

# 5 Things to Keep in Mind When Addressing Racial Bullying in School

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When bullying occurs because of race it can often be even more challenging to deal with, particularly given the current state of race relations in the United States. It is important to remember that the victim, as well as the person responsible for the bullying, are both children or young people. This requires the adult who is dealing with the issue to combine very serious topics with a caring, child-centered approach to the issue. While there is definitely no 'one model fits all' response that will work in every situation, there are five things that should guide your approach.

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- 1. Focus on prevention rather than just reaction.** Preventing bullying through creating a warm and caring school environment is a far more effective long term strategy than simply resolving to respond to bullying if and when it occurs. Focus on using assemblies, hallway display boards, classroom discussions and parent/guardian evenings to engage with students, parents, guardians and teachers about issues of bullying. Additionally make sure people are clear about what your school's bullying policy is, and make sure it is in line with the most current research on which methods are effective.
- 2. Challenge bullying consistently and without exception.** It is crucial, particularly with racial bullying, that when acts of bullying occur the adult in charge responds consistently. Turning a blind eye to incidents of racial bullying, regardless of how 'small' the act is or how many other things you are currently doing, sends a clear signal that these types of behaviors are ok. If staff are not challenging racial bullying, school management and other stakeholders needs to find out why. Research has found that staff sometimes feel uncomfortable talking about race, particularly if they do not share the same racial background as their students. This may require some explicit intervention to address their concerns, potentially in the form of staff training, in order to empower them to provide the support their students' needs.
- 3. Spend time explaining.** When you do come across racial bullying it is important that all the children or young people involved understand the full consequences of their actions, not just in relation the specific incident but also in the context of wider society. Do not assume that everyone understands the significance of racial bullying, even if you feel that they should. Including issues of race in English, History and Social studies may be one way of disseminating information to build students' awareness. Some student however may need teachers to take the time to explain it to them individually.
- 4. Protect and support the victim(s).** It can often feel like 'dealing with the bully' is the same as responding to the bullying. This however largely ignores the victim and offers little regard for the longer term healing that they may now have to undertake. Make sure to take the time to check that the victim feels both

supported and protected going forward. Importantly, open up channels of communication between the students and yourself to ensure that if they ever need help, or is targeted again, they know they can approach you for help.

5. **Support the child who is responsible for bullying.** As we know from a large body of research children or young people who are responsible for bullying others are often suffering themselves. While in some cases it may seem difficult to feel sympathetic to these students, especially if they are older and therefore close to adulthood, you should remember that this may be the last chance for someone to address these issues before they leave school and join wider society. If you feel like you cannot help them, make sure you approach a colleague who you think can.

These five points remain rather broad ideas but we hope that, coupled with the resources on the RIDES website, they can help guide practical steps to deal with racial bullying.