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CREATE A CULTURE OF KINDNESS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

48 Character-Building
Lessons to Foster Respect
and Prevent Bullying



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Naomi Drew, M.A., with Christa M. Tinari, M.A.

Praise for CREATE A **CULTURE OF KINDNESS** IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

“Create a Culture of Kindness begins as if you are having a conversation with the wisest and most supportive teachers you have ever spoken to. This is worth the price alone, but you will soon see that the lessons also reflect wisdom and deep respect for children’s competence and potential. This book gives you the tools needed to create an organized, respectful classroom filled with students who are more mindful and therefore more ready to engage in learning and positive relationships. Its lessons on compassion, in particular, should be mandatory in every middle school.”

—Maurice J. Elias, Ph.D., Rutgers University and author of *Assessing Social, Emotional, and Character Development and Emotionally Intelligent Parenting*

“The vast majority of students we talk to agree that bullying is bad and kindness is cool. But they often lack basic strategies to show compassion to their classmates. This book offers dozens of practical, hands-on lesson plans educators can use to teach students how to be kind (and why that matters so much). The lessons encourage students to stand up for what is right, and give them the tools to do it. If you want to ‘Create a Culture of Kindness in [your] Middle School,’ this book is for you.”

—Dr. Justin W. Patchin and Dr. Sameer Hinduja, codirectors of the Cyberbullying Research Center and authors of *Words Wound*

“This book is exactly what educators need, now more than ever: A blueprint for providing kids with the skills not only to prevent bullying, but to fundamentally change their schools and their world. With *Create a Culture of Kindness in Middle School*, Naomi Drew and Christa Tinari have added a timely and valuable resource to the literature on empathy, respect, school climate, and bullying prevention.”

—Michele Borba, Ed.D., author of *The 6Rs of Bullying Prevention*

“*Create a Culture of Kindness in Middle School* is the single most impactful book I’ve seen on transforming a culture of bullying into one that reliably promotes kindness. It is essential reading for every middle school educator and for every parent of a middle school student. It takes intention, courage, and powerful protocols to create a school culture that empowers students to flourish, both emotionally and academically. Naomi Drew and Christa Tinari deliver the goods in this practical, wise, and inspiring guide.”

—Marilee Adams, Ph.D., best-selling author of *Teaching That Changes Lives: 12 Mindset Tools for Igniting the Love of Learning*

“*Create a Culture of Kindness in Middle School* brilliantly covers all the bases, with a hands-on approach to building important skills like compassion, empathy, listening, anger management, coping tools, personal responsibility, and respect for diversity. This timely and important manual includes practical activities, questions, and resources to engage students and help them recognize their interconnectedness, their capacity to change deeply held beliefs, and the potential they each have to make a difference—all while helping to preserve civility, respect, and common decency in our world.”

—Jane Bluestein, Ph.D., author of *Creating Emotionally Safe Schools* and *The Win-Win Classroom*

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9850 51st Avenue North, Suite 100

Minneapolis, MN 55442

(612) 338-2068

help4kids@freespirit.com

freespirit.com

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—Naomi

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—Christa

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List of Reproducible Forms

Customizable digital versions of all reproducible forms can be downloaded at freespirit.com/kindness-forms. Use password **4respect**.

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Introduction



“The mission of schools must include teaching kindness. Without it, communities, families, schools, and classrooms become places of incivility where lasting learning is unlikely to take place. . . . Kindness can be taught, and it is a defining aspect of civilized human life. It belongs in every home, school, neighborhood, and society.”

—Maurice Elias, director of the Social-Emotional Learning Lab, Rutgers University

Creating a Culture of Kindness in Your School

One of the most important jobs educators have is to teach, model, and reinforce respect, compassion, kindness, and other prosocial skills. Doing so builds a school climate and culture where kids feel more connected to their teachers and to one another. It leads to greater emotional health for students and teachers alike. And it can create a fundamental shift in school climate—a tipping point at which bullying and cruelty become a rarity. Academic gains will likely follow. According to the American Institutes for Research, “Positive school climate is tied to high or improving attendance rates, test scores, promotion rates, and graduation rates.” Better test scores and higher rates of student achievement are inextricably related to a school climate of kindness and support.

Changing a school’s culture can start with a single teacher. We saw a great example of this when we interviewed eighth-grade teacher Kiren Chanda. When she started teaching her students about social responsibility, they came up with the idea of doing random acts of kindness for the entire school—from teachers and administrators to custodians, support staff, and students. Motivated by the intrinsic value of doing good for others, Kiren’s class transformed into a team on a mission. And the impact went way beyond the walls of their classroom. Ripples of kindness started spreading through the entire school. Before long, kids were holding open doors for each other, writing thank-you notes to teachers, and giving each other compliments.

Kiren says, “A feeling of niceness and camaraderie started popping up all over the building. Kids were feeling so good about what was being done for them, they wanted to do good for others.” And the recipients of these pay-it-forward acts of kindness were inspired to do similar acts themselves. Ultimately, the climate of the entire school changed. As Kiren’s principal, Steve Roos, said: “We don’t have a bullying problem in our school. Our kids feel accepted here. People take care of one another.” And it all started with one teacher and a bunch of eighth graders who were inspired to do good.

Better test scores and higher rates of student achievement are inextricably related to a school climate of kindness and support.

This story is a perfect demonstration of how, when seeds of peace, kindness, and compassion are planted, they can spread through an entire school.

Making Kindness Contagious

What happened in Kiren Chanda’s school is a great example of something researchers have quantified and documented: Kindness is contagious. A study by James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* revealed that “cooperative behavior is contagious and spreads from person to person to person. When people benefit from kindness they ‘pay it forward’ by

THE REVEALING POWER OF SURVEYS

In order to find out what students are experiencing when it comes to conflict, bullying, and other negative and unkind behaviors, we studied the research and also conducted two national surveys of our own. In total, we surveyed over 1,000 students in schools throughout the United States in sixth through eighth grade. We surveyed kids in different demographic areas, of varying races and socioeconomic groups, and from cities as well as suburbs and rural areas. Our participating schools were both public and private. Because our surveys were anonymous, students often revealed things they hesitated to speak of face-to-face in the dozens of one-on-one interviews we also conducted. On pages 244–247, we have included a similar student survey that you can use at your school.

helping others who were not originally involved, and this creates a cascade of cooperation that influences dozens more in a social network.”¹

Planting the seeds of compassion and respect in classrooms and schools is essential, not only to reduce bullying and other cruel behaviors, but because empathy and kindness are so essential to all human relationships. But just as these positive behaviors spread, so can cruelty and callousness. As a Harvard study of 10,000 middle school and high school students reported, 80 percent were more concerned about their own success and happiness than they were about others. The report states something all of us have seen: “When caring takes a back seat, youth are at risk for being cruel, disrespectful, and dishonest.”² As one eighth-grade boy told us, “I was a bully because I never put myself in the other person’s shoes. I never stopped to think what the other kid was feeling.”

On the other hand, when kids start standing up for others, more are likely to follow. That’s partly because “mirror neurons” in the brain prompt people to mimic other people’s behaviors. According to neuroscience researchers Sourya Acharya and Samarth Shukla, mirror neurons are activated when people

observe others’ actions. This helps explain why kids learn through imitation. Mirror neurons also spark the spread of empathy and emotions. This is why it’s so important to fill classrooms and hallways with enough empathy, kindness, and respect to motivate every student.³

The Need to Foster Acceptance of Diversity

Day by day the world is becoming visibly more diverse. People from different cultures interact in schools, communities, workplaces, and online more than ever before. Schools strive to meet the needs of diverse students, including dual language learners, students with learning differences and disorders, students with disabilities or behavioral challenges, students who identify as gender variant, and those whose families have recently immigrated.

Yet the challenges are many. Racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of bias and bigotry impact students on a daily basis. People who are not part of a society’s dominant group (or groups) may be subject to unfair treatment, restrictions on rights, physical attacks, bias-motivated crimes, and more. And particularly relevant to educators is this fact: The FBI reports that 33 percent of all hate crime offenders, and a similar percentage of victims, are under age eighteen.

A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* about the negative impact of bullying on kids concludes that “bias-based harassment is more strongly associated with compromised health than general harassment.”⁴

Helping kids develop respect and appreciation for diversity decreases their likelihood of harming others due to perceived differences. Teaching students to respect and value differences is therefore a critical part of bullying prevention. In tandem with these goals, educators can also help kids see their many similarities as human beings on a shared planet. This is why this book includes certain key understandings and skills, such as fostering empathy and appreciation of differences, cultivating awareness of our own biases, and developing the fine art of perspective-taking. Lessons 25 and 26, for example, raise awareness of the ways bias, stereotyping, and prejudice bring harm. The lessons provide strategies for students to use in

preventing bias-based bullying behaviors and reinforcing a culture of care and respect.

Encouraging Upstander Behaviors

Along with building empathy, compassion, and acceptance, another critical piece in creating an atmosphere of kindness is teaching kids how to step out of the role of passive bystander and into the role of upstander.

Taking this step is often challenging for kids of all ages for a variety of reasons. A study published in the *Journal of Early Adolescence*, for example, found that bystanders often don't step into the role of upstander "because they lack the skills that are needed to help victims and because they are afraid of retaliation."⁵

"It's not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It's our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless." —L.R. Knost

Many lessons in this book help build the necessary skills, providing practical strategies to help you teach kids how to effectively intervene when peers are mistreated. Some of these skills may be different from what you expect. For example, the first step is instilling the understanding that our actions matter. A National Institutes of Health (NIH) study shows a direct link between kids' mindsets and their willingness and ability to support peers who are mistreated. If students believe they can make a difference, and feel capable of doing so, they're more likely to take action when someone's being picked on.⁶ (For more information on mindsets, see page 5.)

The NIH study also gave the following key actions that educators can use to foster upstander behavior:

- *Clearly communicate* to kids that they are expected to include and support anyone who's mistreated.
- *Show kids* how to include, support, and encourage others so they feel confident in doing so.
- *Encourage the understanding* that bullying is wrong and that helping others is the right thing to do.⁷

Kids also have a lot to say about what works based on their personal experiences. The Youth Voice Survey looked at data from more than 13,000 students in fifth

through twelfth grades to find out what helped most in responding to bullying and victimization. This study's findings challenge some conventional wisdom and shed light on the strategies that really work best. Here's some of what the survey revealed.⁸

The single most helpful strategy for kids who are targets of bullying:

Seek support from an adult at school or from a friend.

Another highly effective strategy for kids who are targeted:

Don't think like a victim. Kids who told themselves that the bullying wasn't their fault, and that there was nothing wrong with them, proved to be more resilient in the face of bullying.

The least helpful strategies for kids being targeted:

- Telling or asking the person bullying them to stop.
- Telling the person how they felt.

The most helpful things bystanders can do when they witness others being bullied:

Include and support those being bullied in the following ways:

- Walk with them and spend time with them at school.
- Give them advice and hope.
- Help them get away.
- Distract the person who's bullying them.
- Help them tell adults.
- Encourage them.
- Talk to them at school to give support and show that you care.
- Call them at home to give support.
- Listen to them.
- Hear their concerns without judgment.
- Show that you care.

The most important adult strategies to help kids who are bullied:

Kids surveyed by the Youth Voice Project also addressed adult behaviors that made a difference. They reported that the three most helpful things any adult can do are:

- Listen to them.
- Encourage them.

The “brain sculpting” that happens during teen years sets up patterns for life. It’s important to let students know this and to make sure they appreciate the implications. For example, if they binge-eat, overdose on video games, drink, or use drugs, their neural pathways become more prone to long-term addiction. At the same time, however, a teen’s neural pathways for *healthy* life patterns are also uniquely primed. Kids who nurture intellectual, artistic, and physical talents will be stronger in these areas for life. The same is true when it comes to social and emotional skills. Kids who learn them now may, in fact, have them forever. The pages of this book are filled with ways to expand your students’ capacities for kindness and empathy, as well as for self-control, problem-solving, moral courage, and altruism. These skills are essential to a kinder climate and culture, within your school and as your students go out into the world.

Note: For important information and current research on the impact of electronic media, which you may choose to share with parents, see “The Impact of Media Violence” in the digital content for this book.

Stress is another major issue for many kids this age. One seventh-grade girl from our survey said, “In middle school, people have mood swings and get angry more easily than when we were younger. We’re getting more homework and have after-school pressures, plus other stuff, too. It’s easier to release stress toward other people than deal with it ourselves.” The teen brain is especially susceptible to stress and its side effects. Family issues like illness, divorce, money problems, and substance abuse can take a huge toll, and some kids have the added strain of acting as substitute parents for younger siblings. Others may be dealing with physical and emotional abuse. All of this can lead to a sense of powerlessness. Since bullying is commonly driven by a need for power, some kids will be more apt to bully as a result. Others will be more susceptible to being bullied, especially those being victimized at home. For kids who already feel overwhelmed by stress, bullying can sometimes feel like too much to bear.

Thankfully, most adolescents are resilient. But when multiple risk factors exist at the same time, some teens will gravitate toward drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, self-harm (such as cutting), and isolation. Some will develop eating disorders. And some will develop suicidal thinking. Again, bullying can be the

factor that pushes them beyond their limits—whether they are observing, being targeted by, or carrying out the bullying.

These are among the many reasons why it’s important to create the compassionate, kind, and connected school culture the lessons in this book explore, build, and reinforce. Doing so will not only decrease bullying but can also provide kids who need help with a greater sense of support and connection.

The Importance of Mindsets

This book is fundamentally about change. When we believe change is possible, it is. When we believe it isn’t, we close off to possibility and act accordingly. The brain actually changes when our mindset is open to growth. That’s neuroplasticity in action.

Some of the first lessons in this book are designed to help your students create a growth mindset—and the understanding that every new strategy they learn will literally change their brains.

Neuroscientists are giving us new ways to use this plasticity and to harness the power of the brain as problem-solver. Helping kids develop a “growth mindset”—as opposed to a “fixed mindset”—is critical. Stanford University neuroscientist Carol Dweck found that growth mindsets enable us to see our abilities as ever-evolving. And this has enormous potential for counteracting bullying and fostering kindness. For example, a study by Dweck’s colleague David Yaeger revealed that kids who’d learned about the power and plasticity of the brain showed a 40 percent decrease in depressive and aggressive responses to bullying.¹² Acquiring a growth mindset helped them understand that change is possible—for kids who’ve bullied, for kids who’ve been bullied, and for themselves.

Based on this science, some of the first lessons in this book are designed to help your students create a growth mindset—and the understanding that every new strategy they learn will literally change their brains. Take a look at the “Brain Graphic” on page 30. It’s used in many lessons to help kids grasp new concepts. These lessons contain strategies and

information to help kids understand how their brains work. In turn, this understanding can lead to greater resilience in the face of conflict, bullying, and more.

WHY IS IT SO HARD FOR KIDS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY?

This is a question that frustrates many educators as they witness kids' denials, excuses, and justifications for bullying and other cruel behaviors. New research sheds light on this phenomenon, revealing that the fear of getting in trouble isn't the only reason kids avoid accepting responsibility for negative actions. A new study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* reveals that denials and justifications of morally questionable acts are common because of something termed "unethical amnesia"—the tendency to forget or justify acts too uncomfortable to confront honestly. This allows people to perceive certain bad things they do as "morally permissible." Perpetrators of cruel acts, for example, might say the other person deserved it. They justify "dehumanizing the victim."¹³ And this is a common practice among kids who bully.

While this study was conducted with adults, other research shows that its implications extend to people of all ages. For example, a 2011 study of kids ages nine to thirteen showed that those who bullied were "woefully deficient" in moral compassion, and easily justified their actions.¹⁴ Additionally, a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that adolescents, whose prefrontal cortexes are still developing, are more susceptible than adults to making bad decisions, including harming others.¹⁵ Being aware of these factors gives educators a starting point for guiding their students toward the right path. You'll find many exercises in the lessons of this book that will help kids take responsibility and make good choices. You'll also find two lessons and three handouts to foster conscience (Lessons 27 and 28), and one lesson on moral courage (Lesson 46).

What Student and Teacher Surveys Tell Us About Bullying, Conflict, and School Violence

Let's start with the good news: Educators, parents, and communities are making real, tangible progress in the mission to reduce bullying and violence in our schools. According to the National Institutes of Health, the rate of bullying among teens in U.S. schools has dropped more than 9 percent since 1998. The latest National Crime Victimization Survey tells us that the rate of bullying among students ages twelve to eighteen is now 21.5 percent—the lowest rate ever reported in this survey. (Past years' rates were 28 percent in 2005, 2009, and 2011, and 32 percent in 2007.)¹⁶

Additionally, fewer middle school students are afraid of being harmed at school than in the past. The rate of students who report feeling fearful of physical harm at school has fallen by 8 percent overall since 1995. The drop is even more dramatic for students of color, among whom the rate has fallen by 15 percent.¹⁷

The work that educators are doing across the country is paying off! Yet there's still room for progress. That's why we wrote this book. We want cultures of kindness to be the norm in middle schools, not the exception. All kids need to feel safe, supported, and accepted. The fact that 21.5 percent of twelve- to eighteen-year-olds still report being bullied is unacceptable.

Listen to the words of students from the two national surveys we conducted:

- "I was bullied because I was small and I really had no one to go to. I used to self-harm with a razor blade." —7th-grade girl
- "They call me weird, emo, and a weird gay person. They say, 'You suck at everything!' and 'You're horrible at sports!' Sometimes I can't take it." —6th-grade boy
- "There are kids in our class who go home and cry every night over things that people do to them. Some of them have family problems and the problems at school make it worse. The teachers don't even know." —8th-grade girl

- “They say, ‘lesbian, stupid idiot, go back to where you came from. You should just end it.’” —8th-grade girl
- “Things go viral sometimes. Some kids make fun of people in a really mean way. They’ll send screenshots of personal texts that are meant just for them. It’s like bullying and harassing at the same time.” —7th-grade boy
- “Kids say I’m bad and shouldn’t be allowed to go to this school. I’m so sad that I can’t sleep. Why do they treat me this way?” —7th-grade boy

As we read through our survey results and as we interviewed middle schoolers, we repeatedly saw how deep the pain of bullying goes for far too many. Often, kids hide this pain as they sit in classrooms and walk through the halls. Yet it interferes with their learning and affects their emotional and physical well-being. Here is some of the other information our surveys revealed:

Frequency of mean words, conflicts, and rumors:

- 81% of the kids surveyed said that they hear kids saying mean things to one another every day.
- 64% said that they see conflicts happening at their school sometimes, often, or every day.
- 42% said that they hear kids spreading rumors or mean gossip every day.
- 14% said that other kids say things to hurt their feelings every day, and 19% said that this happens one to three times a week.

Going beyond this overarching information, our surveys asked students to select their top three choices for each of the items that follow. Here is what their answers revealed.

The top reasons kids said they are teased or bullied:

- looks or body size: 59%
- how they dress: 41%
- physical ability or disability: 28%
- race: 14%

The top places where kids said bullying and teasing occur:

- at lunch: 84%
- in the hallways: 55%

- on the bus or walking to school: 43%
- in the bathrooms: 33%

The top conflict starters:

- rumors and gossip: almost 60%
- being teased or made fun of: about 46%
- name-calling: 40%

Note: Although conflict can lead to bullying, the above refers to more common conflicts that tend not to escalate into bullying.

People kids said they would go to if they were being bullied:

- a parent: 33%
- a friend: 20%
- a counselor: 16%

One piece of information that especially concerned us was this: Only 14 percent of the kids we surveyed said they would go to their teachers if they were being bullied. When we delved deeper, we found out why. Some kids are ashamed to admit what’s happening, or they’re afraid of getting in trouble. Others don’t want to risk being seen as a tattletale or snitch. And, sadly, some kids simply don’t believe their teachers can or will help. Unfortunately, the data support this view in many cases. In their 2012 report, “Bullying in U.S. Schools,” two of the world’s top bullying experts, Susan P. Limber and Dan Olweus, found that 41 percent of middle schoolers say their teachers have done “little or nothing” or “fairly little” to cut down on classroom bullying. Limber and Olweus also found that 39 percent of kids who reported being bullied said it lasted for over a year.

Equally troubling are the following statistics from the *2013 National School Climate Survey* of students by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network): “56.7 percent of LGBT students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or the situation could become worse if reported.” Furthermore, “61.6 percent of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response.” The same survey revealed that “51.4 percent of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff.” Additionally,

“74.1 percent of LGBT students were verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year [at school] because of their sexual orientation and 55.2 percent because of their gender expression.” The same study reported that “36.2 percent were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and 22.7 percent because of their gender expression.”¹⁸

Another disturbing piece of data comes from the National Center for Educational Statistics: 20 to 30 percent of kids who were bullied didn’t tell *any adult*. Yet telling an adult is one of the most effective tools kids have against bullying. As one teenage boy said in retrospect, “I wish I’d spoken up sooner, because it really would have made life a lot easier. If I had just spoken up after the first day, or first couple of days, I could have ended the whole thing.”

One of the most important insights we gained in the process of talking to students and conducting our national surveys was this: Although many schools have anti-bullying assemblies and give kids the clear message that bullying and other mean behaviors are not acceptable, kids are too rarely given enough specific, practical information on how to handle real-life bullying situations. They know the why-nots, but not the how-tos. The main message often tends to be simply, “You shouldn’t do it.” And even if they *do* have more detailed how-tos, they often aren’t given enough time—or any time at all—to practice implementing what they’ve learned.

Kids are too rarely given enough specific, practical information on how to handle real-life bullying situations. They not only need the right words, they need time to role-play and rehearse using them. Without this practice, kids often end up vulnerable and unprepared.

What became clear is that kids not only need the right words to use to confront and prevent bullying, they also need time to role-play and rehearse using them. Without this practice, kids often end up vulnerable and unprepared. Assemblies aren’t enough. Imagine doing an assembly on baseball, talking about it in class a few times, then sending

kids out on the field to play the game. This tends to be how schools and districts often approach teaching anti-bullying strategies.

In addition, many kids we talked to described ways bullying and conflict interfere with all aspects of their lives at school and beyond. A theme that came up over and over in our student interviews was that many middle schoolers feel stressed out and distracted by conflicts they can’t resolve. This often leads to lost friendships, larger conflicts, and—especially in the case of many girls—time wasted replaying the details in their heads. For girls and boys, conflict and anger can lead to incidents of bullying. For example, one kid might get mad at another and want to get even. He might engage friends in harassing the person he’s mad at. Before long, texts are flying, the classroom is buzzing with rumors, and the put-downs continue online. The kid who’s been targeted can feel as though there is no escape.

Here are a few more things the kids we talked to expressed:

- Many believed that talking to a teacher about a bullying situation actually made things worse.
- Most didn’t feel comfortable intervening when they saw someone being picked on.
- Many didn’t feel like they had the right skills for dealing with an angry person.
- Quite a few wished that their classes allowed time for weekly lessons that would help them get better at skills for dealing with bullying.

One of the biggest changes we hope this book will make is to help kids feel more hopeful and less powerless in the face of bullying—especially those who are bullied, but also bystanders and the kids who do the bullying.

A Word About Crisis Situations

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most kids who are bullied *do not* engage in suicide-related behaviors. However, as mentioned earlier, bullying *can* increase the risk of self-harm when combined with other risk factors, such as exposure to violence, family conflict, emotional distress, problems in relationships, feeling a lack of connectedness to school or not feeling supported at school, alcohol or drug use, physical

disabilities, and learning or behavioral differences.¹⁹ It's also important to remember that kids with physical disabilities or learning differences are among the most vulnerable. And, as stated earlier, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender kids are bullied far more often than their peers. In addition, suicide rates among LGBT kids are much higher than the average.²⁰ According to another CDC study, gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in seventh through twelfth grade were “more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide as their heterosexual peers.” Studies have also shown a significantly elevated suicide risk among transgender youth.²¹

Whether bullying takes place in person or online, it can take a steep toll on kids, contributing to problems ranging from depression to disengagement in school, and, in some rare cases, suicide. This is true not just for those who are targeted, but for those who target others. Kids who bully are at an elevated risk for depression, suicide, substance use, trouble with the law, and violence as they grow into adulthood.²²

Bystanders—those who witness bullying—are adversely affected as well. According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control, “Even youth who have *observed but not participated in bullying* behavior report significantly more feelings of helplessness and less sense of connectedness and support from responsible adults (parents/schools) than youth who have not witnessed bullying behavior.” And kids who both bully and are bullied are at greatest risk of experiencing negative repercussions. The CDC notes, “Youth who report both being bullied and bullying others (sometimes referred to as bully-victims) have the highest rates of negative mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and thinking about suicide.”²³

One of the most important protective factors against suicide and despair for any young person, including those affected by bullying, is a sense of connection and support. School is absolutely critical in this regard. This is true for all kids. But it's especially important for kids with difficult home lives and other risk factors. Feeling connected to and accepted by teachers, counselors, and peers can spell the difference between hope and despair. The lessons in this book will help you foster this connection and acceptance. In addition, we've included the lesson “When Bullying Leads to Self-Harm” (page 230) to help you address the difficult topics of suicide and self-harm.

HANDLING CONFLICT VS. BULLYING

Schools with a lot of conflict—such as peer disagreements, fights, name-calling, or an overall atmosphere of mistrust—tend to have more bullying. And while conflict can lead to bullying, the two issues can't be solved in the same way. In fact, it is *never* appropriate or helpful to try to mediate a bullying situation or to get kids to “talk it out” using conflict resolution skills. In bullying situations, which often involve a serious power imbalance, putting the involved parties face-to-face can be damaging to the student who's being targeted. For more information on handling bullying situations, see “Addressing and Preventing Bullying” on page 14.

You'll find tools and resources for your students, as well as a handout for parents. And at the end of this book (page 248) is information for hotlines and other sources of support.

About This Book

All forty-eight lessons in this book are designed for teachers, counselors, group leaders, social workers, religious educators, and facilitators of out-of-school activities. Each one is based on current research and information gleaned from our national surveys as well as from our face-to-face interviews with middle school kids, teachers, principals, and counselors. Additionally, the lessons and strategies in this book can mesh with any existing anti-bullying program you may be using in your school, such as Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, Second Step, or Responsive Classroom.

Each lesson takes thirty minutes or so, and contains discussion topics, activities, and concrete strategies that foster critical thinking and language development. Optional follow-ups at the end of each lesson can be completed on another day or as homework. You'll also find creative, thought-provoking enrichment activities that support, reinforce, and expand the content of each lesson. These, too, are optional, and how you use them is up to you. Some