

The Bullying Rubric Explained

By Mark Liston, PhD

Today's educators are proactive in dealing with bullying in their schools and districts. The first and arguably most challenging tasks they face is to define what is and is not bullying, to develop a workable district policy on bullying, and to identify bullying when it occurs.

To facilitate these tasks, educators have called for a rubric based on a clear definition of bullying. The following is an attempt to provide such a rubric. It is based on this **definition of bullying** garnered from US Department of Education data and the most current research:

Bullying occurs when a person or group with greater power causes significant distress for another. The distress can be physical, social, or emotional and may not be intentional.

This simple definition facilitates development of a functional rubric with the essential bullying behaviors, severity score, and consequence level. **The Bullying Rubric** (© 2011, Mark Liston) provides educators the tool they need to deal with bullying behaviors.

The following pages include:

- The Bullying Rubric,
- An explanation of the rubric's elements, and
- Case studies using the rubric.
- C2 Bullying Response lessons

These are provided by the Liston Group to support educators and their vision of a positive school climate conducive to learning. District policy and philosophy statements, public relations material, reporting and intervention protocols, and common language about bullying will all benefit and be influenced by the science and research packed into these few pages.

The Bullying Rubric was developed by Mark Liston who was bullied at home and at school. He authored *C2: Character Challenge* (www.characterchallenge.org) that can be used for bullying intervention lessons for both bullying Aggressors and Subjects. C2 uses movie clips, Positive Psychology, reflective writing, and peer discussion for social-emotional learning.

For professional development or information on *The Bullying Rubric*, please contact **the Liston Group** at (417) 206-9900 or mark@listongroup.org.

The Bullying Rubric

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* The letters in brackets [A-H] indicate the letter in the “Explanation” section that explains that sentence.

Is this a bullying incident?

Check the statements that are true regarding this incident:

_____ The incident involved a person or group with **greater power** (physical, social, or emotional) than the other/s involved. [A]

_____ The incident caused significant **emotional and/or social distress** for the subject. [B]

**** If both are checked, this is a bullying incident; you should continue the Rubric.**

How severe is this bullying incident?

Evaluate the incident with the following criteria. Add one point for each criteria:

Threat of harm, damage, or release of embarrassing information. 1) _____

Violence, Harassment: Physical, sexual, theft, or property damage. 2) _____

Lie, Accusation, or Rumor: May allude to ethnicity, religion, or sexuality. 3) _____

Mocking, Discriminating, or Excluding:

May allude to appearance, social group, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality. 4) _____

Add lines 1-4 to get the **Total Criteria Points** 5) _____

* Double the total of 5) if it is reasonable to conclude that the aggressor **intended to harm** the subject. If not, fill in the same total. [C] 6) _____

* Double the total of 6) if this is a **repeat incident** involving this aggressor and/or this subject. If this is the first incident for both, fill in the same total. [D] 7) _____

* Double the total of 7) if this was a **public incident** where this aggressor wanted others to see and/or be involved. If not, fill in the same total. [E] 8) _____

* Double the total of 8) if this incident involved **Cyberbullying:** Posting or circulating information via electronic media or communication. If not, fill in the same total. [F] This total is the **Incident Severity Score:** [G] 9) _____

Consequence Level: [H] 10) _____

Consequence Level: Pre-bullying = 1-3; Level 1 = 4-7; Level 2 = 8-12; Level 3 = 13+

* (Administrator) Should you call local law enforcement? Yes _____ No _____ [I]

Explanation:

The letters of the following paragraphs correlate with the bracketed [] numbers in the rubric:

- A. If the incident was not done by one or a group with **greater power** (physical, social, or emotional) than the other, this is not a bullying incident or may be retaliation by the subject for previous bullying incidents. If the latter, investigate the reason for the aggressor's action and determine if previous bullying occurred. Use this rubric to evaluate previous incidents.
- B. Determining **emotional or social distress** is the most difficult task in this rubric. The adult community sometimes minimizes or overlooks student's hurtful words and behavior. Aggressors carefully hide this behavior from adults. Most subjects of bullying attempt to hide or minimize their distress for many reasons, primarily for fear that showing it will worsen the situation. Thus adults must be aware of bullying behavior and the signs of student social-emotional problems.
- C. Just because the aggressor did not have the **intent to harm** the subject does NOT mean it wasn't bullying. Bullying is defined as an incident where one or more with greater power cause emotional and/or social distress on another. Sometimes those with greater power tease, criticize, and berate others but are not aware of the harm they are causing the subject. *The behavior is bullying even if the aggressor is unaware of the subjects pain.* In such cases, the aggressor needs Developmental Intervention [H] to enhance awareness of the effect of their actions on others.
- D. A **repeat** incident means it is at least the second time in the previous year that one of the aggressors and/or subjects have been involved in a bullying incident.
- E. Some emotionally distressing incidents are **between two individuals** and not dependent on others witnessing or supporting it. For example, one student is upset with another and threatens, mocks, or hits the other. Though others may see or hear the incident, the aggressor was not attempting to get others to watch or be involved. This is not considered a public but rather a private incident. As with intent to harm, this is a judgment call that is best made by more than one adult. *When in doubt*, it is better to err on the side of innocence regarding your words and punishment but to err on the side of caution with designing help for both aggressor and subject.
- F. **Cyberbullying** is by definition both public and multiple because a) each person receiving the information has the capacity to circulate it to a new group of people and b) no means exist to stop circulating the information once it is released.
- G. The **Incident Severity Score** provides an objective measure by which administrators can evaluate an incident and compare it to others.
- H. The **Consequence Level** is keyed to the ***BPR: Bullying Prevention and Response*** [www.characterchallenge.org; (417) 206-9900]. BPR has three levels of positive, strength-based developmental (vs. punitive) interventions designed to help both aggressors and subjects deal with the incident. Administrators may create their own interventions and use existing programs.
- I. The theft of \$3 may indicate the need to contact authorities in some communities. Each district must establish their protocols in consultation with local law enforcement.

Examples:

Example 1: (*Explanations are italicized in parentheses*)

Sixth-grader Adam was confronted at his locker by eighth-graders Lex, Bono, and Syd who asked if he could loan them some money. When Adam said he had only his lunch money, Lex pulled out Adam's wallet, took the \$3 in it, and shoved Alex down, yelling, "Don't ever lie to me again, Nerd, or I'll bust your face!" Alex now wears a huge backpack with all his books in it to avoid going to his locker.

Is this a bullying incident?

Check the statements that are true regarding this incident :

- x The incident involved a person or group with **greater power** (physical, social, or emotional) than the other/s involved. [A] (*3 older boys to one younger*)
- x The incident caused significant **emotional and/or social distress** for the subject. [B] (*Alex changed his school routine to avoid them, indicating distress: Fear the event will recur.*)

How severe is this bullying incident?

Evaluate this incident with the following criteria to determine that student's severity level.

* Add one point for each factor involved in this incident:

Threat of physical harm, theft, release of embarrassing information, etc. 1) 1

Violence, Harassment: Physical, sexual, theft, or property damage. 2) 1

Lie, Accusation, or Rumor: May allude to ethnicity, religion, or sexuality. 3)

Mocking, Discriminating, or Excluding: May allude to appearance, social group, ethnicity, religion, or sexuality. (*Lex called Adam "Geek."*) 4) 1

Add lines 1-4 to get the **Total Criteria Points** 5) 3

* Double the total of 5) if it is reasonable to conclude that the aggressor **intended to harm** the subject. If not, fill in the same total. [C] 6) 6

* Double the total of 6) if this is a **repeat incident** involving this aggressor and/or this subject. If this is the first incident for both, fill in the same total. [D] 7) 6

* Double the total of 7) if this was a **public incident** where this aggressor wanted others to see and/or be involved. If not, fill in the same total. [E] 8) 12

* Double the total of 8) if this incident involved **Cyberbullying:** Posting or circulating information via electronic media or communication. If not, fill in the same total. [F] This total is the **Incident Severity Score:** [G] 9) 12

Consequence Level: [H] 10) 2

Consequence Level: Pre-bullying = 1-3; Level 1 = 4-7; Level 2 = 8-12; Level 3 = 13+

* (Administrator) Should you call local law enforcement? Yes No x

Consequence Level: Pre-bullying = 1-3; Level 1 = 4-7; Level 2 = 8-12; Level 3 = 13+

* (Administrator) Should you call local law enforcement? Yes _____ No x_____

Note: This could be viewed as a private incident since it is Erin's first incident and it was between only three girls. In such case, it would have an Incident Severity Score of 4 and a Consequence Level of Level 1. However, it is a dangerous incident socially and emotionally for not only these students but for the school. This type of behavior can spread, infecting other groups and poisoning a healthy school culture. Thus it should be dealt with carefully and the students should be helped to resolve the conflict and be taught better social skills. How would this have been different if Erin had posted the lie on her Facebook page?

C2 Bullying Response Sessions

Bullying Response for the Aggressor

1. Respect = **Divergent**
2. Self-control = **42 (Jackie Robinson Story)**
3. Care = **Frozen**
4. Fairness = **The Help**
5. Leadership = **Star Trek: Into the Darkness**
6. Kindness = **Warm Bodies**
7. Insight, Tolerance, and Discernment = **The Hobbit**
8. Trust and Social Intelligence = **Hunger Games**
9. Cooperation = **Avengers: Age of Ultron**

Bullying Response for the Subject

10. Courage = **The Maze Runner**
11. Trust and Social Intelligence = **Hunger Games**
12. Cooperation = **Avengers: Age of Ultron**
13. Insight, Tolerance, and Discernment = **The Hobbit**
14. Grit and Perseverance = **Unbroken**
15. Forgiveness = **Maleficent**
16. Optimism = **The Martian**
17. Leadership = **Star Trek: Into the Darkness**
18. Fairness = **The Help**