Is it Social Bullying? Strategies for Assessing and Intervening with Older Adults
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
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Objectives

- Identify key characteristics of social bullying among older adults.
- Distinguish between bad behavior and bullying.
- Learn strategies to address social bullying.
Why are we discussing this topic?
“Animals feed while humans dine.”
Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

The Physiology of Taste published in 1825

- All animals need to eat to survive.
- People have changed feeding into dining as a form of communication about who we are and what we believe about ourselves and the world.
“Taste is largely social.”
Diane Ackerman in *A Natural History of the Senses*.

Meals are about more than food.
Bullying

- Bullying requires that someone is trying to gain power over another person.
- Someone who yells and strikes out at everyone is not necessarily bullying.
What does bullying look like?

Bullying includes behaviors and actions that are:

- verbal
- physical
- anti-social or relationship bullying
Characteristics of Most Bullies

Most bullies:

• Feel reinforced by
  – Power and control
  – Making others feel threatened
  – Stirring up conflict between others

• Have difficulty tolerating differences

• Lack empathy

• Have few positive social relationships
Cognitive deficits can contribute to negative behavior, including aggression.

The environment can increase the frustrations and challenges people with dementia experience.
Two Types of Bullying Victims

Anyone can fall victim to a bully

- Passive victims
- Provocative victims
Impact on Victim

- Withdraws socially - may stop coming to meals
- Feels rejected
- May become anxious and/or depressed and even suicidal
- Increased physical complaints/anorexia
- Functional changes
- Speaks about moving out or not attending
Impact on Other Elders

- Bullying creates an environment of fear and disrespect
- Creates insecurity
- May feel guilty for not helping
- Encourages increased bullying behavior
- Reduces satisfaction and participation
Impact on Staff

- Can create an environment of fear and disrespect
- Increases insecurity
- Decreases loyalty and commitment
- Increases the possibility of staff bullying and abuse
- Increases staff turnover
What is Our Goal?
How Bullying Culture Takes Hold

1. Bully targets victim

2. Supporters/followers participate in bullying

3. Victim and onlookers do not intervene

4. Bully is empowered

5. Onlookers don't intervene

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Four Targeted Intervention Levels

1. Organization
2. Bullies
3. Victims
4. Bystanders
An Environment that Promotes Empathy

Culture of respect.

Participants and staff held accountable and responsible for their behaviors.

Everyone is willing to stand up for what is right.

High level of trust is present.
Interventions for bullies

• Consistently set limits on bullying behavior.

• Offer an appropriate outlet to vent frustrations.

• Help bully to:
  – Identify alternative methods to feel in control
  – Learn positive communication skills
  – Develop empathy
  – Expand his/her social network
Interventions for the Bullied

• Help individuals who are bullied learn these skills.
  – Assertiveness training
  – Use of “I statements”
  – Foster self worth and dignity

• Encourage them to seek support and help
What Do You Think?

What percentage of the time has research shown bystanders can be effective in stopping a bullying episode?

- 10% of the time
- 25%
- 50%
- 82%
Why Don’t Bystanders Speak Up?

“It’s none of my business.”

Fear getting hurt or becoming the next victim

Feel powerless to intervene

Don’t like the victim or believe the victim “brought it on.”

Don’t know what to do

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What Do You Think?

How long does it take to stop bullying when a bystander speaks up?

• 10 seconds
• 30 seconds
• 60 seconds
• 2 minutes

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The Role of the Bystander

- Recognize bullying
- Intervene as appropriate
- Be direct; keep it simple

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“The world is a dangerous place; not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.” – Albert Einstein
HELP STOP BULLYING NOW!

Don’t be afraid to stand up and speak out!

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