



Tools You Can Use

Suggested Guidelines for Selecting Anti-bullying Assemblies

1. Recognize the limits of the school assembly approach in changing behavior. It may be beneficial to utilize assemblies to generate awareness and build enthusiasm for preventing bullying; however, ongoing prevention efforts are necessary to bring about changes in behavior and school climate. Have a plan for follow up activities in place prior to providing an assembly activity. (See "Misdirections in Bullying Prevention and Intervention" at www.stopbullying.gov to learn more about using resources wisely.)

2. Preview performances and scripts to ensure that the messages are based on sound theoretical knowledge, research, and best practices in bullying prevention. Avoid performances that promote stereotypes regarding the type of youth who are bullied or who are engaged in bullying. Also, avoid messaging that implies that youth who bully always have low self-esteem and are big and tough, or that "standing up to a bully" is always the best solution. See research by Phillip Rodkin on the socially connected bully (Rodkin, 2012) to understand more about the socially connected versus the socially marginalized bully. See also information from the Youth Voice Project www.youthvoiceproject.com (Davis & Nixon, 2013) to learn more about which strategies are most helpful for youth who are targeted by bullying.

3. Put the focus on the positive behavior that we want students to demonstrate. Performances that focus on positive ally actions are more effective than scare tactics or numerous examples and inflated statistics regarding bullying. Social norming theory (Berkowitz, 2004) posits that behavior is influenced by inaccurate perceptions regarding how other members of the peer group think and act. Individuals tend to overestimate

the number of their peers involved in negative behaviors. Correcting such misperceptions can lead to positive behavior change. Thus, youth are more likely to engage in pro-social behavior when they understand that the majority of their peers share their desire to or are engaging in positive behavior. Use local survey data and youth leaders to help spread the message that most youth are engaging in pro-social behavior or have pro-social beliefs. When possible allow students to create the assembly, share local statistics and have ownership of the messages and actions requested of their peers.

4. Be very cautious with messaging around bullying and suicide. Messages that imply simplistic causal relationships between bullying and suicide are misleading and potentially harmful to prevention efforts. The following was noted in the Journal of Adolescent Health's Special Supplement on the Relationship between Youth Involvement in Bullying and Suicide: "A critical difference distinguishes an association between bullying and suicide from a causal relationship, with significant implications for prevention. Conveying that bullying alone causes suicide at best minimizes, and at worst ignores, the other factors that may contribute to death by suicide" (Hertz, Donato, & Wright, 2013 p.S-2.)

5. Be aware that student audiences may include "suicide-receptive" youth. Avoid assemblies that focus on explicit details, methods and dramatizations of suicide rather than the importance of reaching out for help. (NIHM, Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide)



References

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