



**Rocky Mountain AHMA
43rd Annual Conference**

September 24-25, 2025

Bullying in Affordable Housing

Presented By: Janella Burleson-Goshon

Learning Objectives

- By the end of this session, you will be able to:
 - Recognize the signs of bullying behavior in housing settings.
 - Distinguish bullying from normal conflict.
 - Understand the impact on residents, staff, and community stability.
 - Apply strategies for de-escalation, documentation, and intervention.
 - Promote respectful, inclusive housing environments.



Understanding Bullying in Housing

RESIDENT BULLYING AND FAIR HOUSING

WHAT YOU NEED TO
KNOW



What is Bullying?

- Repeated, targeted behavior intended to **intimidate, humiliate, or control**.
- Involves a **power imbalance**: one person exerts control over another.
- Can be:
 - Verbal** – name calling, threats, insults.
 - Social** – spreading rumors, exclusion, intimidation in shared spaces.
 - Physical** – blocking access, damaging property, or direct aggression.
- Bullying ≠ one-time disagreement → it's a **pattern of conduct**.



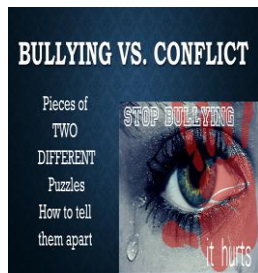
Bullying vs. Conflict

Conflict:

- Disagreement between equal parties.
- Temporary and situational.
- Often resolved through compromise.

Bullying:

- Ongoing pattern of intimidation or control.
- Power imbalance (age, health, staff vs. resident).
- Intent is to **harm, dominate, or exclude**.
- Why it matters:** Conflict resolution skills don't always work with bullying — intervention may be required.



Who's Involved

Resident-to-Resident

- Harassment, intimidation, exclusion in shared spaces.

Staff-to-Resident

- Demeaning or disrespectful communication, abuse of authority.

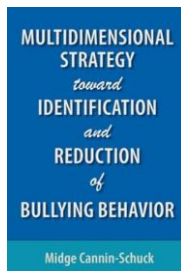
Resident-to-Staff

- Harassment of maintenance or office staff, verbal abuse, threats.

Other Parties

- Family members, caregivers, or guests creating hostile dynamics.

Bullying is not limited to one group — it can happen in **all directions**.



Impact on Residents

Fear and stress → can trigger or worsen health issues.
Isolation: Residents avoid community spaces or neighbors.
Loss of trust in management if they feel unsupported.
Increased move-outs or transfers → housing instability.
At risk of eviction if conflicts escalate into lease violations.



Impact on Property & Staff

Fear and stress → can trigger or worsen health issues.
Isolation: Residents avoid community spaces or neighbors.
Loss of trust in management if they feel unsupported.
Increased move-outs or transfers → housing instability.
At risk of eviction if conflicts escalate into lease violations.



Recognizing Resident-to-Resident Bullying

- Repeated complaints of harassment or intimidation.
- Residents avoiding common spaces (laundry room, mail area, community room).
- One resident repeatedly dominating or controlling others.
- Exclusion from social activities or spreading rumors.
- Escalation: minor disputes → threats or property damage.



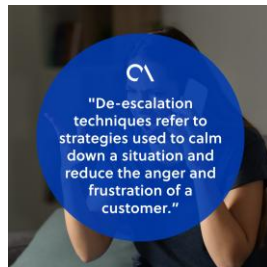
Recognizing Staff/Resident Dynamics

- **Staff-to-Resident:**
 - Demeaning language, shouting, or sarcasm.
 - Threatening lease enforcement unnecessarily.
 - Ignoring or dismissing legitimate concerns.
- **Resident-to-Staff:**
 - Harassing or threatening maintenance/office staff.
 - Verbal abuse during service requests.
 - Repeatedly demanding special treatment.
- **Key point:** Bullying can happen in **both** directions.



De-escalation Basics

- Stay calm and neutral — do not take sides in the moment.
- Use a respectful, even tone of voice.
- Separate parties if situation escalates.
- **Active listening:** Let each person explain without interruption.
- Focus on facts, not emotions.
- Avoid making promises you can't keep.



Documentation Essentials

- Record **date, time, location** of incident.
- Document parties involved + witnesses.
- Capture **direct quotes** whenever possible.
- Note patterns (repeated complaints, multiple residents affected).
- Keep records objective — avoid personal opinions.
- Documentation protects both management and residents.



When to Intervene

- **Immediate action** required if:
 - Threats, harassment, or safety risks.
 - Bullying tied to protected class → possible Fair Housing violation.
- **Early intervention** recommended if:
 - Complaints repeat or escalate.
 - Residents avoid community spaces.
- **Escalate** to management, compliance, or authorities when:
 - Behavior endangers staff/residents.
 - Mediation or warnings fail.

Bullying
Intervention
Strategies

Building a Respectful Culture

- Clear community standards in leases & house rules.
- Zero-tolerance policy for harassment/bullying.
- Staff must model respectful communication.
- Resident engagement: newsletters, community meetings, peer leaders.
- Encourage reporting without fear of retaliation.
- Promote inclusion and conflict resolution training.



The Culture of Respect
Teaching human beings why we should value each other's lives

Scenario 1: Resident-to-Resident

- One resident repeatedly blocks another from using the laundry room.
- Makes derogatory remarks in public spaces.
- Targeted resident avoids community areas out of fear.
- **Discussion Question:**
 - Is this conflict or bullying?
 - How should management respond?



Scenario 2: Staff-to-Resident

- Staff member frequently raises voice and belittles elderly resident during repair requests.
- Resident avoids calling in maintenance out of fear.

Discussion Question:

- How should management address this?
- What policies or training could prevent it?



Scenario 3: Resident-to-Staff

- Resident harasses maintenance worker, shouting threats when repairs aren't completed fast enough.
- Staff feels unsafe entering the unit alone.

Discussion Question:

- How should staff document this behavior?
- When should it be escalated?



Bullying & Abuse: The Overlap

- **Bullying and abuse** often share traits:
 - Repeated, targeted, power-driven behavior.
 - Can be verbal, emotional, financial, or physical.
- **In housing:**
 - Resident bullying may escalate to **domestic abuse** or elder abuse.
 - Financial exploitation (pressuring residents for money, favors).
- **Why it matters:**
 - Bullying can be a **warning sign** of deeper abuse.
 - Ignoring patterns risks resident safety and property liability.



Trauma-Informed Care & Anti-Bullying

Trauma-informed care principles:

- Safety → create environments where residents feel secure.
- Trustworthiness → consistent, respectful communication.
- Choice → give residents voice in solutions.
- Collaboration → work with residents, not against them.
- Empowerment → focus on strengths and dignity.

Applying to bullying prevention:

- Respond with empathy, not blame.
- Recognize history of trauma may drive behaviors.
- Avoid re-traumatizing during interventions.



Key Takeaways

- Bullying is not just a school issue — it happens in housing too.
- **Conflict ≠ bullying:** conflict is situational, bullying is patterned & power-driven.
- Impacts residents (fear, isolation, turnover) and staff (complaints, burnout, compliance risk).
- Documentation is critical: patterns matter more than one incident.
- Apply early intervention, clear policies, and model respect to build healthier communities.



Resources & Q&A



HUD FAIR HOUSING & EQUAL OPPORTUNITY (FHO) GUIDANCE ON HARASSMENT/HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS



LOCAL LANDLORD-TENANT STATUTES: RULES ON HARASSMENT & LEASE ENFORCEMENT



MEDIATION & TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE TRAINING TOOLS FOR STAFF AND RESIDENTS



RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT IDEAS: NEWSLETTERS, COMMUNITY CIRCLES, PEER LEADERS
