



BREAKING THE CODE

A Bullying Simulation

Breaking the Code (BTC) is a research-based prevention simulation that highlights the existence and harmfulness of a hidden and unchallenged bullying social structure. It incorporates social issues such as shunning, intimidation, gossiping, lies, discrimination, threats, physical abuse, and making fun of others. The purpose of *Breaking the Code* is to impact the beliefs and attitudes middle and high school students have about bullying. It attempts to show how bullying allows a hidden code of conduct or a ‘pecking order’ of power to exist in a school’s social climate, and how a simple seemingly insignificant decision a bystander makes has the power to strengthen or weaken this code and structure. *It* encourages youth to take a stand against all behavior that treats others as inferior and change the social environment of their school and community.

BTC is a simulation activity and guided discussion. It provides students with a visual understanding of how a social hierarchy of bullying permits a climate of inequality and harassment to continue and increase for those who are singled out as the targets of mistreatment. The simulation tells a story of high school youth faced with everyday situations where they are pressured to give in to the bully’s social structure.

BTC is both reality and research-based, supported by statistical research on bullying situations among teens in the U.S.

The simulation is designed to be flexible enough to fit within the time restraints and issues that a particular school is facing. Scenarios may be left out of the simulation and the story can be adjusted. However all issues included do reflect the reality of situations youth face.

In *BTC*, the story covers eight scenarios in which the main characters either witness or are involved in situations of bullying. At the end of each scenario,

one or more characters receive a “DECISION CARD”, representing the possible choices they have to make. The consequences of their choice upon the bullying hierarchy is represented visually as the characters are asked to stand or sit depending on the change of their status in the bullying hierarchy.

Statistics regarding bullying are represented and embedded throughout the simulation based on statistical research. These statistics can be shared with the participants as the simulation unfolds.

The simulation is followed by a guided discussion focusing on emotional impact of the main characters and observers (how they felt), decision-making, the code and hierarchy itself, strengthening or weakening of the code, the impact on the victim and the bully, and the power of the bystanders individually and collectively. By increasing the awareness of the unspoken code, how it operates in a social environment and the reality of the harm it brings, along with the part the bystanders can play to support or destabilize the code, it is the goal of *BTC* to help youth understand the power they hold to change the social climate of their school and community.

BTC is designed to be used in a typical middle or high school classroom setting (of about 25 students) with a minimum of eleven active participants and the remainder of the classroom as spectators. However it can also be used in after school programs or other group settings. It is believed that the simulation will impact those who play classroom spectators as well as main characters. Although the simulation was developed for middle and high school youth, it can also effectively raise awareness among teachers and adults about bullying and their impact on it’s hierarchy.

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