

5-2019

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Alleviating Bullying Behaviors Among Adolescents

Haley Q. Glidden

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

Alleviating Bullying Behaviors Among Adolescents

Introduction

For many children, bullying has become a social norm. There are many risks associated with being a target or engaging in bully behaviors for adolescents such as anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and feelings of vengefulness (Nixon, 2014). To address this issue, I created a two-session curriculum about the negative effects of bullying and presented it to a freshman class at Everett Alvarez High School in Salinas, California.

Needs Statement

Bullying is classified as “aggressive behavior intended to harm another that is repeated over time and involves a power imbalance” (Hase, Goldberg, Simon, Smith, Stuck, & Campaign, 2015, p.608). With advancing technology, adolescents not only encounter traditional face-to-face bullying, but must cope with cyberbullying as well. Both traditional and cyberbullying can cause detrimental effects on adolescents’ physical and mental health, such as social anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, and in some cases, suicidal thoughts and attempts (Nixon, 2014). It is essential that schools provide students with proper coping strategies and how to intervene when students see someone being bullied or are being bullied themselves. Adolescents who witness someone being bullied may feel the desire to intervene but may not know how without also being bullied or receiving scrutiny from their peers (Batanova, 2014). As a result, adolescents are vulnerable to the many risks associated with bullying. These risks are not limited to being a target of bullying but also behaving as a bystander or bully.

With access to the internet and social media on smartphones, adolescents are also susceptible to cyberbullying. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying allows for a target to be harassed not just by people they interact with daily, but by anyone with access to the internet. Using social media can also create unwanted exposure, like someone posting unflattering photographs and hurtful words about someone else online. Furthermore, adolescents who engage as a cyberbully cannot see the immediate effect their actions have on their targets, which makes it easier for a person to continue bullying (Nixon, 2014). Research has shown an overlap between traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Hase et al., 2015). Although each have their own unique characteristics, the consequences are strikingly similar. For example, Hinduja and Patchin (2017) found that after asking high school students if they had ever experienced traditional bullying, the study found that, “46% said they were called mean names and 42% said they were left out of things on purpose or excluded from their group of friends” (p. 3). It was reported that 70% of students had been the target of one or more bully behaviors within the past month (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017.) When it comes to bullying, a target may feel helpless and need help from someone.

Bullying has negative effects on adolescent development such as low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, anxiety, fear of attending school, chronic illnesses, and feelings of anger and vengefulness (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) indicated that youth who used the social media platform Myspace were putting their safety at risk by being more likely to be targets of “harassment, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, alcohol and drug abuse, hate crimes, planned or executed bombings, planned school shootings, suicide, and murder” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010, p. 615). Not only does bullying affect one's physical health,

but the target's mental health is jeopardized as well. What causes an adolescent to intervene or not intervene when they see someone being bullied? Batanova (2014) determined that adolescents may find it hard to help someone who is being bullied out of fear that they too would become a target of bullying, or that their friends would judge them for intervening. Although an adolescent may see someone being bullied and have a desire to help, they choose not to intervene because they fear that they too will become a victim of bullying or will no longer fit in with their friend group. According to Batanova (2014) adolescents who have empathy for others are more likely to intervene when someone is being bullied. It was found that students who felt guilt or anger when witnessing someone being bullied were more likely to intervene. Furthermore, students who were aware of productive coping strategies, such as seeking help and support from an adult or friend, were more likely to report if they were a target of bullying. If schools implement bully prevention programs, then students will have the proper tools to feel confident and safe when intervening in bullying situations.

Adolescents may find themselves intertwined with bullying behaviors at their school; they may be someone who witnesses someone being bullied, partakes in bullying, or is the target of bullying. It is essential that schools provide their students with resources to diminish these behaviors, such as implementing prevention programs that teach adolescents how to report when they or someone else is being bullied. Furthermore, these prevention programs should help adolescents with aggressive tendencies learn how to control their emotions in a healthy way, while also showing them the negative effects their actions may have on another person. For these reasons, I have created a series of lessons plans that will address these problems that adolescents cope with while in high school.

Theory Application

Albert Bandura, in his Social Learning Theory, proposed that adolescents learn by observing the different behaviors around them, and they will learn which behaviors to act out based on either reinforcement or punishment outcomes of behaving a certain way (Wittmer & Petersen, 2018). Studies have shown that adolescents who are exposed to forms of aggression, such as domestic violence, are more likely to engage in aggressive, bully behaviors at school and outside of their home (Swearer, Wang, Berry, & Myers, 2014). According to the Social Learning Theory, this relationship exists because adolescents learn from the modeled behaviors they see, and they mimic these behaviors (Wittmer & Petersen, 2018). If an adolescent mimics this behavior and receives reinforcement, such as peer acceptance, he or she will continue to engage in aggressive behaviors. Likewise, an adolescent who sees someone being bullied may or may not intervene. If an adolescent has previously seen someone intervene to stop bullying, and the situation resolved well, then this adolescent is more likely to intervene if they see someone being bullied. This is because the modeled behavior they witnessed (intervention) was met with a positive resolution. On the other hand, although an adolescent may feel that helping is the right thing to do, they may stop themselves from intervening because no one else is helping, or they tried to help someone in the past but were met with punishment instead (such as being bullied).

Another component to Bandura's Social Learning Theory is the concept of self-efficacy. According to the theory, self-efficacy is how a person feels about themselves and their ability to successfully perform a certain task or behavior within their social relationships (Wright, Wright, & Jenkins-Guarnieri 2013). Matsushima and Shiomi (2003) found that high school students with

lower levels of social self-efficacy were more likely to suffer from shyness and loneliness, whereas students with high levels of self-efficacy were more likely to maintain close relationships with their peers (Wright et al. 2013). Adolescents who suffer from loneliness are at higher risk of being targets of bully behaviors (Wright et al. 2013). Prevention programs modeling positive, non-aggressive behaviors for adolescents may alleviate the bullying problem faced in schools (Espelage, Low, Ryzin, & Polanin, 2015). Once again, according to Bandura's theory, adolescents learn by mimicking the behaviors they observe at home or in school, so if schools provide students with learning tools about properly treating others with kindness and respect, it may help decrease bully behaviors. By reinforcing the idea that bullying others is met with negative consequences, while treating others with kindness is met with positive reinforcement, adolescents are more likely to stop engaging in bully behaviors (Wittmer & Petersen, 2018, p.64). For this reason, I have created a series of lesson plans that will help the students understand social behaviors so that they can have positive relationships with their peers and avoid being bullied.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at Everett Alvarez High School in a ninth grade homeroom class. According to the School Accountability Report Card, (SARC; 2018), Everett Alvarez is 0.7% African American, 0.9% Asian, 2.6% Filipino, 0.1% Pacific Islander, 6.8% White, 88.1% Hispanic, and 0.8% Two or more races. In addition, 598 (22.6%) of the total students (2,645) at Everett Alvarez are English Language Learners, with 558 of those students whose first language is Spanish. Furthermore, 69.8% of the students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged.

I would expect that the ninth grade participants will reflect the ethnic and socioeconomic composition of the school. I will conduct my project in English, so the students will have to be English proficient in order to understand and engage with the presented material. My project is meant for high school students, and it is not likely that the activities I have planned will apply to younger children or adults. Although, I do believe that with some changes in the activities, younger children would be able to take away from the material if it was presented in a simpler way for them to understand.

Learning Outcomes

For this project, I intend to provide two, 35 minute lessons to freshmen students at Everett Alvarez High School. By the end of the project, participants will be able to:

1. Describe two covert forms of bullying.
2. Describe two effects of bullying on someone's mental or physical health.
3. Describe two ways to intercede or prevent bullying and explain what to do if they are being bullied.

Method

Day 1:

First, I introduced myself to the participants and explained to them why I was there and told them about why it is important to take bullying seriously. For the first activity, I asked the

participants to stand up. I had a tennis ball in my hand and explained that whoever held the tennis ball would have to call out an example of bullying with which they were familiar. When someone called out an answer, he or she threw it to someone else. In order to make sure the entire class participated, I had the participants take a seat once they called out an answer. While they called out examples, I wrote them on the board. See Figure 1 for what they said. Some had trouble thinking of an example, so I assisted them by writing “Verbal, Cyber, Physical” on the board. Then, I had them take their seats, and I began my presentation that went over the different types of bully behaviors, such as overt behaviors. See Appendix A for the presentation. I connected the brainstorming activity to my presentation by explaining that adolescents may not be aware of what covert bullying behaviors are. During my lecture, I explained what covert bullying behaviors were and gave the participants examples. After that, I discussed some of the negative effects that bullying can have on an adolescent and into adulthood. To see if they were able to understand the material I had just presented to them, I had the class play an interactive online quiz using Kahoot on their Google Chromebooks or their cell phones if their Chromebook was dead. See Appendix B for the quiz questions. The online quiz addressed Learning Outcomes 1 and 2. All of the participants participated. At the end of the game, I gave the top three scores a prize, which was some type of school supply such as a notebook, flashcards, or post-it notes. At the end of the class, I handed out pencils to all of the participants and explained to them that next class I would be discussing ways to intercede bullying if it happens to them or someone else.

Day 2:

First, I gave each participant a number 1 to 5 and put them into groups based on their number. I had them get up from their seat and move to their designated spot for the day. Then, I briefly explained what I had gone over during the previous class as a refresher. Afterwards, I began my presentation and explained why someone might bully another person and provided the class with two vocabulary words: bystander and target. See Appendix C for the powerpoint slides. I explained what these words meant, then began providing the participants with ways to intercede bullying if it happens to them or if they see someone being bullied. After the presentation, I passed out different types of bullying situations to each group and asked them to discuss and describe how they would resolve the situation if A) they were the target and B) they were a bystander. See Appendix D for the bullying scenarios. After discussing this in their groups, they wrote down their ideas on a piece of binder paper. Afterwards, each group shared their ideas with the class. They discussed why the participants thought that their idea was the best way to resolve the situation. After that activity, I gave them a worksheet which had them demonstrate that they had fulfilled the learning outcomes for days one and two. See Appendix E for the worksheet questions. At the end of the activity, I thanked the participants for allowing me to conduct my project with them, and passed out Anti-Bully stickers.

Results

Learning Outcome 1 was that the participants would be able to identify and describe two covert forms of bullying. I believe that this outcome was partially met. On day one when the participants answered questions via Kahoot, the majority of the class demonstrated they

understood the difference between overt and covert forms of bullying (questions 1 to 6 asked participants to identify if the situation was an example of an overt or covert form of bullying). On average, the participants scored an overall of 70% correct for their responses. See Table 1 for the complete percentage of correct responses. However, at the end of day two, I gave the participants a worksheet which asked them to describe what covert bullying was, and 50% of the participants left the question blank. I think this may have happened because they forgot what covert meant or got it confused with overt since some participants wrote overt examples instead of covert. See Table 4 for their responses.

Learning Outcome 2 was that participants would be able to describe two negative effects that bullying may have on an adolescent's mental and physical health. I believe that this outcome was successfully met because 86% of the participants were able to list more than two negative effects on their worksheets, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and attempts, feelings of loneliness, and substance abuse. See Table 2 for a list of their responses.

Learning Outcome 3 was that the participants would be able to describe two different ways to intercede on bullying, as the target and as a bystander. I gave each group a bullying scenario and asked them to write how they would resolve the situation as a target and as a bystander. I believe that this learning outcome was partially met. Out of the 5 groups of participants, only 3 groups took this activity seriously by participating and giving coherent responses. Groups 1 and 3 refused to write anything down and instead were on their phones. The teacher was not there on this day, and, instead, there was a substitute teacher, which I think might have played a factor as to why some participants did not engage in the activity. Only 15 out of the 25 participants actually participated in the activity. Groups 1 and 3 only wrote one

sentence. The groups that did participate wrote examples to alleviate bullying, such as standing up for the target, telling the bully that their behavior is not okay, being a friend to the target, and speaking to an adult to seek help. After this activity, I provided the participants with a worksheet that asked them to describe at least two ways to intercede and prevent bullying. 86% of the participants successfully provided correct examples for this portion. See Table 3 for their responses.

Discussion

Overall, I believe that this project was partially successful. During day one, the participants were engaged in the activities and either asked questions or made a comment during the presentation that was connected to the material they were learning about. According to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, adolescents learn by observing the behaviors they see. If these behaviors are positively reinforced, the adolescent will act out this behavior. But, if the behavior is punished, the adolescent will not perform the behavior again. In the case with bullying, adolescents may continue to bully if they are reinforced by their peers, or they will stop bullying if their actions are punished. Furthermore, adolescents who intervene when witnessing someone being bullied, and are positively reinforced after intervening, will continue to step in when someone who is bullied needs help. My project aimed to provide adolescents with the tools to intervene if they witness someone being bullied or stand up if they are being bullied. The bullying scenario activity participants completed allowed them to look at a bullying situation from two different perspectives: if they were being bullied or if they witnessed someone being bullied. The activity allowed the students to collaborate with their peers and discuss the proper way to alleviate the situation and either help themselves or help someone else after being bullied.

This activity is connected to Bandura's Social Learning Theory because it allowed the adolescent's time to discuss and learn from one another as to what they would do to stop bullying. I believe that the participants now have the knowledge to alleviate bullying behaviors in their community, given their responses on the conclusion survey.

In terms of diversity, I believe my project included mostly everyone, except I think there may have been one participant who had trouble understanding the program. I performed my project in English, but I believe there was one participant who had trouble understanding English. He asked someone sitting next to him for help understanding what the questions on the worksheet were. If I were to do this project again, I believe it would be beneficial to check with the teacher beforehand and ask if any students are English language learners. With this information, I may be able to work with the teacher to find a better way to include all students, regardless of the English proficiency.

If I had to do this project again, I would be more strict about how much time to give the participants when filling out the worksheets. On day one I gave the participants a survey so I could better understand their background with bullying. I gave them 5 minutes to complete it, but some took longer than 5 minutes and did not want to turn the survey in until they were done with it. In doing so, the end of day one was a bit rushed during the online quiz because the participants wanted to pack up for their next class. This haste may have caused them to just click on an answer for the quiz without actually thinking about the question because they wanted to hurry and be done with the activity. Also, I gave the participants a worksheet to complete that had a question for Learning Outcome 1. But, I gave them the worksheet to complete at the end of day two, and mostly all the participants left that question blank. I believe that if I had given them

a worksheet to complete at the end of day one, they would have recalled the information better. Furthermore, I believe day two would have gone by a bit more smoothly if the teacher was there that day. The day before I went to present for day two, the teacher of the class emailed me and explained she would not be in class. With her absence, I noticed that the participants did not seem to care about participating in the activity. If I were to do this project again, I would make sure to go on a day where the teacher would be there. Nevertheless, I do believe that the participants learned about the topic and they will think about their actions in a bullying situation and how they treat other people.

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*Table 1**Percentage correct for each Kahoot question*

	<i>Percent Correct</i>
<i>Question 1</i>	<i>80%</i>
<i>Question 2</i>	<i>72%</i>
<i>Question 3</i>	<i>71%</i>
<i>Question 4</i>	<i>58%</i>
<i>Question 5</i>	<i>70%</i>
<i>Question 6</i>	<i>71%</i>
<i>Question 7</i>	<i>76%</i>
<i>Question 8</i>	<i>90%</i>
<i>Question 9</i>	<i>75%</i>

*Table 2**List of responses for negative physical and mental effects associated with bullying*

Response	Number of Responses
Depression	15
Anxiety	15
Suicide	15
Feelings of Anger	3
Changes in Sleeping Patterns	2
Feelings of Revenge	2
Self-Harm	8
Suicidal Thoughts	4
Low Self-Esteem	7
Substance Abuse	5
Stress	5
Missing School	2
Engaging in Bully Behaviors	13
Isolation/Feelings of Loneliness	7

*Table 3**List of responses for ways to alleviate bullying*

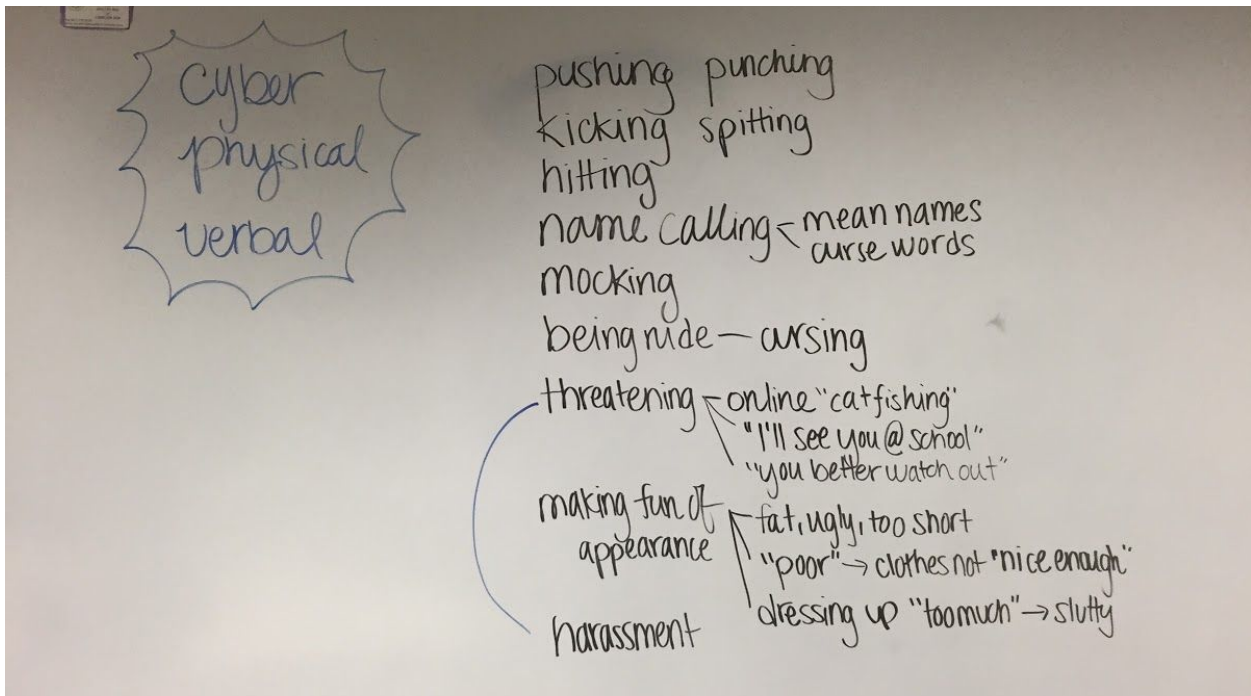
Response	Number of Responses
Tell and Adult	11
Confront Bully	11
Ignore It	8
Tell a Teacher	7
Tell a Parent	7
Tell a Friend	3
Ask Why	9
Walk Away	1
Be a Friend	4
Get Superintendent Involved	3
Stay Calm	1

*Table 4**List of responses for describing and identifying what covert bullying behaviors are*

Responses	Number of Responses
Ugly messages	2
Hand Gestures	1
Excluding Someone	2
Mental Abuse	1
Mocking	2
Mean Faces	4
Threats	1
Bullying that is not Noticeable	1
Name-Calling	2
Talking Behind Someone's Back	3
Hitting Someone	1
Physically Hurting Someone	4
Cyberbullying	2

Figure 1

Warm-Up Activity Learning Outcome 1



Appendix A

Powerpoint on Bullying Behaviors and Negative Effects, Learning Outcomes 1 and 2



**Bullying Behaviors &
the Negative Effects**

What Does Bullying Mean to YOU?

Let's call out some examples!



Bullying is Defined as...

“A recurring behavior in which one person uses their superiority to intimidate another person”



Overt vs Covert Forms of Bullying

Overt: “**Obvious”** easily noticeable

For example...

Physical

Verbal

Cyberbullying

Covert: not as easily noticed or detected
Under “**Cover”**

For example...

Menacing looks

Negative physical gestures

Socially excluding someone

Toxic Relationships

Health and Livelihood is at Risk

- Anxiety and depression may lead to:
 - loss of appetite, feelings of hopelessness, and suicide attempts
- Vengeful youth may attempt revenge
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Aggressive behaviors can affect future relationships



Log Into Your Google Chrome Books...

Let's play Kahoot! Go to [Kahoot.it.com](https://kahoot.it)

<https://create.kahoot.it/share/bullying-overt-forms-negative-effects/3aea2d07-5bd8-4482-945a-2129acoff78c>



What Happens to Those Who are Bullied?

Bullying has been shown to cause...

- Social anxiety*
- Depression*
- Lowered self-esteem*
- Suicidal thoughts and attempts*
- Feelings of anger/vengefulness*
- Frequently miss school

* These can all lead into adulthood*



Appendix B

Kahoot Quiz for Learning Outcomes 1 and 2

Q1: Define covert bullying behaviors.

Q2: Determine if this is an overt or covert form of bullying.

Q3: Determine if this is an overt or covert form of bullying.

Q4: Determine if this is an overt or covert form of bullying.

Q5: Determine if this is an overt or covert form of bullying.

Q6: Determine if this is an overt or covert form of bullying.

Q7: Which of the following is not a long term effect of bullying?

Q8: True or False: Adolescents who are bullied may suffer negative effects into adulthood.

Q9: What is a negative physical effect of bullying?

Appendix C

Powerpoint on How to Intercede Bullying, Learning Outcome 3



Review: Bullying May Occur Because...

Do not like the person.

Find bullying fun.

Like to feel tough, strong and in control.

Think it will make them popular.



Vocabulary

Bystander:

Someone who witnesses bullying occur and does not take part in the activity



Target:

Someone who is being bullied, online or in person

What Can We Do to Stop Bullying?

Don't ignore it.
 Speak up. Stay calm.
 Lead by example. Be kind.
 Think before you post.
 Tell an adult.



***If you've tried everything and bullying continues to persist, get your superintendent involved.**



Find an Activity You Enjoy and Do It!

Join a club, sport, or after school program.
 You'll be surrounded with people who have things in common with you!



Activity: Bullying Scenarios

1. Form into groups
2. Read your situation
3. Discuss how you would resolve the situation
 - a. Describe how you would resolve the situation if you were a **bystander**
 - b. Describe how you would resolve the situation if you were the **target**



Appendix D

Bullying Scenarios for Learning Outcome 3

Group 1 Scenario:

Alex is sitting in homeroom working on homework. Suddenly, their phone begins buzzing. It's a text message! How nice, no one ever texts Alex! Yay! Alex opens it up, and realizes, to their horror, the nude picture they sent to that really cute basketball player they have a crush on, is now part of a chain message. The picture is captioned, "SLUT." How can this be happening?? Their crush promised they wouldn't show anyone else. They said it was for their eyes only. "How could they do this to me?" Alex wonders. "I should have never sent that picture." Alex looks up, hoping no one else in their class received the text message, but they aren't so lucky. Everyone's eyes are on them. Some people begin pointing at Alex, whispering or laughing. Others begin calling out to them, saying mean things. The basketball player that Alex sent the picture to is in their class. The basketball player looks at Alex, laughing, and says, "Thanks for the picture!" They wink, and keep laughing.

Group 2 Scenario:

You're walking home from school. You're in your neighborhood, almost home. While you're walking, you notice up ahead a kid from your class named Alex walking home by himself.

"They always walk alone," you muse to yourself. You feel a tap on your shoulder. You turn around, and see that it's your friends! "Hey guys, what's up?"

"Nothing much," they say. "Do you want to come over later to play video games? I just got a new one!"

"Yeah, sounds fun," you nod.

"You know what else is fun? Messing with Alex. Let's do it." they say menacingly. Your friend runs up ahead and push Alex, who falls to the ground and drops their books.

Group 3 Scenario:

Alex is at their favorite hang out spot after school grabbing a bite to eat. They're hanging out with their friends and their significant other (SO: boyfriend/girlfriend). Everyone is having a great time, when someone suggests grabbing some ice cream for dessert.

"Sounds good!" everyone agrees, and gets up to get some ice cream.

As Alex begins to stand up, their SO grabs them by the arm and pulls them back down. "Are you sure you want ice cream?" they ask Alex.

"Huh?" Alex asks confused, "Yeah, I do. Why?"

Their SO looks at Alex and shrugs, "Well, you already ate a burger and fries. Are you *sure* you want ice cream too?"

Alex pauses, second guessing their choice of getting ice cream. What's the harm?

Their SO sighs, "Look, I just want you to fit in your outfit for prom! Last time you showed me what you looked like in it, you were spilling out. You looked like a beached whale. I just want you to look good, you know? I'm just looking out for you."

Alex's face turns red from embarrassment. Their friends are staring, unsure what to do.

Group 4 Scenario:

It's lunch time on campus. Alex is sitting with friends at their usual hang-out spot. While Alex and friends discuss their homework for History class, Alex notices a group of kids are giving Taylor dirty looks. Taylor is sitting with a friend, so they aren't completely alone. That's good. The kids continue to give Taylor dirty looks, and then they begin making inappropriate hand gestures towards them. Alex knows that if someone was giving them dirty looks and making those kind of gestures towards them, it would make them really uncomfortable.

Group 5 Scenario:

It can be difficult trying to make new friends, especially if you are a new student or shy. Alex doesn't have many friends. Alex tends to hang out by themselves because they don't want to try inserting themselves into someone's established friend group. One day during homeroom, Alex gets invited by a group of kids to hang out at the mall after school. Alex is excited and heads to the mall after their last class. They wait outside for their new friends to arrive, but no one ever shows up. The next day at school Alex asks the leader of the group, Jordan why no one was at the mall. Jordan laughs at Alex and says, "We were just kidding! Do you think we'd actually hang out with you?"

Worksheet for Learning Outcomes 1, 2 and 3

1. Please list some negative effects associated with bullying:

-
-
-
-
-

2. Please list some things you can do if you are being bullied or if you see someone being bullied:

-
-
-
-
-

3. Please list some reasons why someone might bully another person:

-
-
-
-

4. Please describe what **covert** bully behaviors are (include examples):

5. After participating in this program, do you feel like you have more knowledge to help stop bullying in your community? (Please circle one)

Strongly Agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

