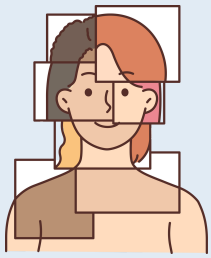
Identity-Based Bullying
Tipsheet for Educators

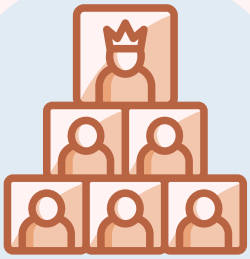
What is identity-based bullying?



When a person is targeted based on their real or perceived **social identities** (e.g., **gender**, **sexual identity**, **race, ethnicity**, **body size**, **religion**, **disability**, or **immigration status**)

Involves an **imbalance of power**, where a person or group with more social power bullies someone with less





Grounded in **social structures** created by the larger society that grant access to power and priviledge to certain groups over others (e.g., **racism**, **(hetero)sexism**, **ableism**)

Can take many different forms, including **physical** (e.g. hitting), **social** (e.g. excluding), **verbal** (e.g. slurs or insults), and **cyber** (e.g. negative social media comments)



Content by: Drs. Ann Farrell and Alexa Martin-Storey

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Important facts about identity-based bullying among youth in Canada



How many youth are affected?

- In a 2024 survey of over **1200** middle- and high school-aged students **in Canada**, nearly **1 in 5** reported being bullied about their social identity [1]

Who is more likely to experience identity-based bullying?



- Students most commonly reported identity based bullying based on **body size**, **race**, and/or **disability** [1]
- Educators most commonly identified bullying about **race**, **ethnicity**, **body size**, and/or **sexual orientation** as a problem in their schools [1]
- Youth are often targeted based on **two or more aspects** of their identity [1]

What are the harms?



- Identity-based bullying is particularly harmful, because those targeted can internalize feelings that parts of their self are devalued or not accepted by others.
  - These negative feelings can **disrupt healthy development** [1-2]
- Youth experiencing identity-based victimization are more likely to experience **adverse academic and mental health outcomes** than their peers [3-5]

Identity-Based Bullying
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Why don't students report when they experience identity-based bullying?

- Researchers think that one reason why identity-based bullying is particularly harmful is that youth have greater **difficulty discussing** this behaviour with teachers and relevant caregivers.
- In the 2024 survey with Canadian youth, around **50%** of those who reported experiencing identity-based bullying indicated that they **chose not to report it** [1].



Reasons for not reporting



Stigma around "snitching"

48% of youth sampled who did not report their experience of identity-based bullying reported that fear of being labelled a "snitch" or a "tattletale" was their reason.



"I don't trust adults to help"

32% of youth sampled identified fear about being blamed for their experience, and/or not having control about how the situation was addressed, as their reason for not reporting.



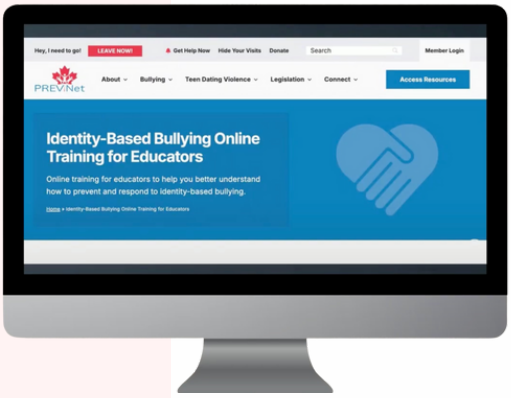
"I've got this"

A smaller sub-group (around **19%**) did not report identity-based bullying because they had handled their experience themselves*.

*youth who thought that they could handle the problem themselves were more likely than youth in the other two groups to report that teachers and other educators at their schools were effective at addressing identity-based bullying

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How can educators help?



1. Take PREVNet's free online training

- Students who **trust** educators in their school to effectively address identity-based bullying are **more likely** to report this kind of bullying when it occurs
- PREVNet offers **free**, **interactive** online modules on identity-based bullying for educators

Our online training can help you to:



2. Recognize identity-based bullying in your school

- This includes building an understanding of **power**, **privilege**, and **oppression**, and how these shape interactions between students
- Being aware of this issue is an important first step to **intervening** - both in the classroom and at the **school policy level**

3. Learn about your biases

- This can help prevent harmful beliefs and attitudes from being passed on to the students in our classrooms





4. Take action

- Our training includes strategies for starting **open, respectful conversations** about power, peer dynamics, and identity-based bullying with students

Identity-Based Bullying
Tipsheet for Educators

Citations:

1. Craig, W., Martin-Storey, A., Dirks, M., Exner-Cortens, D., Holfeld, B., & Nadeau, M. *Building capacity to prevent gender-based violence – Development and evaluation of evidence-based tools for Canadian educators.* Funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. 2023-2025; unpublished.
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3. Gutmann Kahn, L., & Lindstrom, L. (2015). "I Just Want to Be Myself": Adolescents with disabilities who identify as a sexual or gender minority. *The Educational Forum, 79*(4), 362–376. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2015.1068416
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6. Price, M., Polk, W., Hill, N. E., Liang, B., & Perella, J. (2019). The intersectionality of identity-based victimization in adolescence: A person-centered examination of mental health and academic achievement in a US high school. *Journal of Adolescence, 76*, 185-196. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.09.002

Additional Resources:

- **Identity-Based Bullying Teaching Resources** (PREVNet)
- **Identity-Based Bullying Online Training for Educators**(PREVNet)

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