

1 Setup

This material focuses on games to play with teens who have been victims or feel as though they may become victims of bullying. The goal of each game is to teach the teen skills that are useful in responding to a bully's offer. The intent is to equip the teen to improvise responses that neutralize the situation and maintain the would-be victim's sense of self respect. The idea is for the would-be victim to walk away feeling solid inside, knowing that they countered the bully successfully (but not feel that they "won", which would tend to accelerate the situation). The strategy neither lets the bully get away with their behavior, but rather counters it effectively, nor does it involve an attack in return or a sense engagement. The goal is to actively neutralize. Quick dissipation of the energy and move on.

2 Progression of games

This section gives a progression of games, starting with basic acceptance and listening games, and going all the way up to core bully neutralization games. The idea is to provide a progression of skills, building up what the teen needs in order to succeed at the neutralization techniques.

The progression is: acceptance → building upon offers → recognizing status signals → manufacturing status signals → recognizing emotional content of voice → manufacturing emotional content in voice → bully neutralization by neutral acceptance with earnest voice emotion and neutral status signals.

2.1 Basic skills games

These games get the teens in the mood, demonstrating that they are seen, are actively paid attention to, are accepted, and are part of something. Gets them used to actively seeking to receive, honoring what they receive, building upon it, and giving their contribution. They gain confidence of their contribution being accepted.

The first set of basic skills games establish acceptance, and they establish building upon offers.

The second set of basic skills games focus on hearing the offer well. These include repetition games that demonstrate that the offer has been received. Perhaps also gesture mirroring.

Choose your favorite basic warmup games. Some suggestions:

yes, lets! teens mill about randomly. One calls out "let's be dinosaurs" the rest respond "yes, lets!" and start making dinosaur sounds and movement. Then another calls out "let's be pirates" the rest respond "yes, lets!" and start making pirate sounds and motions, and so on, until facilitator calls time.

pass the clap teens form circle and pass a "clap" around. The one who has it chooses a recipient, makes eye contact, and they both clap in unison, which passes it to recipient. The clap can be passed to a neighbor, or across the circle or right back to the person who gave it.

Rock star intro take 30 seconds to gather 2 facts about person to your right. Then go around in circle, each person works the 2 facts into an announcer's introduction, talking the person up like they're the greatest rock star to ever live.

clover form a circle. Choose a random word. Facilitator starts, says the word, and says that they'll go around the circle until the word comes up again, naturally. Don't force it, but everyone will be aware and looking for the word to come up again. Then go around circle. One says word, neighbor says first word association comes to their mind. Go until the word comes up again.

2.2 simple status games

Move on to status signal skills. Play games that give teen skill to recognize signals offered by others that indicate status level. And to be able to generate status signals at a status level of their own choosing.

milling about status signals Mill about the room. Group divided into two parts. One part makes direct eye contact and holds it. The other group makes brief contact but quickly drops eyes to floor. Tell groups to switch. Debrief. Bring out how simple physical thing like dropping eye contact can have such a strong feeling. All they did was drop vs hold eye contact, and the feelings followed, along with the rest of the body language. This sets the stage for the teens to link simple body movements that they can control to feelings inside others. That is a base for them to realize they have the power to do things to affect the would-be bully.

firm vs weak handshake . Two groups again, mill around, shake hands. One group firm, other group weak. Give them a few moments, then switch the groups. Debrief.

shoulders slumped vs raised and back . Two groups, mill around. One group slumps their shoulders forward and down. Other holds them up and back. Debrief.

Perhaps a few more body language games, to make crystal for the teens what each body language does.

Voice up game Demonstrate, then have teens form groups of three and practice, give feedback to each other and iterate. Hand out cards, each has a line written on it. The teens take turns in their groups. One teen says the line twice. First time their voice goes up at the end. Second time it goes down at the end. Debrief. "Did you notice a difference in how it made you feel, hearing one version versus the other." Variation: have the teens record each other on cell phones, and play back.

Card rank games .

Guess own rank Each person does not know their own rank in organization. They each get a card that they do not look at. They hold card to forehead. Others treat them according to the rank they see on forehead. At end, debrief "what rank do you think you have?" "why?" "what behavior did you notice that gave you hints to your status." "what behaviors were different between how you treated high rank vs low rank."

guess other's rank Each person gets a card that shows their rank and keeps secret (all know the range of cards, so they know where they land). Goal of game is to guess the rank of all the others. They then all build a device together. Each person should display behaviors

according to their rank. Use signals to figure out who's higher and who's lower. At end, line up in order of rank. Debrief.

Freeze mannequin 2 people start scene, conductor calls "freeze". Debrief on who is higher status. Conductor adjusts body of one, then debrief again. Maybe third iteration. Shows students the power of specific body language elements. All get a turn. Pair off in threes. 2 start, 3rd conducts and then comments. Try to both be high, then both be low, then one high, one low.

? Queen off with their head – practice being low status – put victims as queen. ? Sequential, only talk to neighbor ranks, command to lower, suggestion to upper – build device together

? cool, follower, outsider – 4 people meet for drinks, each person randomly assigns one to each other person. Then treat them accordingly. Next, add that each person assigns one to themselves. Respond back according to internal choice. Can try variations suggested by kids (mean-weak-kind, aso)

(I could really use some help here, on good games for teens that will progress them to the point of being able to understand what status signals their body is giving off, and to control them, to not be high and not be low. No challenges nor status topping, but no low status either.)

2.3 presentation skills games

These give teens the ability to recognize emotional content embedded within voice cues. They also give them the ability to manufacture an emotional content of their choosing, especially an earnest and neutral one.

It has been often helpful to the teen if they are filmed, for example on a smart phone, and can then see a playback. They can see themselves as others see them. Then allow them to do the scene over, after having seen themselves, to improve. Ask them to do particular body language things, or to hold a particular mantra in mind, and iterate. Show them the video of the difference between their various tries.

gibberish elections Take volunteer out and demonstrate three gestures where no others can see. The volunteer comes back in, and in sequence, gives three gibberish speeches, each as a different "candidate". One speech is associated with one of the three gestures. They use that gesture frequently during the speech. Afterwards cast votes. Debrief about what people felt about each speech-giver. Reveal at end that the only instruction was to use that one gesture, that all the rest of voice and body followed from that one gesture. (choose pointing up with finger in air, pointing outward at audience, open hands palms up, open hands palms down, fist up in the air)

repeat phrase Teen says the same phrase multiple times, each time with a different emotion. Whisper an emotion into teen's ear. They hold that emotion in mind, repeating it over and over, while they say the fixed phrase out loud. The others try to guess what the emotion was. Debrief "what parts of the voice gave you clues to the emotion" "notice how the rest of the body naturally supports that emotion"

(I could really use help here, too, on good games that will give teens ability to instantly recognize the emotion within voice cues, and then become able to say a given phrase with a variety of deliberately chosen emotions)

emotional mantra The idea behind this game is that perception about a person forms before they ever open their mouths. Whisper a mantra into each teen's ear "cool" "weak" "apologetic" "leader" "follower" "fearful" "kind" "sensitive". They should repeat that word inside their head as they walk around and let their body adjust to the word. Have a few students doing this, the rest observe. Then call "Freeze". Observers say what they think the mantra might have been for each participant. Debrief.

3 Bully Neutralization games

2 card game The idea of the game is to teach the teen how much their emotional affect affects the reaction inside the bully. It is also their first baby step at responding. The game has cards with words on them that are in pairs. One of the pair is what the bully says, the other of the pair is what the would-be victim says. The teens pair off and do the scene three times. The first time, the would-be victim says the line on the card in an apologetic voice. The second time in a sarcastic voice, the third time in an earnest voice. Each time, after delivering the line, observe the effect and ask the would-be bully how it felt, their reaction. Then ask the would-be victim how it felt to respond in that way.

By doing this, the would-be victim learns that the way they say something has a large impact on the would-be bully. This can feel empowering, like for the first time they feel that they actually have something they can do. And it opens up a door to understanding that the would-be bully has emotions going on inside of them as well, with some insight into what those are.

Finally, by having the words written out for them, the would-be victim doesn't have to put effort into coming up with something to say. By repeating it many times, it helps to fix the pattern in their mind of what good responses look like.

Lastly, the facilitator should point out and emphasize features of the responses. They have been carefully chosen to be neutral responses. The most important feature is that they filter the bully's words to pick out one true thing they said and repeats it. The second most important feature is that the response has no offers. It makes a factual statement, that closes the interaction. These two features should be pointed out and emphasized during the initial demonstration, and then during debrief, and also while walking around and coaching the pairs.

1 card game This game is more advanced than the 2 card game. It makes first steps for the would-be victim to create their own responses. The game has a stack of cards that have statements that the bully makes. The cards are intended to help teens who feel uncomfortable taking the role of bully. In this game, a responses is held to 5 words or less. Would-be vic filters what bully said, remove judgement and emotion words. Distill to fact words. Pick one fact word, and repeat it as an affirmation of its truth. Neutral voice, earnest affect.

Example: "Hey fatty, trouble getting up the stairs?" The fact words are weight and slowness at ascending the stairs. Judgement words are the form "fatty" and "trouble". Factual, neutral responses could be "yes, I am out of breath." or "I do have too much weight."

free form game The idea is to ramp up to the next level. The bully finds things about the would-be victim and makes remarks. The would-be victim tries out a variety of responses.

Debrief after each, about how it felt to say, and about effect on bully. Repeat several times, until the wording and emotional affect have the desired effect.

4 Healing

Playback theater with iteration The idea is to let the teens revisit painful bullying events from their past in a safe way, and then to practice in-situ alternative responses. They build upon the training of all the other games, and apply it to their own painful past experience. First, playback theater is used. The victim is the teller, then experienced players playback their story, perhaps through fluid form, or perhaps through aspects/snippets.

After that, one person takes the role of bully, and the real victim plays themselves. Except this time, before starting the game, the group brainstorms together on good responses. The best three are collected. The bully is given cards with what the real bully said, and the victim has a card for each chosen response, to make it easier for them. The scene is repeated with each version, and debrief after each. Enough time is given to each person who has been a victim so that the focus is entirely on them, and as much time as they need is given so they feel cared for. They try it enough times until they feel comfortable with the response and achieve an affect that is effective.

5 Case Studies

This section just conveys some things we talked about during the workshop. It may be valuable because it gives an example of many alternative responses to a given call-out.

5.1 example call-out

"Hey, fattie, having a hard time walking up the stairs? Ha ha."

- "yes, I need to start riding my bike to school."
- "yes. I'm considering a career as a sumo wrestler."
- "yes. I'm a candy tester, enjoy my job too much."
- "yes. I'm considering a career as an opera singer."

5.2 Some ways it can go wrong

" Oh, I've never heard that before." – tone is key. Very easy for it to come across as calling bully unoriginal and so putting them down. Antagonizes. Can amp up the situation. Or, it can be said in an earnest, appreciative, sincere way, as if it really is and you are valuing them for making the statement in a matter of fact way. That neutralizes.

" Yes, I'm a candy tester. I'll arrange some free samples for you." – attempted high status by implying vic has the power to make reward to bully happen. However, this is a slight status drop to bully. Potential to be bait. And, it adds offer that gives bully something to work with. – ex response "yeah, give me those samples now. Right now, empty your pockets or I'm gonna pound you."

5.3 another example call-out

"Madam, are you blind?"

"If I did need glasses, I would love ones like yours." This accepted the facts of what was said – question about eyesight. Responded with earnest and slightly positive, with definite statement that had no dangling offers.

6 Notes on Effectiveness

Most effective: First, the affect is key to effectiveness, which becomes clear when doing the 2 card game. Earnest tends to be effective, and perhaps also a particular kind of attention placed on the bully, which sees them, focuses on them, in a neutral way. It takes practice, and is situational, of course.

Second, responses tend to be more effective if absent of offers that the bully can use to continue things. Free from judgement words, free from questions, free from future follow on or connection.

Third, especially effective is neutral, earnest statements that are short and are about self. "Yes, I should ride my bike to school." "Yes, they do sparkle." "Yes, .." basically, hear the verbal content, reduce it to simple facts in it, pick one, and affirm it as a true fact, in a neutral voice with an earnest affect.

Self-deprecation may be effective, if done with affect of solidness. Fall on the sword and turn it.

Examples of bully targets: voice, height, clothes, weight, strength, accent, skin color, ethnicity, financial status, grooming habits, activities (piano, band)

7 Background on Bullying

Some notes on underlying things going on in a bullying situation.

Evidence of power Bullies are often motivated by seeing their power to cause an effect, without consequences to self. The stronger the effect, the greater the evidence of power, and so the greater the reward. Sensitive children make the best bully victims because they present large reactions.

However, if the act of bullying creates consequences, then the cost-reward scale is tipped making it less attractive. Zero consequences is the preferred mode of bullies, and even small consequences can repel them.

An anecdote from a friend who worked on Wall Street and used improv techniques to counter hazing makes an interesting example. He has hair that is coarse and sticks straight out. "Hey brillo head, there's some dirty dishes in the break room, why don't you stick your head in the sink and wash up! Ha ha."

Response: "Oh, yes, brilliant idea, my hair is perfect for that, see, here, feel it!" The would-be victim takes the hand of bully and puts on his own head. The bully is shocked, not sure where to go after that. Others see him fail but say nothing. The Bully does not try the same victim again.

There is often a central bully who has a group of minions

The bully sees their power when bystanders are silenced. Their lack of action is positive affirmation to the bully of their power over them.

Within an environment, such as a school or a company, there are 3 stages to the formation of a culture of bullying.

- Discovery phase
 - bully tries little tests to see how others respond
 - learns who are good victims, who are good minions, who are rivals
 - * bully finds weaknesses in victims and/or minions, finds levers can use to get desired response
- Explore norms, patterns, memes phase
 - things are tried, such as physical harm, to test response – if get away with it, repeatedly, it establishes as a given pattern, "the way things are"
 - bystander intervention in this phase has systemic effect
- Established phase
 - peer enforced
 - bystander intervention in this phase has only local to the one situation effect
 - bystander who intervenes is morally wrong because go against established pattern
 - moral code difficult or impossible to change

Another way to view bully motivation is that they are often in social rank position that is in the middle of the hierarchy. For example, in a school, they are lower in hierarchy than the teachers. They push others down in order to see themselves higher, which counters feeling inferior to those above them. Tends to be people in the middle who are bullies. May be cause and effect.

8 Resources

- "Ego Tango" book by Amy Carroll <http://www.theegotango.com> includes techniques to deal with Bullies
- "Training to Imagine" book
- John Cooper – presentation skills

9 Further steps

Some possible additional areas to explore.

Radar reduction games – teach teens body language and voice pattern and dressing and hygiene skills that reduce their visual victim profile. (and incidentally increase their social rank and increase positive response to them in general)

Bystander games – games for bystanders to give them the motivation to counter the bully, and the skills for things to say that neutralize effectively. ("oh, leave him alone then." or "pick on someone your own size" or "you're doing a bad thing" all put down the victim. This rewards the

bully and hurts the victim. Want to find neutralizing strategies that don't endanger the bystander, keeps them safe, but also implies neutral about the victim and bully, simply neutralizes the bully to end the activity. With enough such neutralizations, the bullying loses its reward.. becomes effort with low reward.. every time it's tried, don't get anything out of it)

10 Join in

A blog on LinkedIn, with comment section to talk more about this.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/using-applied-improvisation-teach-teens-neutralize-bullies-sean-halle>