## **Forty Ways to De-Bully Your Classroom**

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Adapted from the Book, *The Bully Free Classroom*

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There are many strategies the classroom teacher can employ to eliminate bullying in the school. He or she is the person on the front line that can make a huge difference in the social climate.

If you are a teacher, please consider how you can fit these simple yet

effective anti-bully working tactics into your classroom. If you are a

parent, please feel free to discuss these with select teachers in your school and encourage their use.

There are many more strategies in the book than can be listed here. These are more oriented to grade school up to junior high. Among some of the more effective ones are:

1. **Name bully behaviors**. Specifically naming bullying behaviors that will not be tolerated in the classroom serves a need to have expectations spelled out in very concrete terms. Some do not bring a sense of correct or civil behavior from home.
2. **Share stories about bullying**. This must be handled in a way that brings a positive climate to the classroom. Students must be able to say in effect, “hey, we can do better than that…”

1. **Set specific rules regarding what will and will not be acceptable**. This dovetails with number one above. Class rules do not have to be numerous or cumbersome, but they do have to be simple and clear.
2. **Designate your classroom as “bully-free”**. It is one thing to declare a school “drug free”. But making your classroom “bully free” takes it closer to home. It sends the right message to students. It is not a panacea in itself, but rather is part of the larger overall strategy. Studies show messages must be sent and received numerous times before an effective result can be realized.
3. **Respond effectively and quickly to reports of bullying**. There are few things more demoralizing to students than to be given the impression that their problems are not important - that there is a system so stifling, it is not worth seeking redress of wrongs or problems.

1. **Intervene to incidents in real time if you witness bullying**. It is easier “not to see” bullying. However, stepping in when we see problems can stop long-term chronic angst with student victims.

1. **Teach friendship skills**. Making friends does not come easy for every child. But it can be taught. In fact there have been many classics written touching on this subject. One of the earliest classics in this area was *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. There have been many books like this that came later. Highlights can be used from this kind of resource.
2. **Set very high expectations**. There is no substitute for this. This is a hallmark of great teachers. Not only should there be high academic expectations, but there should be high behavioral expectations as well.
3. **Learn more about your students**. This takes time, but it is well worth it. The more you learn about your students, the easier it will be to help them.
4. **Identify role models**. All kids need role models. The media does not typically produce the role models that would lead children to be more compassionate and understanding. The teacher has to find them and bring them to the attention of the class.
5. **Provide supervision**. Most bullying happens behind the back of the teacher. Quality supervision goes a long way to maintaining civility.
6. **Reward cooperation**. All things being equal, students in the aggregate respond to rewards. Reward the good and provide disincentives for anti-social behavior. Quick example – students often wear the number of times they have been disciplined as a “badge of honor”. Rather than feed this mentality, alternatives to standard responses can be found. Many schools around the world have found positive results in a Restorative Practices Program, which rewards cooperation.
7. **Keep grades private**. There is nothing like giving a bully ammunition to carry out intimidation on those in the class who are struggling academically.
8. **Encourage random acts of kindness**. One may not get 100% of the students on board with this, but one can likely and eventually get a vast majority to participate. These acts can significantly improve the expectations and general behaviors of students. It becomes included in the students’ minds as normal and doable.
9. **Explore the lives of famous peacemakers**. One of the things that great teachers do is bring in the “inspiration factor” into the classroom. Great teachers inspire. They can lift the sights of their students in ways that have them climb out of the “lower mental latitudes” themselves. Effective discussion of the lives of famous contributors and peace makers can do this.
10. **Change seating assignments when necessary**. This is one of the more basic strategies that teachers use to separate known bullies from other students they can prey upon.
11. **Affirm your students**. This can be done in a variety of ways, but students need to hear that they are valuable, have great potential, and be able to (to the highest extent possible – because we know often younger students do not comprehend long spans of time) see the present difficulties in a long-term perspective.
12. **Assess the week**. It can be a valuable exercise to ask students to reflect upon the events of the week. Are there things that went well? Are there things that could have gone better? This approach is very similar to setting and reviewing weekly goals.
13. **Use humor**. Humor can be a great tool to diffuse an otherwise tense situation. I have known students to use humor very effectively to disarm a would-be bully. Often the bully will not expect the humor and step down from the aggressive behavior.
14. **Get students involved in service**. Service learning can be a powerful tool to increase students’ ability to give. Our schools are not here to produce a generation of “takers”. That road must go both ways. Service allows students to discover the rewards of making the world a better place, which in turn may make our classroom a better place.
15. **Provide counseling**. This is standard for students who are struggling on the lower levels of the behavior spectrum. Make your counseling as high quality as possible.
16. **Empower parents**. Parents can be your allies. Keep them tactfully informed. They can cue you in to bullying situations you otherwise might not be fully aware of. Tell parents about your efforts to keep the classroom bully-free. Give them a copy of *Parent Options for Bullied Kids* (available on the WDE website) or a copy of *Keeping Kids Bully Free: Tips for Parents* (also on the WDE website and adapted from the book *The Bully Free Classroom*).
17. **Mobilize witnesses**. In any bully event we have the bully, the victim, and the bystanders. Most students are bystanders. Training this group to not tolerate hurt and social aggression can be a powerful tool to reducing bullying in the classroom. Safe School Ambassadors, Olweus, and many other programs do this.
18. **Provide safe havens**. Work with your principal and staff to establish a place where students can go where they feel safe, accepted, and welcomed. Dr. Beane suggests that this can be a corner of the media center or cafeteria and can be actually run by older students.
19. **Get students involved in groups**. Students who step out and get involved in afterschool activities generally develop a ready cadre of friends and advocates – they stand less of a chance at being persistently bullied.
20. **Follow your intuition**. It can be said most people have a sixth sense regarding what problems may exist with our students. Follow its promptings. It can lead you to find and solve problems that would otherwise take longer to discover.
21. **Have students keep journals**. This is likely already done in your school – but teachers can often find clues in journals of children who are bullied or are acting as bullies.
22. **Have clear consequences in place**. Students must know what to expect when they cross the line. In addition, there must be an increasing level or severity of consequences as a result of each additional infraction.
23. **Teach power skills**. There is more to say about this than there is space. However *The Bully Free Classroom* discusses many of these strategies to disarm aggression in greater detail. These including but not limited to; agreeing with everything a bully says, using humor, boring the bully with questions, speaking as a broken record, just saying no, and making an actual asset of the bullying incident.
24. **Get other students involved**. One school got students to produce green T-shirts that had an anti-bully message. The trend caught on and significantly increased the positive school climate. Find what works with other students in your school…
25. **Set up a bully court**. This has worked well in many schools. Organizations like PaxUnited have successfully trained students and staff and set up student mediation programs around the country that address many different kinds of problems – including bullying. One can also set up a home-grown system as the school might require.
26. **Help at-risk students find mentors**. Mentoring is acknowledged as a best practice and can be instrumental at helping a bully become a new person. If this social growth process is not happening at home, for whatever reason, a mentor can fill the gap.
27. **Utilize older students**. Have older students mentor younger ones. This can be a very effective way to positively impact school climate. It is a form of service learning. The tutoring can include both academic topics and social topics that include bullying. The training children receive in this area can pay dividends as they themselves move into the higher grade levels.
28. **Use “Stop and Think”**. This invites students to stop and think about what they are doing and what impact they are having in other students’ lives. Dr. Beane’s book, *The Bully Free Classroom*, has an effective protocol that you may want to use here.
29. **Compile behavior profiles**. This tool can be used to document both positive and anti-social student behavior. These can be very useful when meeting with parents on parent-teacher night, or meetings with administrators.
30. **Keep bullying on the social “radar scope”**. Do not let the anti-bully issues die. It is always easier to focus entirely on academics. School is more than academics; it is an opportunity to teach students that there are great rewards when we treat others as we would want to be treated.
31. **Give students meaningful responsibilities**. When you are planning a project, try to give some of the more meaningful tasks to those who would otherwise use their energy and time to bully others. Let these students know you are counting on them.
32. **Have students take care of an animal**. Research has shown that having a stewardship over other types of life, especially animals, can increase social responsibility and empathy in people.
33. **Network with other teachers and staff**. Ensure anti-bully

protocols are in place in other classrooms. Get help. To the highest extent possible, work with your principal to have other staff members provide the anti-bullying diligence that you are providing.

1. **Be the kind of teacher that lives the behavior you want to see in your students**. Example is one of the best teaching practices known.