

## BEST PRACTICES TO PREVENT BULLYING ON FIELD TRIPS



*Written by Kirsetin Morello, the original version of this article appeared in Teach & Travel magazine.*

Like children and youth, bullying comes in many shapes and sizes. Bullying often takes the form of name-calling, systematic exclusion, rumors, threats, physical contact, and misuse of social media. According to a survey by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, twenty percent of ninth- to twelfth-grade American students have experienced bullying. Another study, by the National Center for Education Statistics and Bureau of Justice Statistics, found that twenty-eight percent of students in grades six to twelve have been bullied. As a field trip leader, there are specific best practices to help minimize the potential for bullying and nip it in the bud.

### BEFORE THE TRIP

Becky Telzerow, M.A., L.L.P.C., recommends that staff members pre-trip meetings. You may be able to prevent some bullying simply by recognizing group dynamics ahead of time and using them to make decisions about groups, bus seating, and room assignments.

### THINGS TO DISCUSS DURING PRE-TRIP MEETINGS:

**TRIP EXPECTATIONS.** Be sure students know your trip is an extension of your program—the same rules and values apply—and they should respect your program or school's name, themselves, and others. "Students should understand how to be a responsible ambassador," said Telzerow.

**CLEAR RULES.** Thoroughly review a Behavioral Rubric that identifies inappropriate behaviors and defines disciplinary steps. Well-developed rubrics outline the consequences for a first-time infraction, a second-time one, et cetera. (Your school may already have an established Behavioral Rubric.) It's important for students to know the trip atmosphere will be safe and that

social pecking order doesn't matter—the rules apply equally to everyone.

**NEW FRIENDSHIPS.** Help students understand that trips such as these present an opportunity for new friendships to blossom. To encourage new relationships, leaders could prohibit saving seats on the bus or at mealtimes.

### DURING THE TRIP

Bullies are natural leaders and are naturally power hungry. "If adults can help a student find a way to channel that inappropriate leadership into positive leadership, it's a win-win," said Telzerow.

**ESTABLISH TECH GUIDELINES.** Students today have cell phones and iPods, and we're not going to change that; plus, it makes communicating with students easier. But you could and should set expectations about technology use in a group setting. For example, let students know that when you're touring, you expect them to put their phones away and listen attentively.

(Adults on the trip should model that behavior, too.) Pay attention to how a student reacts when you ask him to put it away. “If they react strongly,” said Telzerow, “staff members should try to tease out why.” Excessive phone use could be an indicator that he’s using social media for bullying.

**DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY.** “Give potential bullies a really good, appropriate trip responsibility,” said Telzerow, “and have them be a positive model on the trip not a negative one.” Doing so could take a lot of patience on the staff member’s part, but it creates a stronger connection with that student. The more of a connection a potential bully has with a healthy adult, the more prevention it provides for the entire trip.

Say “hello.” Telzerow suggests gathering your entire group each morning and greeting them by name. “Make eye contact with them, so they know they’re valued and they belong on that trip,” said Telzerow. If something seems off, you could follow up with students to get an idea of whether something happened during the night.

**CATCH THEM DOING GOOD.** Verbally praise students, authentically, when you see them doing the right thing. It creates a strong community atmosphere and a positive environment for everyone on the trip.

**BE A ROLE MODEL.** “It’s important for adults to model a positive tone and behavior,” said Telzerow. For example, adults could reach out to chaperones they don’t know and sit with them during meals or on the bus, rather than sticking with adult friends throughout the trip. Leaders could also show kids that leaders don’t need to be dictators. “Turn over some power to students,” suggested Telzerow, “so you’re not dominating. Instead, model a healthy form of co-leading.”

**IF BULLYING OCCURS**

If bullying occurs despite prevention efforts, Telzerow suggests

these action steps to immediately handle the situation.

**STEP 1.** Privately pull aside the less dominant student. Describe what you’ve seen and ask them to share more information. If they don’t want to discuss the incident further, let them know that you’re concerned and you’d like to help if it happens again.

**STEP 2.** Next, privately pull aside the bully. “Never, ever shame or embarrass the bully in front of their peers,” said Telzerow. Remain non-emotional, state what you saw, and ask the bully, “What was wrong with that?” Then wait for an answer. If there is no answer, educate the bully on why the infraction was wrong. Then, talk about what needs to happen to restore the relationship. Often, it’s also appropriate to implement a “gag order” prohibiting the bully from discussing the situation with friends; this reduces gossip and possible escalation of the situation.

**STEP 3.** Consider making changes to student groups. Use discretion and do what’s in the best interest of the less dominant student.

**STEP 4.** After both of these discussions, it’s imperative that all leaders keep their eyes and ears open to potential conflict in the next twenty-four hours. Afterward, privately speak to the less dominant student once again, to determine if there’s been any retribution (from either the bully or the bully’s friends). If necessary, take disciplinary action based on your school’s Behavioral Rubric.

**STEP 5.** When bullying occurs, it provides leaders with the opportunity to talk to the students involved about the fact that relationships are messy and growth is painful. “All of us have the ability to be mean and rude, to bully others,” said Telzerow. “But these situations give us an opportunity to show grace and to have the courage to change. Many times the most painful things that can happen on a trip are life changing and transforming, for the adults as well as for the students.”

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**SEE MORE AT:** <http://naaweb.org/professional-development/item/149-best-practices-to-prevent-bullying-on-a-field-trip>

### **OPENING DISCUSSION**

What best practices in the article resonate with you?

Which of these best practices do you think will be most helpful?

What thoughts or questions do you have about the article?

### **APPLICATION ACTIVITY**

Think about a time when you've witnessed bullying on a field trip.

What happened?

Which one of the Before the Trip or During the Trip best practices might have helped prevent the bullying?

How did you handle it? After reviewing the best If Bullying Occurs best practices how might you react differently?

### **CLOSING REFLECTION**

Have participants think about the following based on information from the article and discussion:

What's one thing you are considering implementing?

What is the next step needed to make this happen?

When will you take this next step?

Write a note to yourself with this information.

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If applicable, provide participants with the corresponding certificate of participation and if required ask them to complete the questions included on the certificate.

# **CERTIFICATE** of PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## BEST PRACTICES TO PREVENT **BULLYING ON FIELD TRIPS**

\_\_\_\_\_ **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT HOURS, EARNED BY:**

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### **CONTENT INCLUDED:**

Before the Trip • During the Trip • If Bullying Occurs

**FACILITATOR:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

| What are two things that can be done before the field trip to minimize potential for bullying?

- a.
- b.

| What are two things that can be done during the field trip to minimize potential for bullying?

- a.
- b.

| How will you use these best practices?