
BYSTANDER REVOLUTION

RECOMMENDED LESSON

Break the Cycle

This lesson outlines one simple way to integrate the Bystander Revolution Break the Cycle video playlist and discussion questions into a middle school classroom setting.

Grade Level:
Middle School

Estimated Time:
45 minutes

**Common Core
ELA Standards
Grades 6–8:**
R.7, SL.1.B,
SL.1.C, SL.1.D,
SL.2, SL.3, SL.5,
W.2.A, W.2.B,
W.2.C, W.2.D,
W.2.E, W.2.F,
W.3, W.4

OVERVIEW

Students will discuss the concept of breaking the “cycle of bullying.” Students will watch videos with personal advice from celebrities, experts, and students sharing their views on how to address bullying behavior with empathy and compassion. Students will debate the merits of different prevention and intervention strategies. The lesson concludes with an opportunity for the educator to discuss resources available to students at the school, and present an optional homework assignment.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Explain the concept of breaking the “cycle of bullying.”
- Summarize advice heard from celebrities, experts, and students.
- Compare and contrast different prevention, intervention, and coping strategies.
- Apply the strategies to help themselves and others when they encounter bullying.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Computer & internet access
- LCD projector (optional)
- [Break the Cycle video playlist](#)
- Pens/pencils & paper

PREPARATION

- First, watch the [Break the Cycle video playlist](#).
- Familiarize yourself with key concepts.
- Copy the **Graphic Organizer** (pg.6), one for each student.

PROCEDURE

Introduction

(5 minutes)

Introduce the topic by asking students the following questions:

- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “break the cycle”?
- Do you think when people experience bullying behavior, they are more likely to repeat it?
- Why would someone who is bullied go on to bully others?
- Could responding with compassion, instead of anger, to those who bully reduce the spread of bullying?

KEY QUESTION

How can students cultivate compassion for both targets of bullying and those who bully?

DEFINITION

The cycle of bullying is:

A sequence of bullying events in which one instance of bullying leads to further bullying. For example, someone who has been bullied may go on to bully others, and bystanders who witness bullying may adopt the behavior in an attempt to retaliate or defend.

Video Viewing

(15 minutes)

Introduce the video playlist by explaining to students that they are about to watch 5 short, unscripted videos from celebrities, experts, and students talking about their personal philosophies on breaking the “cycle of bullying.” Instruct students to keep in mind any experiences they have had with bullying and to consider whether the solutions presented in the videos would work in those situations. Provide students with the **Graphic Organizer** to keep track of their reactions. Then show the following 10-minute [playlist](#).



FEATURED SOLUTION

BREAK THE CYCLE

Don't fight bullying by trying to humiliate or attack the person doing the bullying. Perpetuating abuse only makes things worse.

Discussion

(15 minutes)

Below are some sample questions you might use to lead a conversation, as time permits. Each sample question has several possible follow-up questions that may be useful in the discussion.

1. How would you describe the “cycle of bullying”?

- Could it be that people who are bullied may go on to bully other people?
- Could it be that once someone starts to bully others, it can be hard to stop?
- Do you think that bullying behavior can be contagious? Why?

2. Gavin de Becker says everyone has been a bully and a victim and that these roles are temporary. What does he mean?

- Is someone who bullies always a “bully” and a target of bullying always a “target”?
- Have you been both of them at different times in the past?
- Do you think people can change roles?

3. How did you feel watching the video about people who used to bully others?

- Did it alter your perception of people who bully? How?
- Did seeing how they changed help you imagine how people in your life could change too?
- Can you remember a time when you realized something you were doing was wrong?
- Can reflecting on your own mistakes help you understand why others might act in a way you disagree with?

4. Do you agree with the idea that “hurt people hurt people”? Why or why not?

- Do you think people hurt others as a reaction to their own problems?
- Do you think the reasons people bully may not relate to the person they’re bullying?
- Do you think personal suffering excuses bullying behavior? Why or why not?

5. Do you think talking to the person who’s bullying is a good strategy? Why or why not?

- Can giving someone who is bullying a chance to explain what they are going through help to stop the behavior?
- Can you think of reasons why punishing someone who bullies might not always be the best solution?

6. What does Neil Gaiman mean when he says “don’t become them”?

- Does he mean people should avoid responding to bullying with more bullying?
- Do you think bullying someone who bullies is just as bad?

7. Colin McCann says that if you can understand “why your bullier is being a bully...maybe you can crack open the light.” What do you think he means by that?

- Could it be that imagining someone’s motivations for bullying might help you understand them better?
- Can it help you realize that someone bullying you may be influenced by things that have nothing to do with you?
- Can empathizing with someone who is bullying help you figure out how you might be able to help them?
- What can we gain by striving to empathize with others?

SUGGESTED STRATEGY

If you’re wondering if you might be bullying others, ask a friend for their honest feedback and if they’ve noticed you being mean. Try not to be defensive when you receive their feedback but use it as an opportunity to improve.

8. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has a quote, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” How can that quote apply to putting an end to bullying?

- Could it be that being mean to people who bully is not likely to reduce bullying?
- Can being compassionate toward people who bully help to reduce bullying? Why or why not?
- What are some examples of how people can work to fix bullying at the root of the problem?
- Do you agree that people who bully need love too? Why?

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

(5 minutes)

Ask students to imagine a world where bullying happens very little, if at all. Ask students to write a paragraph or two on what that world would be like, and what steps they can take in their lives to make it a reality.

CLOSING

(5 minutes)

Let students know that if they are being bullied or know someone else who is, there are free, anonymous resources listed on bystanderrevolution.org/help. If there are resources available within your school, like a guidance counselor or social worker, you can make students aware of those options as well. You should also emphasize that if students are in danger or are witnessing an emergency, they should tell a teacher or guidance counselor, or call 911.

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

1. Watch a video and reflect in writing

Have students visit bystanderrevolution.org and watch another video of their choosing. Ask students to write a letter to the person in the video, telling them why they agree or disagree with the advice presented. Ask them to tell the person how they might apply what was said to their own life.

2. The Weekly Stand

The Weekly Stand is a list of 52 simple, fun, transformative actions bystanders can take to reduce bullying and improve school culture. Each action contains helpful background information, suggested strategies and phrases to use, and a video for inspiration.

Have students go to bystanderrevolution.org/weekly, choose one of the actions to complete, and then turn in proof that they did it through some creative means: a photo, a screenshot, a short video, an essay, or even a comic strip.

ABOUT BYSTANDER REVOLUTION

Bystander Revolution is an online resource offering practical, crowdsourced advice about simple things individuals can do to take the power out of bullying.

As you watch these videos keep in mind any experiences you have had with bullying. Consider whether the solutions presented in the videos would have worked in those situations. Use the notes column to keep track of comments, questions, or thoughts you may have.

VIDEO	NAME	NOTES
1 	Anyone Can Change	
2 	Gavin de Becker	
3 	Brenna	
4 	Colum McCann	
5 	Neil Gaiman	