



The Bullying Circle Exercise will help students understand the various roles students may play in a bullying situation. This activity is best done with students in grade 3 or higher.

This activity is not a role-play. Instead of acting out a bullying situation, students will be describing the feelings and actions of their character in a bullying situation (given their role in the Bullying Circle).

## Bullying Circle Exercise

### Directions

1. Ask for eight student volunteers to come to the front of the class.

*Note:* More than one student may be assigned the various roles in this exercise. This may be a more true representation of what actually happens in bullying situations, since most bullying is done by two or more students, and there are usually several bystanders.

2. Huddle the volunteers together and tell them you want them to describe the role their character would play in a bullying situation where a student is being bullied because of the clothes he or she is wearing. During the discussion, they will be describing to the class all the different roles people play in a bullying situation.
3. Give each volunteer a Bullying Circle Role Card (found on pages 6–7 of this PDF document) and have them read the description of their character. Each card represents a role in the Bullying Circle. Role Cards are available in English and Spanish.

***Important!*** Do not give the role of the student who bullies to a student who has bullied others or who has supported bullying, if you know who these students are. Also do not give the role of the student who is bullied to a student who has been bullied in real life. You may want to assign yourself the student who is bullied in order to avoid any potential problems.

4. Advise the volunteers to prepare for their presentation by being ready to describe their character: letting the class know who they are, their part in the bullying situation, and how they feel about it. Use the ideas written on each card to prepare for this presentation. Students should use these

ideas or make up their own. Ask the volunteers not to deny their involvement in the bullying situation for this activity, although this often happens in real life.

5. Have the volunteers form a half circle in alphabetical order (based on the letters on their cards).
6. Start the discussion by setting up the situation in this manner: **In bullying situations, there are usually more people involved than just the person who is being bullied and the person who is doing the bullying. Today we are going to see, with the help of our volunteers, all the roles that people can play in a bullying situation. Remember that these volunteers are in these roles for the time of the discussion only. They are acting as characters involved in bullying another student because of the clothes he or she wears.**
7. Start with the student who is bullied (letter H, which may be played by you). Ask this student, for example: **Chantelle, tell us who you are and what happened? What was this bullying experience like for you?**

*Note:* Remember that playing the student who is bullied can feel bad, as others may make negative remarks about the person as they describe their role. Support this character with sensitivity. You might say, “Sorry this has happened to you!”

8. Then move to the student who is bullying others (letter A). Ask something like: **Marcus, tell us what you did. What do you think of Chantelle?**
9. Continue going around the Bullying Circle, interviewing each student. You may want to ask each person in a role: **Tell us what you did. What do you think of Chantelle?** You may want to ask the followers/henchmen (letter B) and the supporters/passive bullies (letter C) what they think of the student who is bullying the other student as well.
10. Ask all students in your class the following questions (without mentioning names):
  - **Which of these roles do you think we have in our school?**
  - **Are people always in the same role or can their roles change?**
  - **What kinds of things might affect the role changes?** (Responses may include what their relationship is with the student who is doing the bullying and/or the student who is being bullied, peer pressure, and wanting to prevent the student who bullies from bullying them next.)
  - **Do boys and girls play all of these roles? To the same extent?**
  - **What role do you think most of the students at our school play?**
  - **At our school, what role(s) do popular students usually play?**

11. Engage the class in a discussion about what defenders (letter G) can do under these circumstances. Brainstorm these people's options. Be sure to encourage students to include things that they can do both in the moment and after the fact.

Responses might include the following:

- Tell the students who are bullying to stop.
  - Use physical, but nonviolent force to get the students who bully to stop. (*Note:* This is an example of what NOT to do, but it is likely to come up in discussion. Students should not use any physical force.)
  - Help remove the student who was bullied from the area.
  - Talk to the student who was bullied later on, saying you are sorry it happened and that you didn't like it.
  - Invite the student who was bullied to join your group at recess or lunch.
  - Tell an adult. (Usually the best option!)
  - Offer to go with the student to report the bullying.
  - Talk to parents or other adults at home for advice about how to help.
  - Avoid joining in the bullying.
  - Avoid supporting the bullying (for example, laughing about the bullying).
12. With student input, place these responses on a continuum from "low risk" to "high risk," based on the risk to personal safety, social criticism, and so on.



13. Say: **One reason that students sometimes don't play the role of the "defenders" is that they mistakenly believe they will be required to be friends with the student who is bullied. Although it is good to make new friends (and particularly to befriend someone who is picked on or left out), adults in this school aren't trying to force this to happen. Students don't have to be a friend (or even like someone) in order to help out.**
14. Tell the class that your school's bullying prevention program is designed to shift attitudes, so that the students who often join in on the bullying may stop doing this, the students who like watching the bullying may reconsider and begin to dislike it,

the disengaged onlookers (letter E) may feel more empowered to join the defenders (letter G), and so on.

15. Ask the students to physically move, bit by bit, away from the “bullies” position (letter A) along the continuum, so that more of them are closer to the defenders end of the line, giving a visual picture of the removal of power from the “bullies,” now standing apart from the others.

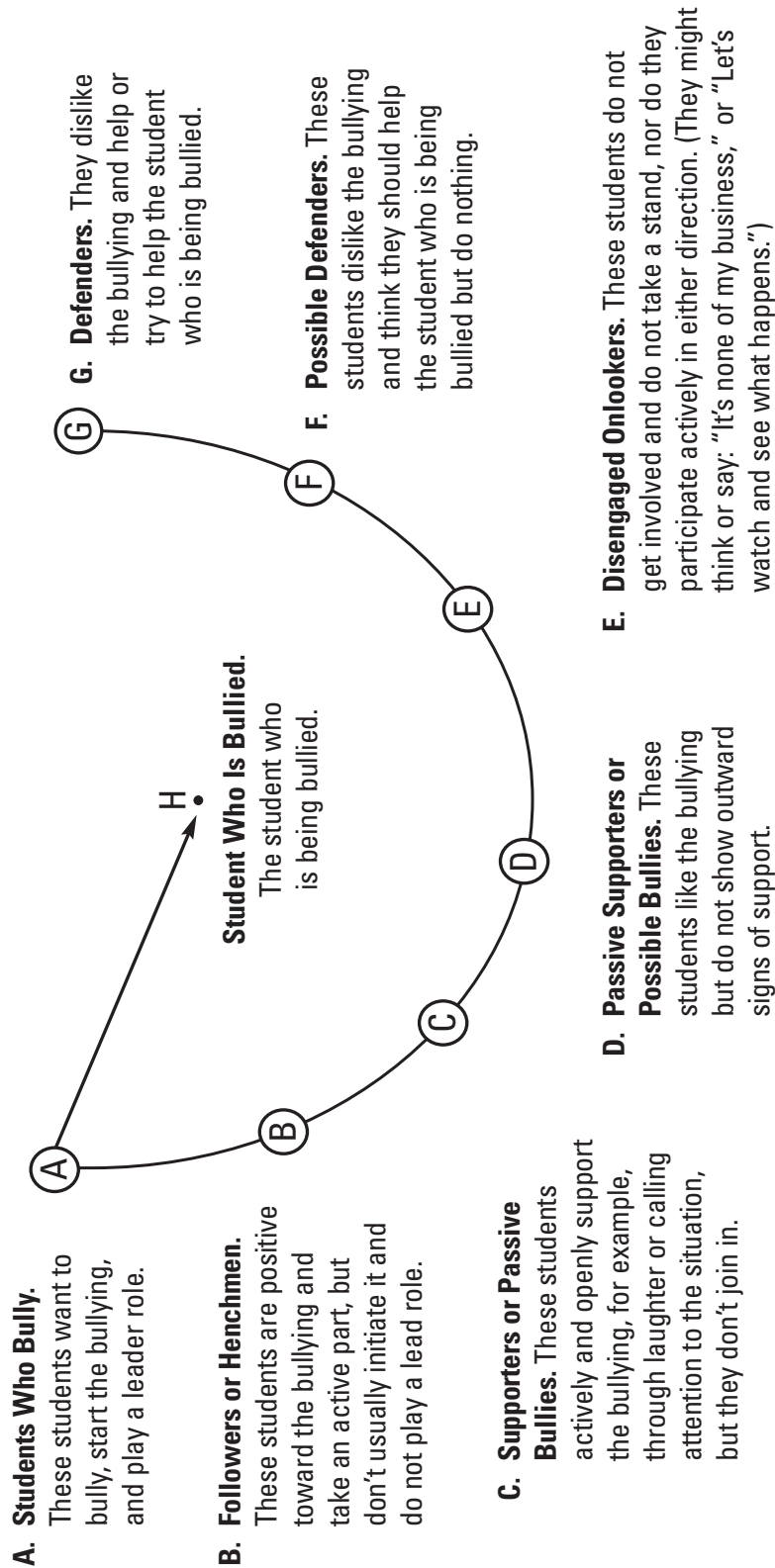
*Note:* We don’t intend to ostracize students who bully, but want them integrated back into a new culture that values respect and fair treatment for everyone.

16. Ask the whole class to give a round of applause for the volunteers and issue a prize to each of them, if you like.

From time to time, consider using the Bullying Circle Role Cards with other bullying scenarios to help reinforce students’ understanding of the roles everyone plays in helping to build a more welcoming school climate.

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## Bullying Circle



## Bullying Circle Role Cards



### **Students Who Bully**

You want to bully, start the bullying, and play a leader role.



### **Followers or Henchmen**

You like the bullying and take part, but you don't start the bullying.



### **Supporters or Passive Bullies**

You support the bullying, for example, by laughing or pointing it out, but you don't join in.



### **Passive Supporters or Possible Bullies**

You like the bullying but you don't show outward signs of support.

## Bullying Circle Role Cards



### Disengaged Onlookers

You don't get involved in the bullying, but you don't try to help the bullied student, either.



### Possible Defenders

You don't like the bullying and you think you should help the student who is being bullied, but you don't do anything.



### Defenders

You don't like the bullying and you try to help the student who is being bullied.



### Student Who Is Bullied

You are the student who is being bullied.