

# Culture and Bullying

How are they related and what steps can we take to help?

## Project Prevent and Address Bullying (PPAB)

for students with disabilities

For Educators

Northern Illinois University | School Psychology Program

### What is culture?

Before delving into the ways that bullying and culture are related, one important question needs to be addressed: What exactly is culture? As defined by the American Sociological Association, culture consists of the languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful (ASA, 2018). Culture can be expressed in a number of ways, such as through religion, dress, traditions, social norms and many others.

### How are culture and bullying related?

A student is considered a minority if they differ from others in terms of race, culture, language or other major characteristics. While students can be targeted for bullying for a variety of reasons, those who belong to a minority group are at a greater risk of being victimized than their peers. However, other factors should be taken into account, such as the overall racial makeup of the school's population. Students who are minorities are more likely to be bullied when they are in the minority of the school's population.

### Civil rights laws and bullying

Under civil rights laws enforced by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice, schools are required to respond appropriately to harassment of students belonging to a protected class. A protected class is a group of people who qualify for special protection by law of policy. In the US, federal law protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of: race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, physical/mental disability, veteran status, genetic information, citizenship status.

It is also worth noting that many states have additional protected classes, such as sexual orientation.

### What can I do to protect students from becoming victims of culturally-driven bullying?

Here are some ways that educators can promote a supportive school climate that promotes students' diversity:

- **Become aware** of your own cultural background. Taking a step back and carefully considering your own cultural identity can help you understand how culture can color the lens through which we see the world. This is a necessary first step to take, as we cannot expect to understand how culture affects others before we understand how it affects ourselves.
- **Educate** students about a variety of different cultures that they may not be familiar with. Exposing students to cultures that differ from their own and perhaps those around them can lead to more open-minded attitudes, a broader and more complete worldview, and greater empathy and understanding for those who are different from them.
- **Encourage** students to have an open and respectful dialogue about culture. By encouraging questions and facilitating a conversation among students regarding their own cultures, we can reinforce the idea that cultural differences are something that should be celebrated together.
- **Correct** students immediately when a negative comment is made about someone's cultural background. Short and straightforward comments, such as "We don't say that here," can help correct students while assuring the students who are minorities that you are on their side.
- **Avoid** using or condoning derogatory language about race or cultural values. Hold yourself accountable for the things you say in and out of the classroom so that you can ensure that you are always setting a good example for your students.

