This is both a frequent and an important question. It can be answered directly through a list of actions: staff members should
- stop the behavior if individual intervention is safe- or otherwise call for help ,
- protect the target,
- remind bystanders to take action next time,
- and apply consequences when appropriate.

The question, though, also raises more significant issues:
- How do we recognize bullying actions?
- How do we reach consistency between staff members?
- How do we choose and administer effective consequences?
- How do we help youth who bully find other ways to act?

I am writing to summarize what I have learned about this subject in the past nine years of implementing bullying prevention programs at my own school and with staff at other schools. I will focus in this essay on the key question: How can we structure our in-the moment interventions so learning and change are most likely?

Students may interpret adults' reactions to their negative behavior in different ways:
- They may react angrily, believing that they are being punished because we don't like them or unfairly.
- They may see our interventions as fair and as an expression of our caring about them.

These different interpretations of adult disciplinary interventions will lead to quite different responses by students. Students who see discipline as unjust or based on adults' feelings toward them are likely to become more angry and rebellious. Students who see discipline as fair and based on caring connections are more likely to consider changing their own behavior.

Our actions have the potential to influence students' thinking. If disciplinary interventions for peer-to-peer aggression vary widely depending on which adult is present and on which student shows the behavior, students learn that what they do counts less than who sees it or what their reputation is. If disciplinary interventions include adult expressions of anger or frustration, students are more likely to believe that they got in trouble because of the feelings of an adult rather than because of their own behavior.

Students are more likely to understand that disciplinary interventions are based on our caring for them if school staff have made consistent efforts to build positive relationships with every student through greeting, initiating positive interactions, frequent use of honest, action-based praise, and other mentoring initiatives that attempt to build staff-student connections for each student,. We also help students to learn this lesson when we maintain positive emotional tone during the discipline intervention. When discipline interventions are consistent no matter which staff member is involved, and when they are consistent no matter which student displays a certain behavior, students are more likely to view discipline as fair, and thus to learn from it. When we focus our subsequent discussions with students who have broken rules on helping them discover what was wrong with their behavior, what goals their actions were directed toward, and how else they could have reached that goal, students are more likely to find other paths to get their needs met without hurting others.

Olweus, Limber, and Mihalic summarize this approach to intervention well when they state:
    "The [bullying prevention] program strives to develop a school (and ideally a home) environment characterized by:
- warmth, positive interest, and involvement by adults;
- firm limits to unacceptable behavior;
- non-hostile, nonphysical negative consequences consistently applied in cases of ...unacceptable behaviors; and
- where adults act as authorities and positive role models."
(Olweus,Limber, Mihalic 1999)

    When I discussed this statement with Dr. Olweus, he told me he had been influenced by the work of Diana Baumrind, the American psychologist who identified two dimensions of effective parenting: consistent discipline and supervision, and warmth and connectedness. Baumrind's research identified four parenting styles, as shown in the chart below:

Diana Baumrind: four parenting styles

	L Warmth and connectedness H	
H Consistent discipline **L**	**Authoritarian:** High consistency, low warmth and involvement	**Authoritative:** High consistency, high warmth and involvement
	Uninvolved: Low consistency, Low warmth and involvement	**Permissive:** Low consistency, High warmth and involvement

In long-term follow-up research with children who had been raised in these four types of families, Baumrind (and others who have replicated her work), found these outcomes:

Diana Baumrind's research: outcomes

H	Follows rules. Anxious in interpersonal relationships	Able to relate, overcome frustrations, and persist.
	High risk for aggression and other difficulties	High self esteem. Difficulty with responsibilities and frustration.
L		

(Vertical axis label: **Consistent discipline**)

L Warmth and connectedness H

Olweus's research, which has found that boosting warmth, connectedness, and disciplinary consistency in schools has led to marked declines in rates of bullying, makes clear the importance of these two principles: connectedness and consistency. Based on my experience implementing bullying prevention over the past ten years, I am convinced that these two principles hold the key to our work. Our goal, then, should be to implement disciplinary approaches that build student perceptions that staff are using discipline to help them learn and grow, and that students see our disciplinary interventions as fair. Both of these goals connect with the original meaning of the word "discipline" which derives from the same linguistic roots as the word "disciple." Effective discipline teaches. As the principal of the school where I work, Nancy Reynolds, often states: "Our rules and consequences here are all about learning. We care less about what you have done than about what you will do in the future."

How, then, can we design and implement discipline interventions that are based on caring and consistency? Let's begin with a specific event. Just before my school's April vacation, we held a "beach day" in the gymnasium. There was still snow on the ground in Maine, where I live, and the kids hadn't gone out for a few days. Students ate their lunches on mats and beach towels, wore sunglasses, and danced to the music of the Beach Boys. As I was moving around the gym talking with students, one student ran across the gym and kicked another student. I had to figure out what to do. For the reasons described above, it was important to me to use an intervention that was consistent with other staff members' actions and which either built my connection with the student who shoved or at least did not harm that relationship. I also wanted him not to kick again.

What adults do in a situation like this depends partly on what we call this action. Three common labels we might use to describe this act are conflict, horseplay, or bullying. These different labels would lead us to intervene in different ways. One well-respected definition of bullying we might use to make the distinction is Dorothea Ross's:

Bullying is a form of social interaction—not necessarily long-standing—in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behavior that is intended to, and does, in fact, cause distress to a less dominant individual (the target). The aggressive behavior may take the form of a direct physical and/or verbal attack or may be indirect. More than one bully and more than one target may participate in the interaction.

Dorothea Ross, *Childhood Bullying and Teasing* (ACA, 1996)

When we look at this definition, there are three elements that I have consistently found very difficult to be sure of:

- How am I to know which of these two students is more dominant socially?
- How am I to know what the kicker intends? Many young people say convincingly that did not mean to cause distress- that they were "just playing."
- How am I to know if the action *does* cause distress to the target? Some young people show great distress if a friend plays with someone else for one recess; others do not let us know they are distressed even if something very serious is done to them.

As I see it, school staff are often asked to make distinctions between many possible labels for behavior, even though these categories of behavior are not easily distinguished in real situations.

Some of the categories of behavior we could place this, or any negative peer action in, are shown on the following diagram:

What do we- or students- call aggressive behavior?
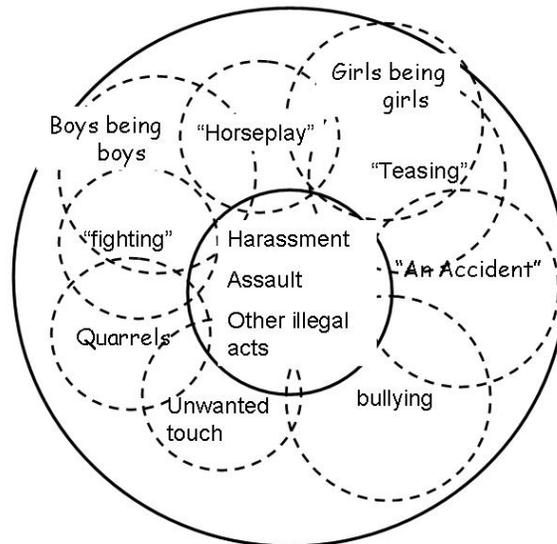
Names have evolved over time

All the circles but the center one are surrounded by dotted lines, because in my experience all these distinctions are based on adults' assumptions and judgments, not on objective criteria. Thus placing an action, like that shove, in one category or another is difficult to do with any degree of certainty or fairness. In my experience, if we tell parents their child has bullied another child, we are likely to hear "She is not a bully," or "I know he didn't mean any harm." If we mislabel bullying as a quarrel or as horseplay, we may sit the two children down together to talk- and thus risk solidifying the bullying youth's power over the target- or tell the target to handle the situation him or her-self, and thus put the target at risk of being hurt again.
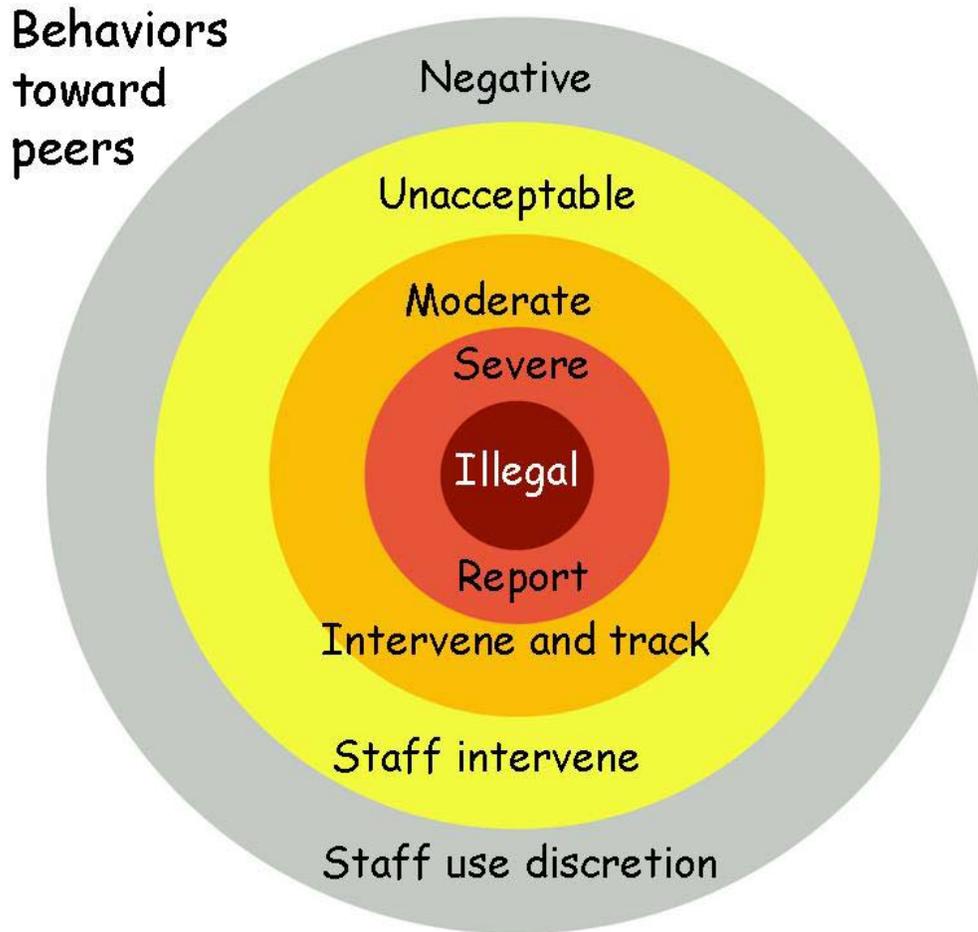
Instead of focusing on whether a specific action is bullying or not, I have found it more useful to look at negative peer to peer behaviors in a different way.

Negative actions toward peers

Unacceptable peer-to-peer behavior

Harassment

Assault

Other illegal acts
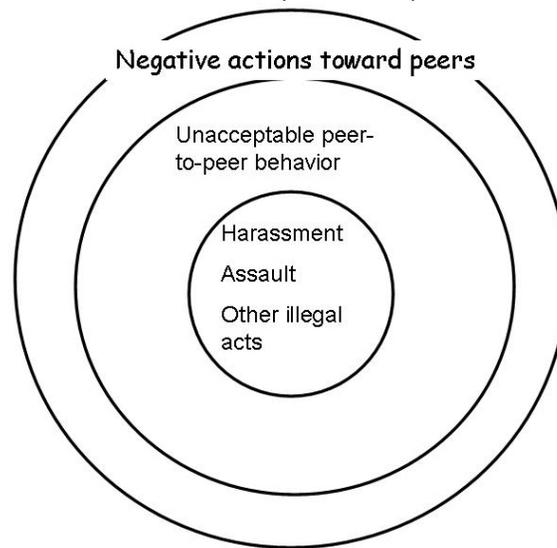
Note that the large circle of negative actions toward peers includes an outer ring of behaviors that are negative yet acceptable at school. An example may help to clarify this concept. When I was sixteen years old, my girlfriend broke up with me. She told me that she never wanted to go out with me again. This action had a marked negative effect on me. I stopped doing my schoolwork; I stopped sleeping well; I thought seriously about killing myself. Even though this action had a clear negative effect, was done by a more popular student, and was done to a less popular student, I cannot imagine a school in which a staff member would tell this young woman that she had to start going out with me again or risk having a detention. We see parallel actions in Elementary schools when a friend decides to stop being best friends with another student. The student who is the "target" of this behavior may be distressed. Unless the other student goes on to do other cruel things to his or her former friend, though, I believe educators have no business intervening through disciplinary action in this situation.

Within this outer circle of behavior which may have negative effects but are seen as acceptable, there are other actions which are both negative in impact and unacceptable at school. An example might be spreading rumors about a classmate, calling names or making threats focused on sexual orientation, or punching another student. In addition, some of these unacceptable behaviors are also illegal- they fall within the legal definition of harassment, criminal threatening, assault, or other criminal acts.

Distinguishing between behaviors in this way makes fair, consistent responses by staff more possible. To respect the wide range of different behaviors we are dealing this, I recommend that we make one more set of distinctions, shown in the following diagram:

Behaviors toward peers

Negative

Unacceptable

Moderate

Severe

Illegal

Report

Intervene and track

Staff intervene

Staff use discretion

This diagram has additional categories covering actions which may be unacceptable in some situations and acceptable in others and actions which are unacceptable schoolwide but are not the most severe. We can integrate staff, student, and parent input to differentiate between GRAY behaviors, which may or may not be acceptable based on age or context, YELLOW behaviors, which are unacceptable schoolwide and which are to be dealt with in the moment by whichever staff member sees or hears them, ORANGE behaviors for which we intervene in the moment and also keep track of, and RED behaviors, for which we intervene in the moment and also report to the administrator for action. When schools reach consensus about which specific behaviors fall in each of these categories, they are much more able to work toward consistent and fair staff responses.

Another diagram which outlines this way of looking at behavior is below:

Planning for consistency

	Behaviors that violate law	All staff report; follow policy
	Severe risk of harm	All staff report; follow rubric
	Moderate severity	Staff intervene and track behavior
	Unacceptable	Staff intervene using own approaches
	May be acceptable or unacceptable	Staff use own discretion

For **GRAY** behaviors, staff may choose to
- ignore,
- advise,
- use mediation strategies if both students have done something wrong,
- or use small, in-the moment consequences.

For **YELLOW** behaviors- that is, actions that are unacceptable but not severe, we might:
- Use Saufler's ten-second intervention: "That behavior is not allowed here because..."
- Discuss why the behavior is not allowed: "Why do you think we don't allow those words?"
- Use immediate micro-consequences: "Sit over there to help you remember not to say (or do) that again."
- Encourage students to reflect about their actions: "What did you do? What was wrong with that?"
- Signal the student that the action is unacceptable via a look, a signal, a short whispered conversation, or a brief talk after class is over.

   It is important to stress that different staff members will each have their own ways to intervene with yellow-zone behaviors. Some will stop instructing for a moment to have a brief quiet word with the student who does these behaviors. Some will ask the student to stay after class for minute. Some will conduct a brief in-the-moment lesson for the whole class. Some will discourage the behavior with a look. In choosing to have an action in the Yellow category, staff have committed to take some kind of action rather than ignoring the behavior- to show what has been called "zero indifference" rather than "zero tolerance."

For **ORANGE** behaviors we would use the same in-the-moment interventions as for YELLOW behaviors. In addition we would track these behaviors by having all staff report them to the student's homeroom teacher, team leader, or advisor. That person would then be responsible to keep track of the number of these actions reported and to inform the administrator when a student has chosen any combination of ORANGE behaviors three times. That report would then lead to administrative action.

For **RED** behaviors- that is, actions the staff and students have determined are the most serious and most likely to harm physically or emotionally, I believe we are most effective with a predictable, rubric-based discipline system as described in *Schools Where Everyone Belongs.* In this approach, RED behaviors are consistently reported to the principal, who follows a predetermined set of escalating consequences designed to help students change their behavior. The school also supports change and growth in students who use RED behaviors through a structured reflection process designed to help them take responsibility for their actions, develop empathy, and plan other ways to meet their needs without hurting others.

When we work toward schoolwide consensus about which actions fall in which categories, staff interventions can become more consistent and thus more effective. We can begin this consensus-building process by listing the negative peer to peer actions which staff and students witness. We then edit this list to remove our assumptions about intentions and impact of the behaviors, and might find ourselves with a list like this one:

- Punching, kicking, and pushing down
- Running into others roughly
- Slapping, grabbing, and pushing
- Shoving and shouldering
- Touching or grabbing private parts of others' bodies
- Starting or spreading rumors (truthful or false statements that are likely to embarrass)
- Low-level namecalling ("You're mean"; "You're no good at kickball")
- Namecalling related to academic ability, body shape, or appearance
- Namecalling related to family income or family characteristics
- Namecalling related to gender, sexual orientation, race, or ethnic background
- Other sexual comments
- Use of words relating to sexual orientation or race or gender as general derogatory comments not aimed at person ("That test was so gay" " The Red Sox played like girls this season" etc…)
- Threats
- Cutting in line
- Taking possessions
- Saying: "I don't want to play with you today"
- Exclusion: Telling other people not to play with someone
- Mimicking, making faces, following without threats

When we have created this list, we should decide which of the listed behaviors have to be on the RED list because of law, district policy, or other mandates.

Then we can create a web-based survey using Surveymonkey or Zoomerang, which allows us to get anonymous input from students, staff, and community about the rest of the behavior. We can also use paper surveys for parents without access to the internet. Here is a sample screen from one such survey I have used:

2. In the past month, how often have you seen students do these things at school? How important is it to you for the school to make sure these actions don't happen here?

	How often do you see this behavior?	If students do this, I think:
Cutting other students in line		
Mimicking, making faces, following without threats		
Running into other students roughly		
Shoving and shouldering other students		
Touching or grabbing private parts of other students' bodies		
Slapping, grabbing, and pushing other students		
Namecalling of other students related to academic ability, body shape, or appearance		
Punching, kicking, and pushing down other studens		
Low-level namecalling of other students("You're mean"; "You're no good at sports" "Doofus")		
Threatening comments or gestures toward other students		
Using words relating to sexual orientation or race or gender as general derogatory comments not aimed at one specific person ("That test was so gay" " The Red Sox played like girls this season" etc...)		

In this survey, the choices for "How often have you seen this behavior" are:
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

and the choices for "If students do this, I think" are:
- There should always be consequences to help the student stop and keep others safe
- Teachers should discuss it and discourage this behavior consistently.
- There should not be consistent schoolwide rules about this behavior- staff should intervene in some situations but not in others.

This survey format lets us gather information from staff, community, and students to use in building school discipline expectations and procedures. When staff members are involved in developing discipline expectations and interventions, they are more likely to follow through in action when they are aware of unacceptable behaviors. When students have been involved, they are more likely to see the resulting discipline system as a fair one and to learn from consequences.

After reaching consensus on expectations- next steps

When the RED behavior list has been created, the administrator should, I believe, work toward the creation of a rubric for dealing with severe peer to peer negative behavior. A rubric might look like this:

A possible RED peer aggression discipline rubric

Behavior	1st time	2nd time	3rd time
Severe and repeated moderate	Consequence A	Consequence B	Consequence C
Most severe and retaliation	Consequence B	Consequence C	Individual Plan
Illegal	Follow policy and law	Follow policy and law	Follow policy and law

Consequences may be more severe based on actual behavior

Within the RED peer to peer behaviors, it is useful to differentiate again between least and most severe, based on potential for physical and emotional harm. That differentiation allows us to create sequences of consequences which can be applied consistently based on the student's actions and the number of times the student has chosen those actions in the current school year. If students choose to repeat these serious actions more than three times, it is useful to create individual action plans to help them change their behavior. Individual plans may also be created for students who have handicaps. It is crucial, though, that the same expectations apply for all students, though consequences for students with special needs may differ based on their needs as determined through their Individual Education Plan. More details about rubrics and about specific consequences at different grade levels can be found in *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*.

Back to that incident in the gym:

This behavior fell within our school's RED behavior zone. I took four steps that day and one additional step a few days later:

- I asked the student what he had done. *"I kicked her,"* he said, "*but I was only kidding around.*" I thanked him for his honesty and pointed out that we do not allow kicking.
- I used a micro-consequence, telling him calmly to spend the rest of beach day (ten more minutes) outside the gym. A chair in the office was available and the secretary was willing to supervise him for the time remaining. He began arguing with me about why he should have to leave beach day. "It was an accident," he said. I reminded him calmly that I had seen the whole series of events, and that I had seen him run across the gym, stop, focus on the target of the behavior, and then kick her. He walked with me into the office, still arguing. Our principal, knowing that any student would only be asked to sit in the office if he or she had done something wrong, pointed out calmly student that he had a choice. He could accept his small consequence and return to the rest of the day's activities, or he could continue arguing and make things worse for himself. Then the principal and I moved away from him for a moment to see which choice he would make. When he calmed himself, she said to him: *"You decided to calm yourself down."*
- I wrote a behavior report so the principal could follow through with a rubric-based consequence.
- Later that day I asked the student what he had done and what was wrong with it. He told me he had kicked another student and that she could have been hurt. I commended him for his honesty and for thinking this incident through.
- A week later I asked the student again what he had done and what had been wrong with it. Again he told me he had kicked another student and that he could have hurt her.

Four things seem important to me about this intervention. First, it was easy for me to do. None of the elements of the intervention were time consuming. Second, it maintained my relationship with the student, because he knew that I was reacting to his behavior in exactly the same way that I would react to any other similar action by any student. He also knew that other staff members would have handled the situation in a similar way. Third, because of the calm tone of the intervention and the small size of the consequence, he was able to focus his attention on what he had done and on what was wrong with that action. And fourth, the intervention was a public one that others could learn from. When I returned to the gym after walking the student to the office, some of his friends asked me why he wasn't in the gym. I asked them what they thought. "Because he kicked somebody?" one asked. "Right," I said. "Oh," said another thoughtfully.

This article has outlined techniques for building consistent, caring disciplinary interventions in schools. It is a supplement to more material on this topic which will be found in the books *Schools Where Everyone Belongs* and *Empowering Bystanders ,* by Stan Davis with Julia Davis (both published by Research Press). See http://www.stopbullyingnow.com for details.