



Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

2.2 Responding to Bullying

Objectives

Develop an awareness of the factors involved in bullying.

Explore feelings and attitudes around expectations of the behaviors of people involved in such situations.

Discuss ways to intervene safely in such situations.

Materials needed

Copies of the handout

Time needed

Twenty to thirty minutes

Instructor directions

Have your students read the range of responses to oppressive behavior and the scenario provided.

Ask them to evaluate the behavior of each of the participants in the scenario in light of the information given.

Ask them to evaluate each person's behavior when each is identified with a particular age, academic standing, gender, and ethnicity. Have them discuss if and why their expectations change in light of these variables.



Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

2.2 Responding to Bullying Handout

Directions

Consider the following range of responses to oppressive behavior:

- Actively joining in the oppressive behavior
- Not responding to the oppressive behavior
- Educating oneself about the oppressive behavior
- Interrupting the oppressive behavior
- Supporting others' proactive response to the oppressive behavior
- Initiating a proactive response to the oppressive behavior

Now consider the following scenario:

In a university gymnasium, five adults of various ages are engaged in swimming laps, some swimming freestyle, some using kickboards, in lanes along the long axis of the pool. The lane markers have been removed for cleaning. A lifeguard watches from a chair a few yards away. A group of four students approaches and noisily enters the pool, laughing, splashing, and playing, swimming across the short axis and cutting across the lanes of the five swimmers. After a few moments, when the behavior of the newly arrived group continues, one of the original swimmers leaves the pool. Another begins to swim shortened laps in a lane at the far end of the pool. Two others cross to the side of the pool and remain in the water, watching the newly arrived group. The fifth swimmer, using a kickboard, continues to swim laps in a lane along the long axis of the pool. The newly arrived group continues to ignore the original swimmers and to splash and play across the short axis of the pool.

After the third time one of the newly arrived group cuts across the lane, the fifth swimmer says politely, "Excuse me; the lanes for swimming laps are going in this direction," and indicates the long axis of the pool. Three of the newly arrived group ignore the fifth swimmer's comment, and the fourth replies, "Yeah, well, I'm only swimming in one direction." The fifth swimmer responds firmly, "We are already established going in this direction," and continues to swim. The newly arrived group moves out of the way but begins to make loud comments including profanity and derogatory remarks about the fifth swimmer's appearance. The lifeguard continues to watch. One of the other original swimmers leaves the pool.

The fifth swimmer continues swimming laps while the newly arrived group continues to engage in derogatory remarks, splash water in the swimmer's face, and move in and out of the lane the swimmer is using. Of the remaining original swimmers, one continues swimming shortened laps, and the other continues to watch without speaking, as does the lifeguard.

When finished with laps, the fifth swimmer leaves the pool and approaches the lifeguard, asking, "Did you see what they were doing?" indicating the newly arrived group. The lifeguard responds carelessly, "Ah, they didn't mean any harm." The newly arrived group proceeds to occupy the entire area of the pool, and the remaining two original swimmers now leave the water.

Based on the scenario given above, and in light of the range of possible responses to oppressive behavior, analyze the behavior of each of the participants in the situation. Answer the following questions:

What was the responsibility of each of the individuals involved?

Based on what you know, do you think each participant behaved appropriately? If not, what do you think each should have done differently?

Now assign each of the participants an age, an academic standing, a gender, and an ethnicity. Analyze their behavior. Do your feelings about each person's behavior change if you assume that the fifth swimmer was female? If the lifeguard was white? If the disruptive group was elderly? The original swimmer who left was faculty? What if the disruptive group was black? If the observers were freshmen? If the lifeguard was female? If the fifth swimmer was Asian? Think about how and why these factors might change your expectations of each person involved.

Discuss other possible scenarios. Answer the following: If you were in the newly arrived group but felt uncomfortable with their behavior, what would you have done? What would you have done if you were the fifth swimmer? The lifeguard? One of the observers?

Are there ways to intervene safely in bullying situations? Do you agree with the position that not responding to oppressive behavior works against social justice just as much as actively joining in oppressive behavior? Why or why not?

McClintock, Mary. "How to Interrupt Oppressive Behavior." *Camping Magazine* Nov.-Dec. 1990: 32-34.