



# **Practicing Interventions: Role Playing**

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**You cannot simply explain an intervention technique to students and expect them to use it. They need practice these skills – using multiple scenarios, before we can expect them to actually apply what they know in “real life.” A well-directed role play can be a challenging and powerful learning experience. Role plays provide opportunities for participants to explore different situations, gain insight, identify problems, resolve conflicts, and create solutions. Students experience and identify with characters and roles that simple discussions cannot. As the participants go into the role play and put their energy in developing and portraying realistic characters, they begin to experience what each character is feeling and experiencing as they play it through. In practicing multiple solutions to a single situation, students gain comfort in the upstander strategies that they feel would work best for them, and have more than one resource for dealing with aggression.**

# Creating a Role Play

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*“Role play is an excellent way of making the experience of others real; if awareness about bullying is raised, a no-bullying culture is encouraged.”*

*Keith Sullivan, The Anti-Bullying Handbook*

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## **Step One: Prepare the Role Play**

- Decide ahead of time the purpose or goals of the role play and keep the topic age appropriate.
- In order to develop empathy, research shows that it is more effective if a participant with a predominant role steps into the “shoes” of another role. (i.e. the aggressor assumes the role of the target in particular role plays)
- Avoid having participants role play aggression whenever possible. Instead, start the role play after the aggressive act has taken place or have the facilitator play the role of the aggressor.

## **Step Two: Prepare the Role Players**

- Explain the purpose of role play and what the role players will be doing.
- Stress that the role play is a way to allow them to generate solutions to a problem or explore unfamiliar situations.
- Explain that the purpose is to be educational, experimental, fun, informative, intentional, and practical.
- Assign roles to participants (or ask for volunteers). Clearly state each person’s character and the role in aggression.

## **Step Three: Prepare the Audience**

- Remind the audience to be attentive to behaviors. They will be asked to provide feedback. It may be helpful to assign specific audience members key elements to look for (aggressor, target, bystander, upstander, non-verbal communication, signs of aggression, body language, making it right, etc.) Choose elements that match the goals of the role play.
- If participants are not quite sure of what is expected the facilitator should provide guidance and demonstration.

## **Step Four: Present the Role Play**

- Have participants perform the role play for the audience.
- Consider presenting multiple options based on the same premise.

# Processing the Role Play

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**Processing a role play provides the participants the opportunity to discuss how it felt and what they were thinking while in the various roles. This is the time where youth draw meaning from the role play experience and make connections to their own lives.**

## **Here are some suggested processing questions:**

- When role playing aggressive acts: describe each role in aggression (target, aggressor, and bystander) and determine the roles of characters in the role play.
- Ask the following questions while participants answer “in character”:
  - Aggressor: How did you feel? (Powerful, popular, threatened, ashamed, etc.)
  - Target: How did you feel? (Sad, scared, excluded, confused, frustrated, helpless, etc.)
  - Bystanders: What was going on with you? How were you feeling? (embarrassed, stuck, scared, silent, frustrated, guilty, disappointed in myself, alone, etc.)
- Have audience members report their observations.
- Discuss alternate options or outcomes and how these could be achieved.
- Seek realistic solutions to the problem within the role play.
- Participants should try out a few of the suggestions followed by processing each idea. How did that feel? Is that a realistic solution? etc.
- Discuss the “moral” or lesson to be learned from presenting the role play. What is expected for the participants and audience to take away from this experience?

# Role Plays and Story Starters

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## Teasing vs. Taunting

- One student makes fun of your best friend, but always says, “Just kidding” after every mean comment.
- When you make a mistake on a group project, another student calls you stupid.
- A student trips in the hallway and everyone laughs and calls her clumsy.
- A student who always raises her hand in class is called “teacher’s pet” after school.
- A group of students always makes fun of a heavier student in the class.
- One student makes fun of another student in front of the whole class. Everyone laughs.

## Touching vs. Hitting

- Every time Joey does not get his way, he punches the person who upset him.
- The student sitting behind you pokes you repeatedly with her pencil during class.
- An older student in the cafeteria always pulls your friend’s long ponytail when he walks by your table.
- You witness a fist fight on the playground.
- Your friends always high five to celebrate victory in physical education class. Casey high fives so hard it hurts.

## Friendship Groups vs. Cliques and Good Popular vs. Bad Popular

- A new student walks in the door halfway through the school year. He does not know anyone.
- You do not play on the school’s basketball team, but you would still like to play basketball with the other children at recess. They tell you that you are not allowed because you are not on the team.
- In choosing teams for a game on the playground or in physical education class, people begin arguing about which team will have to take a player who is less skilled and is not friends with many people.
- You and a friend overhear a group of people making fun of someone and planning to exclude that person from eating lunch at their table.
- You witness a small group of students moving away from someone who is crying and clearly upset.
- A friend of yours makes “blond jokes” every time your other friend, Christa is around. Christa has very blond hair and the jokes make her uncomfortable but she is afraid to say anything.
- You over hear two people making fun of another student.
- Two students cut in line in the cafeteria saying, “Important people go first.”

## Protecting Friends vs. Building Alliances

- A friend comes up to you and asks for your help beating up another student at recess.
- A student in the class is upset at a teacher for giving him a detention. He tells everyone else in the class to misbehave in the afternoon to really show her what getting out of hand can look like.
- One girl in the class tells you to avoid another student because that student said something mean about her.
- Marcus tells you that if you play baseball with Antwan then he will not be your friend anymore.

## **Sharing vs. Gossiping**

- You and a friend walk up to a group of people and find that they are saying things that are untrue about your friend.
- You receive a text message with an embarrassing picture of another student in the class.
- Two of your friends come up to you at separate times to complain about each other.
- One of your teachers openly complains about the principal to the class.
- Your parent tells you personal information about one of the teachers within the school.
- Ashley tells you that she heard you were sleeping around.

## **Telling vs. Tattling**

- You see a fight on the playground where Joey hit Bobby. You need to tell the teacher.
- Someone has written a rumor about you on a table in the cafeteria. You think it was Melanie who wrote it.
- Your brother broke your favorite toy.
- You witnessed Chelsea copying Mandy's homework. Chelsea threatens to beat you up if you tattle on her.
- Brandon offered you drugs. You said no, but are uncomfortable and need to talk to someone about it.

## **Assertive vs. Aggressive**

- You were shoved in the hallway. What do you say to the aggressor?
- You witness your best friend being teased by a group of older boys. What do you do?
- Your friends call you a baby because you cannot stay out past curfew. How do you handle this situation?
- You are angry because no one takes your bullying situation seriously. How can you insist that there is a problem?
- Your sister told everyone in your class that you wet the bed. What do you tell your sister and your classmates?

## **Accidents or Bumpers vs. Aggression**

- Your sister was invited to a party and you were not. How can you tell if it is exclusion or just a bumper?
- A student bumped into you in the hallway between classes. How can you tell if it is physical aggression or just an accident?
- Your friends laugh as you walk by. How can you tell if they are laughing at you, or at something else?
- The teacher did not call on you for three questions in a row. Is she purposefully not calling on you, or is this just a bumper that other students are being called on first?
- You took a long time working on your art project, so you did not have time for free play. Is this a bumper or is the teacher being mean to you?

### **Consequence vs. Punishment**

- You did not do your homework. The teacher made you do it during recess.
- You hit your sister so your parents made you scrub the floor in the kitchen.
- Your classmate did not do her homework. The teacher gives the whole class an extra worksheet.
- You were aggressive towards another student. A teacher asks you to make it right and to serve an after school detention as is written in the class discipline policy.
- You were cyberbullying a classmate. Your parents take your computer and cell phone for a month as it was agreed upon in your Internet and Cell Phone Contract.

### **Healthy vs. Unhealthy Friendship**

- Rachel tells you she will not be your friend unless you give her your dessert.
- Robert tells you he will not be your friend because you taunt him about being short.
- You and Shelley go everywhere together. Today, she chooses to go to the park with Carrie instead.
- Tyshawn and Dominique ask you to write mean messages anonymously on Kyra's Formspring.
- You do not want to play the same game as Jared. You hit him and say you are the leader and he needs to listen to you.

### **Protecting Yourself/Others vs. Reactive Aggression/ Revenge**

- You see someone teasing your little brother. How do you stand up for him?
- Every day you are tripped in the hallway by Brady. You have tried being assertive and it does not work. You want to try to trip Brady back one day.
- Someone has been posting mean things on your Facebook wall with a fake user account. You create a fake account to post on other classmate's walls so that you are not the only one being cyberbullied.
- You are cornered by three boys who threaten to beat you up. You see a large stick on the ground behind you.
- You hear a rumor about yourself. You figure out that it was started by Wendi. You want to start a rumor about her to make it even.