school. Amir and Hector also decided to create a private group on Facebook, in which students post comments and stories about Christine.

Roles: Kim, Brody (males)

Scenario C: Lately, Kim just can’t seem to “stay out of Brody’s way.” Anytime that Kim happens to be walking near Brody in the hallway or during a group activity at church, Brody shoves Kim while making fun of his name by saying “Kim is a girl’s name, sissy” and he criticizes him for walking “too slow,” “too close to him,” or just for “being in his way.” Brody never pushes him when adults, youth leaders or others are around, but frequently does so at other times. Brody also gets close to Kim’s face and threatens him with physical harm if he doesn’t move or do other such things.

- Do you know who to talk to in your church if you witness bullying behaviors?

🎵 **Staff Note:** Discuss possible ways to bring attention to others about these spaces where bullying behavior is occurring (posters, signs, discussions with adults etc.)

7. Discussion: The Spiritual Lesson

“What makes us different from others and what makes our faith so distinct? It is all about **GRACE** – treating others not as they deserve but as God wishes them to be treated – with love, kindness and mercy. God is good to each and every one of us. God’s love embraces the good and the “not so good” alike. God wants us to strive for the highest good and teaches others to do the same, even those who hate and abuse us. Our love for others, even those who are unappreciative and selfish towards us, must be shown the same kindness and mercy which God has shown to us. It is easier to show compassion and kindness when there might be a chance we’d benefit. The real challenge is to show love and expect nothing in return. Our prayers for those who treat us unkindly both break the power of revenge and unleash the power of love to do good, even in the face of evil.

Pledge ????

8. “What we know for sure” and questions:

Participants should be able to state some concrete things they learned today about bullying. They should have a clear definition of what empathy means and know why it is important. Also, they should be able to identify bullying behavior when they are a part of groups.



Session Three:

Bullying Myths; Preventing Bullying

Materials Needed for Day Three:

1. POST-IT Poster paper
2. Holy Bible (Common English Bible)
3. Markers (several colors are helpful)
4. Notebook paper
5. Pens and/or Pencils
6. Blindfolds
7. Magazines/Newspaper
8. Colored construction paper
9. Glitter
10. Glue
11. Crayons

Ask: After asking the small group to consider examples/scenarios ask them the following questions: 1. Can you identify the motivations for bullying behaviors? 2. How can you respond to undercut that motivation as a peer or fellow church member? (It may be helpful to post the questions as a reminder.)

Remind: Each participant needs to know that they may not be able to “fix” everything about a situation but they can pay attention to what is happening and show support afterward or if it is safe, they can intervene during the behavior.

7. **Activity: Circle of Concern Exercise** (Inspire youth to change the tide)

🎵 **Staff Note:** Chairs should be arranged in a circle.

Ask participants to identify who they care about at church and outside of their friend group. This activity can also be done as a writing assignment. Help participants notice who is in and outside of their circle of concern. Is a new person or a loner outside the circle? Is a staff person at the church or someone who is a member or attends regularly outside their circle? Ask them how this could be hurtful to those people and also how it is limiting to themselves and the church community. Ask participants to consider saying hello to the custodian,



1. Review of safe space and ground rules
2. Opening Prayer
3. Brief Review of materials covered in past sessions
4. Scriptural grounding for the day: *Matthew 7: 12*
5. **Handout OR Review and Discussion: Bullying Myths** (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/files/myths-about-bullying-tipsheet.pdf>)

🎵 **Staff Note:** Adults need to be able to advocate for youth who feel helpless and powerless as victims of bullying behavior. Read about how to be an adult advocate and how to intervene at <http://www.nea.org/home/53360.htm>.

6. **Discussion: Preventing Bullying**

Have the group break into smaller groups of 3 or 4; provide pen/pencil and paper for each small group to record and post answers.

Explain: In order to prevent bullying, we need to be able to intervene appropriately when bullying behaviors occur and show support in the spaces and times where bullying is not occurring. The leader will provide scenarios/examples of bullying and/or encourage participants to do so. You may also refer to scenarios used in today's session. Each small group can address a different context (i.e. cyber bullying, gossip at church etc.) and talk about ways that they can appropriately and safely stand up for the humanity of others.

sacristan or church clerical person. Even those who are often quiet but helpful deserve our attention or a kind smile and a “thank you”! Ask the participants to make a pledge to reach out to one or two new people, especially those with special needs, ethnic minorities and others who are sometimes outside of the circle.

🎵 **Staff Note:** It might also be helpful to make arrangements to gather in some sort of forum on an ongoing basis to discuss the impact of their actions.

8. **Activity and Discussion: View “Bullied to death: A suicide story”** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJQGabCzTy0>)

9. **Activity: Keep it Real**

Using blindfolds to further enhance the safe space, ask participants to answer the “Keep it Real” questions at their seats while blindfolded.

🎵 **Staff Note:** Keep a count of how many hands were raised after each question and provide a **brief** and thoughtful reflection about the activity and then ask others to comment. Participants should be Integrating some of the things they have learned so far into the discussion.

10. **Activity: “A World Without Bullying” Collage**

This activity should take about 30 minutes. Each participant will be able to keep their own collage as a reminder that they can create a WORLD WITHOUT BULLYING! After completion, each participant can be given an opportunity to briefly discuss his/her collage.

🎵 **Staff Note:** Assemble materials beforehand so as to be able to move quickly in to letting participants have time to be creative with their collages.

11. **Discussion: The Spiritual Lesson** (The Golden Rule)

If we live by the “Golden Rule,” we commit to being proactive in how we want our world to look. We can never tolerate someone being treated unfairly or approve of any violence that is directed at another person because of who God created them to be. When we treat others as we want to be treated, we are saying to them that “you matter,” “you are important,” and “I am going to make sure that I stand up for you if anyone treats you otherwise.” Jesus

“Keep it Real” Questions

1. I have experienced feelings of loneliness, at times.
2. I have felt left out of an activity that other people were doing.
3. I think that others have told secrets about me before.
4. I have told someone else’s secret to others.
5. I have contributed to the spreading of a rumor by sharing it with others.
6. I have felt embarrassed because of other’s actions.
7. I have embarrassed a friend or other peer for some reason – to make people laugh or to make the person feel bad.
8. I have witnessed physical aggression between others.
9. I have felt physically threatened by another person.
10. I have been made fun of because of my appearance, my speech, my religion, my personality, my preferences, or any other reason.
11. I have made fun of someone else for his/her appearance, speech, personality, his or her preferences, or any other reason.
12. I have seen someone being bullied in my religious community, but did not do anything about it.
13. I have felt threatened or attacked online before, whether through instant messaging, a social network site, or another way.
14. I have made another person feel upset or attacked through some form of technology, whether it on the computer or phone.
15. I have told a trusted adult about a bullying situation, either about myself or someone else.
16. I have seen bullying in this church/space, and I think it is a problem.

brought unpopular messages to people at a time when not everyone wanted to hear them. Using that example, and believing in the “Golden Rule,” we walk out the message of acceptance and love for neighbor each day whether it makes us popular or not. Starting each day with good intentions and love in our hearts for God and all of God’s creation is a perfect way to begin any day and every day!

12. **“What we know for sure,” wrap-up, sending prayer:**

Participants should know that bullying behavior is unacceptable and be able to identify ways to advocate for others when it is safe. Participants will recognize the “Golden Rule” as a way to be proactive in their relationships with others.

Resources

Bullying: Facts for Schools and Parents, National Association of School Psychologists (http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/bullying_fs.aspx)

Bullying Definition, stopbullying.gov (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/definition/#types>)

Bullying Unit (<http://socialstudiesbullyingunit.weebly.com/>)

“Dear Dad” Anti-Bullying short film (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5H8RnV9b_cY)

Developing Empathy: Middle Grades, Teaching Tolerance (<http://www.tolerance.org/supplement/developing-empathy-middle-grades>)

Golden Rule Pledge, Christians and Bullying Prevention (<http://goldenrulepledge.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Christians-and-Bullying2.01.pdf>)

The Pacific Violence Prevention Institute (<http://www.pvpi.org/>)

Teens Are Still Developing Empathy Skills, Sue Shellenbarger, Wall Street Journal, October 15, 2013 (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304561004579137514122387446>)

What is Cyber Bullying, stopbullying.gov (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying/what-is-it/>)

“Where All Can Safely Live” (http://www.reconcilingworks.org/images/stories/downloads/resources/058_where-all-can-safely-live-revised-expanded.pdf)

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Others...

Appendix



Sacred Conversations

Ground Rules for Group Conversations

Conversations take place on many levels and in many settings. Ground rules are essential when the conversation involves many persons and issues over which persons of good will may differ. Ground rules help to foster order and respect, reminding participants of their responsibilities as valuable contributors to a productive conversation that results in better understanding among the persons involved.

Individual groups may wish to supplement this list and are encouraged to do so as they see fit.

1. Only one person shall speak at a time.
2. All persons are encouraged to speak, but no one will be forced to speak.
3. Each person will seek to listen with intent to understand; questions seeking clarification to promote understanding are encouraged.
4. All discussion within the group context is confidential unless otherwise determined by the group.
5. No side discussions or attempts to “win over” other participants or “win points” are permitted.
6. All discussion will focus on the issue and its merits from the perspectives of the person speaking – remarks shall not focus on the character of a person expressing a different position or view or make assumptions as to what others are saying.
 - a. Speakers should focus on using “I” comments that reflect their own understandings/feelings about an issue.
 - b. “You” comments are appropriate when seeking clarification or understanding where others stand with regard to the issue (e.g. “Could you please help me to understand what you mean when you say...?”); “you” comments should never be used in an accusatory way (e.g. “You’re making me angry,” “Why aren’t you listening to me?” or “You just don’t understand”).
7. Participants should avoid use of the words “always” or “never” – both are seldom the case in any situation.

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8. The group may wish to determine additional rules/signals to enhance its work. Some other rules may concern the following:

a. Length of comments _____

b. Loss of focus on the issue at hand _____

c. Conversation domination by one or more participants _____

d. How to invite quieter participants into the conversation without coercion _____

e. How to ensure that clarifying questions are recognized and addressed at the appropriate time _____

f. How to deal with violations of other rules _____

g. Other _____

Appendix



Sacred Conversations

Personal Covenant for Group Conversations

Conversations take place on many levels and in many settings. Ground rules for groups help to foster order and respect, reminding participants of their responsibilities as valuable contributors to a productive conversation that results in better understanding among the persons involved.

A personal covenant that each participant acknowledges and agrees to will guide personal behavior in keeping with the ground rules and maintaining respectful and productive conversations.

I acknowledge and will strive to abide by this covenant during my participation in the following conversation:

Signature

Date

1. I will enter into this conversation with a positive attitude, an open mind, and an open heart.
2. I will stay focused on the issue.
3. I will speak only when recognized/appropriate.
4. I will not interrupt others while they are speaking.
5. I will listen with intent to understand when others are speaking, and will ask for clarification if necessary.
6. I will speak based on my own understanding of and feelings about the issue.
7. I will not place blame on others for my feelings.
8. I will not attack others when they express differing views.

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9. I will not dominate the conversation.
10. I will seek out input from those with differing views in an effort to understand.
11. I will seek out input from those who are quiet without being coercive.
12. I will honor the “sacred space” of the conversation by maintaining confidentiality unless otherwise determined by the group.
13. I will not “gossip” or speak about others in the group behind their backs.
14. I will not seek to “win points” or build factions within the group.
15. I will examine my personal biases and communication weaknesses so that I am aware of them and will work to avoid having them interfere in the conversation.
16. I will gently ask for accountability to the group’s “ground rules” when I feel they are being violated.