

# Lesson #1: Rumors & Safety

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**OPENING – Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) is a leadership program for preventing violence.**

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## MVP Goals

- **Raise Awareness** on the prevalence of violence.
- **Challenge Thinking** – because most of this violence is accepted in society.
- **Open Dialogue** – have the opportunity to voice your opinion on these matters and get you talking about this issue.
- **Inspire Leadership** – or inspire you to take a stand against this violence.
- **Emphasize our role as a bystander** – stopping violence is up to each of us.

If we think about BEING OUR BEST (BOB principles) what will make our discussion a BOB style discussion. Can you tell us a few ways, and we'll write them on the board so we can remember.

So, our first question is very quickly tell us your names and tell us what you think makes a good leader.

The working definitions for this lesson focus on bullying, harassment, and the weapons policy.

## Working Definitions

- **Self-defense:** A right to use reasonable non-deadly force may arise where a person is reasonably concerned for his or her own personal safety. The extent to which a person may use force in his or her own defense depends upon many circumstances, including whether the person has availed him or herself of all other appropriate means of retreat or escape. If self-defense is claimed, the force used to defend one's self must also be reasonable under the circumstances. Some of these circumstances may include the place of the attack, the relative physical prowess of the people involved and the opportunities for escape. Self-defense cannot ordinarily be claimed by a person who initiates an affray.
- **Sexual Harassment:** Unwanted sexual advances, requests for favors and other verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which makes the person uncomfortable or intimidated where he or she works or is a student is sexual harassment. This is particularly true where the person making the demand is the boss or the teacher, requiring sexual favors in exchange for special treatment, promotions or good grades. It can also be true with coworkers or fellow students who say sexually suggestive things or touch people inappropriately, creating what is called a "hostile environment."
- **Cyber-bullying:** Willful harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text or images. Examples include but are not limited to: sending threatening emails, posting derogatory or personal comments and/or photos or video about someone on a web site, sending harassing text messages, physically threatening or intimidating someone and/or spreading rumors about someone.

**See Helena School District Bullying Policy at the end of this document.**

**See Helena School District Weapons Policy at the end of this document.**

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## CLOSING QUESTIONS

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1. Do you feel like you have a role as a bystander to help reduce bullying, rumors and gun violence?
2. What are some risks for an active bystander? Can you think of a solution to this risk where you could still be a leader?

# TEACHING: FORCE OUT

## BACKGROUND

This scenario introduces a discussion of bullying, which recent research confirms is a widespread problem in k-12 populations nationally. Increasingly, however, educators have been addressing the interconnection between bullying behavior and many other forms of violence, including, in extreme cases, school shootings.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Do girls bully like this as well?
- Why do some kids pick on, ridicule, and bully other kids? What, if anything, does this behavior teach us about the bully?
- There's an old saying: "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Do you think this is true? (The linguist Julia Penelope rewrites the saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words cause permanent damage.")
- When should people get involved in the affairs of people they don't know well?
- It is possible that the bully's behavior intimidates other kids-bystanders-into silence? Does that mean that, in sense, they're being bullied as well?

## COMMON CONCERNS

**X** Physical fear is often the reason why people don't speak up in these types of situations, even when they feel uncomfortable or empathetic with the victim. You can talk about the realistic fear many kids have, perhaps relating a story from your own life experience, where either you acted-or failed to act-out of fear.

**X** Kids who bully often have emotional, psychological, or family problems. Many have been abused or bullied themselves, at home or in school. It is okay to talk about these dynamics. However, MVP discussions are not therapy sessions. A facilitator, you need to try and keep the group focused on what they, as individuals or as a group, can do to respond to the abusive behavior.

**End the scenario by emphasizing that emotionally, verbally, or psychologically abusing another person is wrong and should not be tolerated. It doesn't matter if the bully is a boy or a girl. It doesn't matter if the target is a boy or a girl. It's not just harmless adolescent cruelty. Bullying is serious abuse, and can lead to even more serious problems, like self-abuse, and further violence.**

# FORCE OUT

→ **A** kid you hang around with frequently insults and makes fun of another student you know. He always is bumping him into lockers, knocking down his books, tripping him, that kind of thing.

## TRAIN OF THOUGHT

**Is this any of my business?** I feel bad for the student whose getting picked on but is it my place to intervene? Neither kid is really a close friend of mine. Also, I don't want the aggressive guy to pick on me. But I feel really uncomfortable when I see a person treating another person like dirt. **What should I do?**

## OPTIONS

- 1) Do nothing. It's best not to get involved in someone else's business.
- 2) Talk to the student who's doing the bullying, in a calm situation with people in the general area, and tell him that I think he shouldn't be so mean to the other kid.
- 3) Talk to the student who's getting picked on, and tell him I've seen what's going on and don't like it. Ask him if there's anything I can do to help.
- 4) Talk to my mother or father; ask them how they would handle the situation.
- 5) Talk to a trusted adult in the school-a teacher, a counselor, a coach, the school social worker- and let them know about the situation.
- 6) Ask some friends if they've seen what I've seen. Get a group of friends together to go talk with a trusted professional in the school.
- 7) Personal Option:

# TEACHING: DOUBLE FAULT

## BACKGROUND

Rumors are very common in adolescent peer culture. This scenario provides the opportunity to discuss the potentially damaging power of rumors in young women's lives.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

→ Some types of sexual rumors about girls can set them up to be sexually assaulted, because some boys hear "she's easy" as an invitation to take advantage of or even force themselves on them. In what other ways can rumors be harmful to people? Does it make a difference if they're true or made up?

→ Why would one girl spread unflattering rumors about another girl?

→ Would your willingness to speak out about this be affected by whether or not you know the girl who the rumors are about? Do you have a responsibility only to your friends in this sort of situation, or to anybody who's being victimized?

## COMMON CONCERNS

**X** This scenario provides the context for a discussion about how girls/women can be unpleasant, competitive and even abusive toward each other. But it is important not to let discussion degenerate into sexist talk about "catfights." One way to do this is to point out that there are many forces in the culture that socialize girls/women to perpetuate their own second-class status, and speaking poorly of other girls or spreading rumors about them, is one means of doing this.

**X** It is always important to remember that discussions in MVP sessions can touch on issues that resonate all too realistically with the young people in the room. For example, there might be students in the group who have had rumors told about them, or students who have participated in spreading rumors about others. MVP trainers should be careful to avoid putting anybody on the spot. Instead, they should encourage people to be thoughtful and respectful in discussing this sensitive topic.

**End the scenario by emphasizing that rumor spreading is not just a harmless adolescent pastime. Rumors have the power to disrupt people's lives, ruin friendships, and even expose young women to potential violence. Responsible young women and men should not participate in the spreading of rumors, but should instead encourage others to treat people with respect to which everyone is entitled.**

# DOUBLE FAULT

→ **A** female student you know is spreading unflattering rumors about another young woman. You're not sure there's any truth to the rumors, but you know they're nasty and you wouldn't want people saying stuff like that about you.

## TRAIN OF THOUGHT

Is this any of my business?...Besides **it's just talk**. This kind of thing goes on all the time... Then again, **rumors** can be really hurtful.....and if I don't say something aren't I saying its okay?....but if I confront the girl who's spreading the **rumors**, what if she starts saying stuff about me?.... **What should I do?**

## OPTIONS

- 1) Don't say anything; it's really none of my business
- 2) Talk to the girl who is spreading the rumors, either by myself or with another friend. Let her know, respectfully but firmly, that I think she should stop saying bad things about another person.
- 3) Talk to the girl who is the target of the rumors, and let her know that I think the trash talking about her is wrong and hurtful.
- 4) Talk about the situation to my parents or a trusted adult, and get some advice about what I can do to stop the spreading of malicious rumors.
- 5) Personal Option:

# TEACHING: SAFETY

## BACKGROUND

This is the only scenario in the playbook that explicitly addresses the potential use of firearms. Recent research has shown that in many school shootings, the perpetrators provided clues as to their intentions before carrying out their crimes. This scenario provides a basis for discussing a range of ways that peers can respond to implied or overt threats of gun violence.

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Why would someone tell others of their intent to commit serious violence?
- What if this turns out to be just an unfounded rumor? Is there any harm in overreacting to a potential threat? How does that compare to the potential harm in the event that the threat is real and you don't speak up?
- Is it possible to tell from surface impressions whether someone is capable of doing serious violence? Several of the perpetrators of school shootings in recent years were seemingly "normal" boys and young men who didn't fit the stereotypical profile of pathological killers.

## COMMON CONCERNS

**X** It is perfectly understandable that some students, out of fear, will express their reluctance to get involved in a situation with a potential school shooter. You can acknowledge the validity of their concern and urge them to brainstorm responsible options that maintain their anonymity.

**X** Some people feel that the national outcry about school shootings has been disproportionate to the actual threat. After all, they argue, these shootings are still exceedingly rare. You can acknowledge this concern, but emphasize that threats need to be taken very seriously by everyone—students as well as school professionals.

**X** Because this scenario involves a gun, there is a chance that the discussion could gravitate toward a debate about gun ownership, public safety, and the Second Amendment. It is important to keep the discussion focused on the ways fellow students can respond when another student is threatening to use a gun with malicious intent, and not allow the larger political issues to dominate.

**End the Scenario by emphasizing that all threats of violence need to be taken very seriously, and that effective prevention means promptly addressing these threats, not ignoring or minimizing them.**

# SAFETY

→ You hear through friends that a male student in your class has made some threatening comments about using a gun. You don't know the student well and you've never actually seen the gun, but you trust that your friends wouldn't be making this up or exaggerating.

## TRAIN OF THOUGHT

Is this any of my business? This student isn't a friend of mine. Why should I get involved?...Then again, now that I've heard about this situation, don't I have a responsibility to **act**?...If I tell someone in authority, will people find out and think I'm a **snitch**?...But so what? Threats of violence have to be taken seriously. Someone's gotta do something... What should I do?

## OPTIONS

- 1) Do nothing. It's none of my business and nothing will probably happen anyway.
- 2) Try to get more information to make sure this isn't just a rumor.
- 3) Talk with friends and come up with a group strategy about how to proceed.
- 4) Talk about this situation with my parent, a teacher, a coach or another professional in the school.
- 5) Talk about this situation with the school resource officer.
- 6) Call in an anonymous tip to my principal or another member of the school administration
- 7) Personal Option:

# Agree/Disagree/Unsure Statements

Following the instructions in Lesson 1.

Kim is trying to lose weight and barely eats anything all day. Although Rob, her boyfriend, and Heather her friend, notice her lack of eating, they decide not to say anything to her. They should talk to Heather about eating disorders.

It's okay to spread a rumor, as long as the information is true.

Spreading rumors is a girl thing. Boys don't bother with that stuff.

If I know a kid just kidding about bringing a gun to school or killing someone, I should just keep my mouth shut.

**More statement ideas:**

## **Helena School District Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Prevention Policy**

The policy of the Board of Trustees of the Helena Public Schools is to provide students with a school environment free from harassment, intimidation and bullying. The Helena Public Schools will not tolerate harassment, intimidation or bullying in any form at school, school-related events (including off campus events), school sponsored activities, school buses or any event related to school business. Inciting, aiding, encouraging, coercing or directing others to commit acts of harassment, intimidation or bullying is prohibited under this policy.

Intimidation, bullying and harassment include:

- (1) any gesture or written, verbal or physical act that is reasonably perceived as being motivated either by any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, culture, social origin or condition, political affiliation or a mental, physical or sensory handicap, or by any other distinguishing characteristic; and
- (2) acts that a reasonable person knew or should have known, under the circumstances the gesture or written or physical act (a) will have the effect of harming a student or damaging the student's property; or (b) will place a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or damage to the student's property; or (c) has the effect of insulting or demeaning any student or group of students in such a way as to disrupt or interfere with the school's educational mission or the education of any student.

### **Reporting:**

1. The District encourages; (1) students who believe they are being subjected to harassment, intimidation, or bullying by anyone and (2) students who have firsthand knowledge of such harassment to report the matter promptly to their teacher, counselor, bus driver, coach, principal, or any responsible adult who is not involved in the alleged harassment; or to the Helena Public School's EEO officer. Upon receipt of a complaint the District will conduct a prompt and thorough investigation.
2. Any adult school employees, adult volunteers, district contractors or agents who witness, overhear, or receive a report, formal or informal, written or oral, of harassment, intimidation or bullying shall report it in accordance with procedures developed under this policy.

## **Helena School District Weapons Policy**

From STUDENT CODES OF CONDUCT, Student Handbook

### **3.0 Public Safety and School Safety**

#### **A student shall not:**

- 3.1** Possess and/or use weapons or dangerous instruments, including but not limited to firearms, knives, clubs, explosives (including fireworks), chains, or any instrument which may inflict bodily injury on another.
- 3.2** Falsely activate a fire alarm.
- 3.3** Participate in any type of threats that substantially disrupts/threatens the education process.
- 3.4** Commit arson, robbery or burglary.
- 3.5** Commit a felony or misdemeanor within school premises or during school sponsored activities.
- 3.6** Possess or use a weapon within the District or at any school-related activity or events.

The Board of Trustees determines that possession and/or use of a weapon by any person within the property of the district or at school-related activities, is detrimental to the welfare and safety of the students and school personnel.

Except as provided in 45-8-361, MCA possession and/or use of any dangerous or deadly weapon in any school building, in any school vehicle, on school property, or at any school-sponsored activity is prohibited. Such weapons include, but are not limited to, any pistol, revolver, rifle, shotgun, air gun, spring gun or paint gun; slingshot; bludgeon; brass knuckles or artificial knuckles of any kind; chains; knife, and any knife the blade of

which can be opened by a flick or a button or pressure on the handle, or any pocketknife where the blade is carried in partially opened position.

The possession or use of any weapon will require proceedings for the suspension and/or expulsion of a student involved to be initiated immediately by the Principal.

The superintendent or building administration may waive specific provisions of this policy on a case-by-case, temporary basis for educationally related activities.