



# Webinar: Bullying Prevention and Response When Supporting Refugee Students

May 15, 2025, 2:00 – 3:00 PM ET

Transcript

## Introduction

**Rob Callus:** Hello and welcome to today's webinar, Bullying Prevention and Response When Supporting Refugee Students, brought to you by Switchboard, a one-stop resource hub for newcomer service providers.

## Today's Speakers

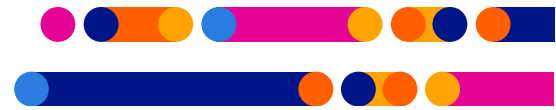
**RC:** My name is Rob Callus, and I will be one of your speakers for today's session. I am a training officer on the Switchboard team with a focus on community integration. In my prior resettlement work, I launched and managed a youth services program with both Refugee School Impact and Refugee Youth Mentoring funding at a local resettlement agency in Durham, North Carolina. I've worked with youth in the resettlement and education context for most of my career, so I've had countless firsthand experiences with our webinar topic today of bullying prevention and response. I'm really looking forward to speaking here today. I'm also really glad to welcome my co-speaker, Teddy Spelman, today. Teddy, welcome.

**Teddy Spelman:** Thank you, Rob. Hi, everyone. My name is Teddy Spelman, and I'm a Program Officer of Tutoring and Instruction with the International Rescue Committee, supporting educational programs for forcibly displaced youth nationwide. I have a master's in TESOL from Hunter College, and I've previously taught ESL in New York City schools and community programs and in Los Angeles as well. I'm really pleased to be able to speak here today on this topic from my experience as an educator, seeing bullying and the effect that it has on the education process.

**RC:** Thank you so much, Teddy. I've heard it's a little low on my audio, so I'll do my best to speak up while we're going through today. Definitely crank up those speakers as much as you can. I'm so sorry for the technical difficulties.

**RC:** I just want to welcome you guys as part of today's webinar. Today's webinar is what we at Switchboard call a Throwback Thursday webinar. It's part of a series that brings back our most requested webinars to give our audiences a second chance to catch the insights that you all need in newcomer services. While recordings are always available on our website—including for this webinar that was originally led by my former colleague Madina—joining live offers a unique opportunity to ask questions and engage with your fellow service providers.

**RC:** Please feel encouraged to use the Q&A function to make sure you get the most out of today's session. As with all of our sessions, this webinar is open to all newcomer service providers across state agencies, resettlement organizations, newcomer-serving schools, and other community-based groups. We hope you'll share more about this webinar and other Switchboard learning opportunities with your colleagues.



## Learning Objectives

**RC:** For today, we have three learning objectives which outline what we hope you'll be able to do at the end of the session. First, we hope you'll be able to explain the link between core stressors that refugee students may face and the experience of bullying. Next, we hope you'll be able to describe the roles in bullying and the risk factors specific to refugee students. Finally, we hope you'll be able to walk away by applying vital strategies and considerations that may help prevent bullying and help you respond to bullying of refugee students as well.

## Discussion Question

**RC:** We're going to start today's session with a couple Slido questions, which is a live polling platform. In order to participate, you'll need to either scan the QR code using your phone camera feature—the QR code's at the top left of your screen—or you can go to [slido.com](https://slido.com) on a web browser and type in the code 2765771 at the top.

**RC:** We wanted to start with getting an idea of how you're feeling at this moment as we begin. Share a little bit about how you're entering today's session, think of your emotional state, think about what's going on in your world, and feel free to share. It's an anonymous poll, so feel free to speak openly and respectfully, of course.

Welcome to our session! How are you feeling at this moment as we begin?

**RC:** As you can see, it is a word cloud, so if you write in a word that others experience as well, that word will get larger. I'm really with you guys on the stressed and the exhausted side of things. This is a really tough time to be in our sector, and our work is demanding. I just want to validate that y'all are working hard, absolutely, to be the best advocates you can be for your students.

**RC:** I'm really grateful also to see some folks writing "calm." I hope being in this space can be a moment where you can take a deep breath and engage with the fact that you're here for yourself, you're here for your students, you're here to grow in your understanding and be in community, even if virtually, with others who are in this work.

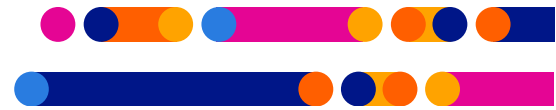
**RC:** I hear you guys in so many of these feelings as well. There's a lot of news coming out these days, so of course I hope y'all are doing everything you can to take care of yourselves and stay engaged, while also unplugging in ways that are helpful for y'all. All right. Also want to acknowledge that it's possible that y'all are having multiple of those feelings at the same time. We are complex human beings, so all those feelings, hold onto them, let's stay with them, and we are so grateful that you are showing up in whatever way you are here today.

## Poll Questions

**RC:** In the ways that we're showing up, I also want to get a sense of who is in the room in terms of what setting that you are currently employed in.

In what setting are you currently employed?

**RC:** This gives us an idea of who we're talking to today. We'd like to know if we've got a lot of folks at resettlement agencies, schools, or districts, at other community-based organizations, so on and so forth. We've got a large majority of folks coming from the resettlement agency side. So grateful that y'all are here. Hope y'all



are doing all right amidst the chaos of it all. Also want to say thank you so much to our friends in schools or in districts. I'm sure you guys are taking time out of a really busy school schedule to be here. Just want to say thank you so much for showing up for us, and we hope that this will help you continue showing up for your youth and your students.

**RC:** All right. Next, we want to get a pulse check on the relevance of today's session. We have a feeling that if you're here, this is something that you have a vested interest in. The next question is on a rating scale:

Rate on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree): The bullying that happens among the youth I work with is a serious challenge that I deal with every day.

**RC:** All right. It's interesting seeing where these sorts of answers lie. We're averaging around 3.5. What's important to note here is that this is showing that it's a prevalent experience across folks who work with newcomers. It might not be something that's really a stressor every day, but it is a reality that we are working with our youth.

**RC:** I think another thing about talking about bullying prevention and response is that it feels like something that's like insurance. You might not know what you need, but it's good to be prepped. It's good to be able to talk about this for when you do need it, in case those situations arise. Just want to say I hope that folks in the 3s, 4s, and 5s walk away from today's session feeling a little bit more secure about how they may enter situations in which bullying may be an experience and a reality of your students.

**RC:** All right. Thank you so much for participating in those polls. There will be a couple other opportunities for engagement throughout our session today, but as always, friendly reminder that the Q&A box is open for y'all to ask questions as we go. If you need clarifications or if you want to ask a question, we may be able to answer it live, but we'll also have time at the end to respond to some of those questions.

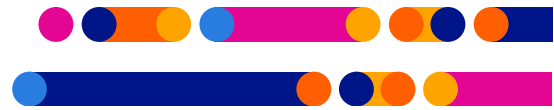
## 1. Core Stressors for Newcomer Youth: The Link Between Stressors and Bullying

**RC:** We're going to begin with our first section, wherein we'll explain the link between core stressors the refugee students may face and how that connects to the experience of bullying as well. It's important to note that newcomer youth do face a heightened risk of bullying, and in this section, we're going to try and make connections as to why.

### Core Stressors

**RC:** On this next slide, we want to start by talking about the major buckets of stressors that newcomers may experience in their resettlement journeys, and we want to acknowledge that these experiences are highly complex and really communicate with each other in these feedback loops. This core stressor slide may look familiar to folks who have attended other Switchboard trainings.

**RC:** The diagram that's on this slide that we'll now expand out to show a little bit more, names a few of the kinds of challenging experiences that newcomers may experience as stressors as they create new lives for themselves in their resettlement. While some of these stressors may be felt more acutely for newcomers based on a number of internal and external factors, and not every newcomer will have all of these stressors taking a



toll on their experiences, it's important to note that folks coming to the U.S. may experience these related to trauma, acculturation, social isolation, and the everyday stressors of adjusting within their resettlement case processes.

### Link Between Core Stressors and Bullying

**RC:** Rather than going into detail into all of the stressors on here, I'd like to move to the next slide where we'll put this more specifically into the context of the newcomer youth experience and how these core stressors may connect to experiences of bullying. In this slide, these are some more specific stressors that refugee students potentially experience. It's important to note that the six that we're going to provide as context on this slide may be influenced by any number of the factors on the preceding slide, and in many times and in many cases may be related to multiple experiences of trauma, acculturation, isolation, and resettlement.

**RC:** Our first one, we might see students experiencing unfair treatment based on appearance, religion, or ethnicity. That unfair treatment may be a result of just acknowledging difference. When newcomers are resettling, their differences may be really easy to observe by their peers.

**RC:** Next, you'll also have folks, our newcomer youth, coming in with language barriers, and again, not true of all newcomer youth. Some newcomer youth come able to speak English and communicate with their peers in a shared language, but this can lead to obstacles in terms of advocating for oneself in a situation where they may be bullied or where they may feel like they must participate in bullying or can't advocate for others.

**RC:** Next, folks may be coming from countries where they had deep and rich networks of social and emotional support, but coming to a new place, they may not have access to that same protective social network, and that may lead to trouble making friends and trouble finding folks who can also serve as advocates for you and your acculturation experience. We also want to be really clear about the experience of poverty or just lacking resources, lacking basic needs like clothing, food, or permanent housing, and the stress of those economic realities leading to how one shows up in school and manifesting in difference.

**RC:** Next, newcomers will be entering unfamiliar environments. There's a lot about the school environment, about a new city, a new country, that can be really jarring and can feel in that isolation core stressor space, and it can be really challenging not being surrounded by folks who share your cultural or ethnic background. That can feel, again, isolating.

**RC:** Last but not least, the very broad idea of cultural differences. Again, differences can often be a target, unfortunately. And while we may see in this space differences as a sign of strength and something that we can connect over, these differences may also be, like I said, targets for folks who may be treated unfairly.

**RC:** Students who have just one of these challenges or stressors I mentioned will be vulnerable, but imagine having a combination of these stressors, many or all of these stressors. It's really important that we, as providers and educators, are aware of these sorts of experiences of youth, not in a deficits-based way, but in a way of acknowledging the context and how our students may be showing up in school and the experiences they may be having.



## Case Scenario: Ameena

**RC:** We're going to put this a little bit further into context by practicing with a bit of a case scenario. Here we have Ameena. Ameena is a 10-year-old girl from a rural area of Afghanistan who speaks Pashto and has a limited educational background. She was resettled in the U.S. with her family about three months ago and has been a student at your school ever since. Ameena wears a hijab and appears to be quiet. She plays by herself at recess and sits alone at lunch.

## Discussion Question

**RC:** Given the conversation we had already on core stressors and how these manifest and connect to experiences of bullying,

What might be some potential stressors Ameena could be experiencing as she is working to integrate into her school environment?

**RC:** All right. Language barriers. Looks like you guys are really good at the Slido again already. All right. She has limited educational background. She might not speak English, or she's still learning English. All right. We've got cultural differences, unfamiliar environment, acculturation. Y'all are sharp. Y'all are experts already in this space, clearly. All right. She's really quiet. We noticed that. Quiet could be a signal of a number of things. It could be the language barriers. It could be the cultural differences. It could be just the feelings of isolation, the lack of social experience. I like seeing that response there, especially considering what social experiences in the United States look like. That can be really tough, making friends in that new situation.

**RC:** She's only been in the U.S. for three months. Maybe even in the first couple weeks, she wasn't able to start school quite immediately, depending on temporary housing. She's still really early in her process. We have to be really aware of these sorts of things. Let's notice, like she—someone specified here, the hijab that she wears and the cultural difference. For many folks, a practice of faith and spirituality can be a protective factor. I want to name that as a strength, but then we can also see that as a cultural difference that may be, again, unfortunately, a target of unfair treatment and difference.

**RC:** Even in the things that could be stressors, there are opportunities for strength. We want to be able to, as youth services providers, lean into the strengths and make sure that the treatment based on difference is respectful.

**RC:** All right. Thank you guys so much for participating in this Slido. We've reached the end of our first section, grounding ourselves in the refugee youth experience. Now we're going to get into the nuts and bolts of bullying. I'll turn it over to Teddy for that one.

## 2. Bullying Nuts and Bolts: Roles and Risk Factors

**TS:** Thank you, Rob. Yes, we'll talk about some of the roles and risk factors that are involved in bullying.



## What is bullying?

**TS:** I think it's important to start out by defining what bullying is, because from my experience, bullying is a term that can be overused, a blanket term to describe any kind of conflict or difficult interaction between students, between youth. In reality, bullying is not just conflict or behavior that leaves another person feeling hurt. Bullying specifically is unwanted or aggressive behavior towards another person that creates a real or perceived imbalance of power. It's behavior that happens repeatedly or has the potential to happen repeatedly. It's behavior that's intentional, meaning that it has the specific intent to cause harm and create that imbalance of power. About 22% of students ages 12 to 18 experience bullying. That percentage tends to increase in middle school and decrease in high school.

**TS:** We can also consider bullying through the lens of the forms that bullying takes. The most common type of bullying is verbal bullying, which involves things like repeated teasing, repeated name-calling, repeated threats to cause harm.

**TS:** We also have social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying. This can involve exclusion from conversations, groups, or activities; actively telling other children not to be friends with someone; spreading rumors or publicly embarrassing another student. Social bullying can be especially insidious because it's more indirect. It can be more difficult to detect.

**TS:** There's also physical bullying, which involves hurting a person's body or possessions. That can include hitting, kicking, spitting, taking or damaging a student's clothes, belongings, backpack, books.

**TS:** Then lastly, cyberbullying, which is unfortunately becoming more and more frequent. About 37% of children between the ages of 12 and 17 have been bullied online, and that number tends to increase year after year. Some examples of cyberbullying include sharing personal or private information about someone over text or social media, posting someone's private images, and online harassment. Even more so than other forms of bullying, cyberbullying is very difficult for stakeholders like educators to know anything about because it all happens in the online space.

## The Roles in Bullying

**TS:** Now that we've defined what bullying is and the forms it can take, we'll talk a little bit about the roles that are played in bullying. I think a major theme that we want to cover is that bullying is something that happens within an entire ecosystem. It has to be addressed through the lens of an ecosystem. There are a lot of roles that come into play in bullying, not just the child who bullies or the child who gets bullied. For example, there's children who assist. These are children who may not start bullying but who may encourage it from others and sometimes join in.

**TS:** There are children who reinforce. These are children who are not directly involved in bullying behavior but give the child who bullies an audience, for instance, by laughing along. These children who reinforce, in a sense, make bullying worth it for the child who bullies. They're an important part of that imbalance of power because it becomes one versus many and emphasizes the sense of social isolation for the child who's bullied.

**TS:** There are also sometimes children who defend. These children actively comfort the child being bullied and may come vocally to the child's defense. This is less common because defense takes a lot of self-confidence, self-assurance, and a sense of security in the overall social ecosystem.



**TS:** Then lastly, we have outsiders or bystanders. This is how most children participate in the bullying process. They don't reinforce bullying behavior, but they don't step in to prevent it either. A lot of times, these kids want to help or at least don't like what they're seeing, but they may be afraid to intervene.

**TS:** I think it's important, as we try to consider the ecosystem of bullying, to ask ourselves how children who reinforce can be turned into bystanders and then how bystanders can be turned into defenders. Again, children who bully have a lot of power, but in general, the most power lies within the group as a whole, the community.

### Children/Youth at Risk of Being Bullied

**TS:** Thinking back on our core stressors for refugee youth, we can understand why refugee students are especially at risk of experiencing bullying. Students who are bullied are generally perceived as different, less socially protected, and more vulnerable. They may be struggling to make friends and potentially have anxiety or even depression because of the challenges of their experience. Already, they're dealing with their own uphill battles, and bullying just creates an additional layer of stress for these students.

### Children/Youth More Likely to Bully Others

**TS:** If we consider the children who are more likely to bully others, I think it's useful to think in terms of what need is this student trying to meet by bullying, and how else can that need be met? These aren't easy questions with easy answers. Students who bully are sometimes isolated from their peers and disconnected from school, but more often, they tend to be well-connected to their peers and have a lot of social power. They may have a hard time regulating emotions. They may be aggressive or easily frustrated. They may have friends who bully others, and they may have their own frequent exposure to violence or trauma. There's often a need for a sense of power and a feeling that aggression is the natural way to obtain that power.

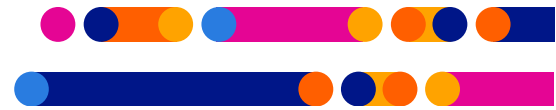
### Effects of Bullying

**TS:** Now that we've talked about the roles of bullying, we can talk about the effects of bullying. To the child who's bullied, bullying can, of course, exacerbate the stressors that are targeted bullying in the first place, such as feelings of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Bullying can lead to physical health problems, decreased academic achievement over time, and low attendance. In fact, tracking attendance can be one of the best ways to identify whether a student is being made to feel unsafe in a school environment. In the most extreme cases, children who were bullied may commit suicide. However, it's important to note that many issues contribute to suicide risk, including depression, problems at home, and a history of trauma. Not bullying alone, but bullying as an important piece in a broader process.

**TS:** Children who bully are harmed by their own actions as well. They become more likely to get into fights, to drop out of school, and to abuse drugs or alcohol in adolescence. In both instances, we're talking about lifelong consequences. Lastly, children who are bystanders to bullying, especially if it's frequent, demonstrate increased mental health problems and higher rates of absence. This, of course, makes sense. An environment that allows bullying to take place doesn't feel like a safe environment for anyone. Again, we're talking about the ecosystem. When one part of the ecosystem sustains damage, the entire ecosystem itself does.

**RC:** All right. Thanks, Teddy. I think that point about the ecosystem and the environment that cultivates a culture where bullying is acceptable is really important when we are discussing this concept of bullying. I also





want to say and name that the language on the preceding slide is really intentional. We're not saying bullies, bullied kids, and bystanders explicitly. We're naming these things as behaviors and roles that children occupy. We're using these children who experience bullying, children who bully, or children with bullying behaviors.

**RC:** I think it's really important to note that we've grounded our conversation in the reasons why refugees and other newcomers may experience bullying and may also find themselves in roles of bullying themselves. We just want to note that this is fluid; this is dynamic.

### 3. Strategies and Considerations: Response and Prevention Methods

**RC:** Our strategies and considerations, and our responses and prevention methods, should be able to meet or should rise to respond in those complex ways. We're really looking at both these ecosystem approaches and we're looking at the interpersonal one-on-one or group setting approaches. In this section, we're going to go into these strategies and considerations.

#### Discussion Question

**RC:** First, we want to acknowledge the wisdom in the room. We want to ask you all, using the Slido question on this slide,

What has worked in responding to and preventing bullying in your work with newcomer youth? What are some of the strategies, considerations, tools, and best practices that you have in your own situations of bullying?

[pause]

**RC:** Yes, I like this first one especially. Curiosity is the greatest tool that you can have in your belt in life, but particularly in newcomer services. Being able to take a step back and to be able to think what questions you need answered, what information you might need. Strengthening their community, making sure that there are positive relationships and community building that can act as protective factors. Reminding folks across differences how they're similar, particularly within groups of newcomers across ethnic or cultural lines. Teaching bystanders, educating families. I'm seeing a lot about educating parents. That's really great. That's absolutely an important strategy.

**RC:** We have to look at this in terms of if we're looking at an ecosystem. In terms of systems, we have to look at the family system as well. Talking about the types of bullying, creating a safe place, and being a safe person to talk to. That's really, really great. We might not be able to be around to prevent every instance of bullying. That's a reality, especially when Teddy mentioned the cyberbullying that we might not be privy to, but we can be establishing ourselves as people to come to when youth need support. All right. Education on resources, trusted adults.

**RC:** During the first meeting with a family, we provide an activity on how to respond to bullying and what to do and not to do in case it happens. That's awesome. Starting during cultural orientation and engagement, starting with conversation on this, setting expectations, and doing so hopefully in a trauma-informed way that doesn't make youth afraid of going to school, but gives them the tools they need to show up and be engaged.





All right. I love this piece about educating teachers and school personnel. Like I said, there's immense wisdom in the room. I am so grateful for y'all participating in this Slido.

**RC:** The next couple slides in this section, we'll be talking a lot about those sorts of ideas and getting into both resources on how to implement those strategies and some of the theory behind that, so you can continue reorienting yourself towards best practices here. We want to start at the school level, and we're going to eventually, throughout this session, get a little bit more funneled down into the one-on-one response situation.

### **School-wide Prevention Initiatives: Safe and Inclusive School Environments**

**RC:** It's important to start with bullying prevention at a school or a program level because consistency here is key. You can't implement these sorts of strategies in just one classroom and expect bullying to stop everywhere, because youth are experiencing systems across a school, across a society. We need to be able to create climates that are welcoming and that are thoughtful and intentional in creating spaces that promote safety, trustworthiness, and empowerment that help students feel valued and in control. It's really important, especially for newcomer youth, given the potential stressors that we started out today's session with.

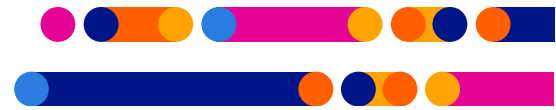
**RC:** We're going to break these down into school-based ones that I'm going to show first on the left side of this slide. It's really important as our school or program-based staff are able to invest in positive relationships. I was really happy to see that "trusted adult" language that was in the Slido. I think being able to say that we are here as trusted adults, as folks that the youth can come to and talk about some of the situations and the experiences they're having, can be huge. We also have a role to play in cultivating positive relationships among peers, among other trusted adults in the school, and that can be really, really supportive. We can do this through mentoring programs, lunch bunches, after-school programs. This can be immensely powerful.

**RC:** Next, we talk about intellectual stimulation. We want students to be able to feel like they're able to set goals for themselves in their learning and that they're progressing towards their goals. For refugee and newcomer students, it's important to be strategic and meet students where they are in terms of their educational needs and to make sure that we're scaffolding our educational materials in a way that's acceptable to them so that they feel like they're progressing. It's also important to note that refugee and other newcomer students have likely had their education interrupted as part of their migration. Being really gentle and cognizant of those sorts of gaps can lead to more positive intellectual stimulation.

**RC:** All right. The last one on this educator staff side are windows and mirrors, something that we like to talk a great deal about as empathy builders and things that build in a sense of dignity. When we say a window, we're talking about something that you can engage with in the education environment, where you look through and see what other people's experiences might be like. That's something that we would describe as an empathy builder. Understanding different experiences of other people can help us to connect more with them.

**RC:** At the same time, school environments and educational program settings should also have mirrors: stories and literature and examples in class that help students feel seen and represented in what they're engaging with. We want students to be able to see that they belong as part of their educational journey as well. That's when they look in a mirror and see themselves. Again, need to also have abilities to cross into other experiences in other ways, and literature can be a really great way to do that.

**RC:** On the other side of this diagram, we have ways to cultivate senses that are more within the student. We do have a role to play here, and our environments can really cultivate these sorts of things. A sense of self-



worth, a sense of control, and a sense of belonging can be immense protective factors in supporting a youth in responding to and preventing bullying that may be happening to them or others around them. I want to note that self-worth, control, and belonging fit really well into a trauma-informed approach that incentivizes creating spaces that empower students, that create agency, voice, and choice. I hope you guys are able to lean into your trauma-informed care approach to build that into the experience of youth so that they feel like their days are predictable, that they feel like they can grow and have mastery over their purview, and that they feel included and accepted as well.

## Culturally Responsive and Trauma-Informed Bullying Prevention Strategies

**RC:** Now that we've talked about these experiential things and environmental soft spaces, we're now going to go into some culturally responsive and trauma-informed bullying prevention strategies. We've got two slides of these strategies, and the first six are general bullying prevention strategies. On the slide after this, we'll talk about strategies that are particularly useful and important to keep in mind when working with newcomer students.

**RC:** Our first one has to do with using bullying prevention programs that are evidence-based, and there are a number of these out there. We've dropped a couple in the chat as examples. Olweus, Second Step Bullying Prevention, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports. These programs and so many others are known for providing interventions at multiple levels, including individually, classroom, and school-wide. They build in social-emotional learning, empathy building, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, so many skills that are important for preventing and responding to bullying. It's important that these are implemented at a school or program-wide level because, again, doing this just in one classroom will be supportive but will not address the ecosystem challenge. Make sure that all staff involved in youth services in your context are trained on these programs so they can be implemented effectively.

**RC:** Next, it's really important to have clear policies related to bullying, including guidelines and definitions of what bullying behavior is, like we talked about in our second objective. It's important to be really clear about reporting mechanisms so that everyone is trained on how to respond to bullying within your school ecosystem, including youth, and that you have consequences for bullying outlined. We can do those in restorative ways. We're not just talking about suspension and discipline; we're talking about that there has to be a response. We'll talk a little bit more about what that response looks like.

**RC:** Next, it's important to lean on school staff and specialists who are dedicated to working and responding and preventing bullying in your context. This might be counselors, social workers, psychologists, community-based youth program specialists, community mentors. All of these folks can play a vital role in implementing programming that will address bullying in your school, whether through small groups, psychoeducational activities, peer mediation programs, and behavior intervention plans. It's important also to look at this again at that ecosystem level, where you can create multi-tiered support systems so that all students are involved in looking at bullying prevention and response.

**RC:** Next, we have parent and community involvement. As many of you aptly already mentioned in the Slido, it truly takes a village, and we have to look at systems not just within the context of a school or a youth services program. We have to make sure that we're providing parental and guardian support to really prevent and address bullying holistically. Schools and programs can provide resources and workshops for parents on recognizing signs of bullying, especially as youth come home. Parents are going to be the first ones to see the effects of the school day on the youth.



**RC:** We can involve community organizations and prevention initiatives as well, and this is especially important to do in a newcomer family's home language. Sending resources and handouts from any of the evidence-based programs that we mentioned might not be useful, but having them interpreted or translated might be a way to make sure that those are understandable in the context of the U.S. and the newcomer experience. This may be new for families, so also important to be gentle with folks.

**RC:** Next, we have bystander intervention training. When we talk about the ecosystem and the roles of bullying and the fluidity with which people or youth can find themselves in the varying roles, it's important that everyone is trained in ways that cultivate a culture of advocacy, that folks feel able to recognize and stop bullying as it happens, as that peer intervention can be so helpful and so effective. If you de-platform and de-emphasize the power that a youth with bullying behaviors has, that's going to send a message about the culture of bullying within the school. This can also be a really great way to provide more generalized, broad training and education to youth, and that it's not targeting anyone in particular. It's providing strategies for a whole school or a whole program, which might make it easier for some youth to engage.

**RC:** Last but not least, it's so important across all contexts to be able to grow in our cross-cultural skills, right? Take time to know your students and families. Become aware and familiar with their cultural views about bullying. We can't emphasize this enough when it comes to working with newcomers, but again, this is useful across all contexts and identities.

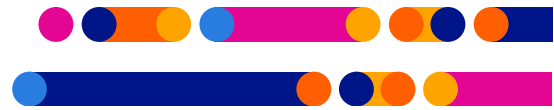
**RC:** Depending on a student's personal values, experiences, and background, what we may define as bullying in a school setting might be widely accepted in a home country or culture. For example, what we may consider as a reportable offense might just be something that they don't feel comfortable reporting or saying anything about. There are so many different cultural views on conflict and what bullying means and how one should respond to those in order to stay aligned with their own cultural values.

**RC:** Next, we'll move on to the following six strategies on what this means in the newcomer services context when working particularly with refugees and other newcomers. First, it's really important that, as an ecosystem, we're examining our attitudes towards refugees, right? This can be through the context of making sure that we're aware of what the newcomer experience is and not relying only on ESL or ELL educators to work with refugee students. Everyone at a school where refugees go should understand a little bit more about what the refugee experience is like. That might involve just checking where your attitudes lie there, right?

**RC:** Next, it's important to identify barriers to school participation. Those attendance issues might be an indicator of bullying experiences. What are the things that stand in the way of youth participating in school? What are those things that create a dynamic of difference? How can we address those?

**RC:** Next, I know I said we can't just rely on ELL staff in bullying prevention, but they are also going to be champions in this work and that they're going to be the ones working really directly with these youth and their families. Often, they'll have a high level of cultural context and understanding of the youth that they work with. While we're involving specialists like social workers and counselors, we should also include ELL staff in bullying prevention, as they may be really strong advocates and have that perspective as well.

**RC:** For our next one, it's important to provide training or professional development on crossing cultures. This, like I said, is useful for newcomers, but this is true of crossing all cultures. There are a number of cultures



within the United States. Being able to understand how to work with folks of different perspectives is essential in a school environment where youth are coming from all of these different cultures.

**RC:** Next, we'll move on to translating surveys to gather data. We want to make sure that we're figuring out the experiences of youth and families in our schools. In order to do that, we need to make sure that we're getting information from families in a way that they are able to participate really fully. Make sure your resources for understanding experiences of families are comprehensible.

**RC:** Finally, it's important to be able to create spaces for leadership, right? Within our context of bystander training or bullying recognition and response, there are opportunities for acknowledging that, like Teddy said, there may be reasons that youth may lean towards bullying behaviors. How can we look at those sorts of rationales, motivations, experiences, and conditions, and see those as an opportunity for building leadership that will empower newcomers, build self-esteem and resilience, and decrease bullying, both as folks who are exhibiting the bullying behaviors and as folks who may be receiving and experiencing bullying as well?

**RC:** I'll turn it over now to Teddy to continue us along in this conversation.

### **A Strengths-Based Approach Using Protective Factors**

**TS:** Thank you, Rob. I think it's important to talk about taking a strengths-based approach using protective factors to bullying. I think we all know from working with refugee populations that our students have a tremendous number of assets. This is something that when I'm training volunteers to work with refugee youth, we always start with: What are our students' strengths? Inevitably, those strengths touch on not just the student individually, but again, the entire ecosystem that the student is a part of.

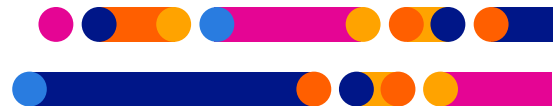
**TS:** First and foremost, our students are resilient. They have had to overcome so many challenges and barriers to get where they are, and the challenges continue every day. Our students still come in, persevere, achieve, and find joy and meaning.

**TS:** Family, peers, teachers, and the broader community can also be sources of strength, and through the lens of bullying, what we'll call protective factors. It's important to think about what sources of strength in the student's life need to know that bullying is happening. Is it a teacher that you know the student has a strong, trusting relationship with? Is it a stable, protective presence in the home, a member of the family? Is it a friend of the student, someone who could transition from bystander to defender?

**TS:** I would argue that the same questions could be asked about the child who bullies as well. What brings out the best in them? What are their individual strengths? Who in their community can be leveraged as a more positive influence? Not all students will have all of these specific protective factors, but as we get to know them better, we can help them recognize what assets they have within themselves or their support networks to help them.

### **Bullying Response Strategies**

**TS:** How do we appropriately respond to bullying? Let's start with targeted interventions. Any time a bullying incident occurs, it's important to provide targeted interventions to everyone involved. The student being bullied should come first, though, because it's important for them to be as centered, empowered, and in control as possible.



**TS:** What are they experiencing, and what would make them feel more safe? Once you've connected with the student, ensure caregivers are involved in the conversation as well. They may need support and guidance on how to talk to their child about bullying or getting bullied. From there, you may develop behavior plans, counseling plans, social skills training, psychoeducation, and other kinds of interventions.

**TS:** You may also want to utilize restorative practices. Children who are bullied can benefit from an opportunity to express themselves, and children who bully need an opportunity to learn from their mistakes to grow. In a restorative conversation, you're breaking the framework of bully and victim, powerful and disempowered. You're focusing on building and repairing relationships, and addressing harm caused by bullying behavior through facilitated dialogue between the individuals involved in a bullying incident—encouraging empathy and understanding, and working together to develop solutions that will repair the harm and prevent future incidents.

**TS:** Another crucial step is to collect data and ensure you have an anonymous reporting system. This is a very important part of responding to bullying. If a school tracks bullying incidents properly, they'll have more ideas about how to address it. For example, where is the bullying happening? Are there any patterns in location, classroom, time of day, students involved? Sometimes without necessarily addressing the core issues, you can at least restrict instances of bullying by setting up systems for smoother transitions, for example, or different groupings within a particular classroom. Implementing anonymous reporting systems allows students to report instances of bullying or concerns about safety without fear of retaliation.

**TS:** Lastly, you may need to reassess school climate and prevention programs. If bullying is a recurring issue in a school, it's time to examine the school's practices and programs that are in place. This again goes back to why data collection is so important. You can use that data on bullying incidents and school perceptions of safety and the effectiveness of prevention efforts as a North Star to help guide the school on areas for improvement. You can also use this data to identify trends, evaluate the success of particular interventions, and make informed decisions about allocating resources for prevention and response efforts.

**TS:** I want to add also just quickly before we get into the scenario, just to address a question I saw in the chat about bullying within groups versus between groups. Just to say that I think having an understanding of those cultural dynamics is really important and can play a role in why bullying is taking place and how it's taking place. I also think that a lot of the strategies we're discussing here apply regardless of whether bullying is taking place within a group or between groups.

### Case Scenario: Ali and Walied

**TS:** Let's take a look at another case scenario. Walied is a 15-year-old boy from Afghanistan who has been in your school for a year. He was raised in Kabul in a privileged Pashtun family because his father held a government position. Walied has gotten in trouble on several occasions for teasing and name-calling another Afghan student, named Ali, who is Hazara and fairly new to the school. Other students are also beginning to join in on teasing Ali when they are at lunch. The school counselor tracks attendance and has noticed that Ali has been absent for more than 10 percent of the quarter. His parents state that he does not feel safe at the school and they keep him home when he doesn't want to go.

### Discussion Question

**TS:** This is a question for everyone here in attendance:



What can school personnel do to resolve this problem and ensure Ali feels safe and welcome in his new school?

[pause]

**TS:** I know this is more of an in-depth question, so we'll leave a little bit of time for people to think, start typing some responses. I'm seeing a comment in the Q&A that I think might be in response to this, so I'll read it out. Someone said, "Communicate the issue with parents and students and make follow-up interventions." I think that's definitely touching on the importance and the value of involving those other stakeholders, parents and students, within the community and trying to leverage those.

**TS:** We have some additional comments. Thank you to those of you who are responding here in the Slido. Meetings, having meetings with the school office, parents, and training. Just to comment on this, I think there's a lot of cultural context within this specific scenario that we're assuming that you as a party involved understands these different groups within Ali and Walied's community. That doesn't mean that anybody else in the school environment, in the ecosystem, is aware of those factors. I think having conversations and having trainings that address those factors can be really helpful and important.

**TS:** Thank you guys so much. I'm seeing a lot of comments roll in here. "The bullying student should be held accountable and educated on why the behavior is unacceptable. The bullied student should be provided with accommodations, like moving seats, not being left alone with the other student unsupervised, etc." It's really important to note the piece of creating protective systems for the student who's being bullied, being mindful of the environment, changes in seating, and where the child who's bullied and the child who was bullying are in the space. I think in terms of the conversation with the child who bullies, I think that's very important and also challenging to go into that conversation without a sense of judgment but with a sense of accountability.

**RC:** Awesome. All right. Thanks so much to y'all for your responses and really grateful to see so many thoughtful questions and comments in the chat. Just want to super uplift those. Continue submitting those.

## Q&A Panel

**RC:** We're now in the last couple minutes of our session where we want to uplift a couple questions or themes from those questions. One of the questions that came in that Teddy addressed a little bit and came up in the case scenario is,

What happens when you have in-group or within newcomer communities experiencing bullying or having issues there?

**RC:** I think there's inter-ethnic conflict that might bleed over in terms of the social experiences, but then you also have newcomers who are entering the United States and experiencing entirely new systems and rules for engagement, right? They may be new to the experience of—a Congolese refugee may have seen themselves as African, but in the United States, they may be perceived as Black, right? What do those shifts mean? I want to name that those sorts of differences and dynamics are not here for us to solve immediately.

**RC:** We're not going to be able to bridge the gap completely between two ethnic groups in Afghanistan, but we can, like y'all said, be responsive using the policies that are in place with our schools to name that regardless of the dynamics of the foundation of that bullying, that there are responses and consequences that we'll have



to take in terms of how they show up in the room. I just want to really uplift that point and hopefully that answers the question that was in the chat.

**RC:** I want to get also to this question from Sarah. I'm going to ask, Teddy, if you can respond to this first because it's such a good one. Oh, no, not Sarah, Tara. So sorry about that. Scrolling back.

How can we address conflicts that are based in cultural differences? Some of our students react very strongly to physical touching, interactions between genders, etc.—interactions that don't exactly fit the narrative of bullying and may not even be hostile, but they can still be really upsetting and can feel like harassment in some different ways.

**RC:** How might you, based on what we've talked about or learned from in terms of bullying prevention and response, how might that apply in things that might not quite fit the mold of bullying? What do you think, Teddy?

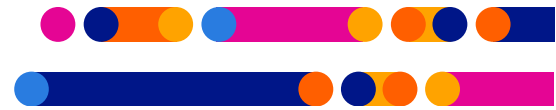
**TS:** I think that's a great question. I think interactions between genders is a really good example of that kind of conflict that might, again, not exactly fit the narrative of bullying, but still have effects of isolation and harm. I think it's important in that instance, especially if—because I think one of the things we mentioned was that bullying is defined by an intention to harm. If it's a situation, for example, where physical touch is making somebody uncomfortable but it's not necessarily done with an intention to harm, but rather because of cultural differences, to have conversations, again, in more of a restorative sense with each individual who's involved.

**TS:** Let's say there's one student who's making another student uncomfortable with the way that they behave. To have conversations with each student involved, maybe first individually and then collectively about, "What's happening here is that one student is being made to feel something. Let's name what those feelings are. Let's talk about what can you do to avoid making the other student feel those things," while at the same time acknowledging we don't feel a sense of judgment. "We don't feel a sense of blame or contempt towards you for the way that you behave. We only want everybody in the space, both you and the other party, to feel safe." I think, again, this may be an instance where involving caregivers, the caregivers of both students, is important to be able to have those conversations. We may be talking about behaviors on both sides that are reinforced or taught and learned in home environments.

**RC:** Yes. Thanks, Teddy. I agree. I think there's also a part of this that may be involved in the emotionality of this concept. It's really important to start by making sure that we're having these conversations not in an escalated or aggravated space. We, as restorative and responsive educators and staff, need to make sure that we're de-escalating a situation first. We need to be able to move and transition folks into regulated spaces in order for us to elicit more about the experiences, right? Validating the experiences, the feelings, and then moving into, once we're in that de-escalated space, conversations around how to move forward, right? Don't make solutions while a student or one of your youth clients is feeling really up and activated. Work to get ourselves de-escalated, create space, create regulation, and then work to problem-solve together, all right?

**RC:** We are unfortunately running a bit low on time, but I want to name that there are so many great comments and questions that we have not been able to get to.





## Conclusion

### Reviewing Learning Objectives

**RC:** We hope, in spite of not being able to answer all of these, that you feel able to do all of the learning objectives or accomplish all the learning objectives we set for today in our 60-minute session.

### Feedback Survey

**RC:** We ask, as part of all of our webinars, that our participants provide some feedback. We'd love to know how we're doing at Switchboard and how we can continue improving our technical assistance and our trainings. If you could take a moment to scan the QR code on the slide on your screen, or you can go to the link in the chat for the Switchboard feedback survey. It's five questions, takes about a minute, maybe less, and it really helps us to improve our services.

**RC:** I also want to flag that if there are questions that you had that you feel we didn't answer in today's session, please feel free to reach out to us. There are a number of ways to do that that I'll show a little bit later on. We provide technical assistance to all folks who serve newcomers. If you have particular questions that are specific to your context or you want to get a little bit deeper into it, please reach out. We'd love to talk to you more about that.

### Recommended Resources

**RC:** All right. We also want to make sure we leave you all with a bunch of resources that will help you continue improving your practice. I want to particularly highlight a very recently published resource just this week, a bunch of scripts for addressing bullying. These scripts involve conversations with youth, both preventatively and also conversations for parents or caregivers. We hope you are able to access these resources. We'll also send these along in our follow-up email.

### Stay Connected

**RC:** I want to say thank you so much again for attending today's webinar with Switchboard. We're so grateful for your trust in our provision of your technical assistance needs. We hope that you'll stay connected with us beyond today's session.

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