Bullying among young children
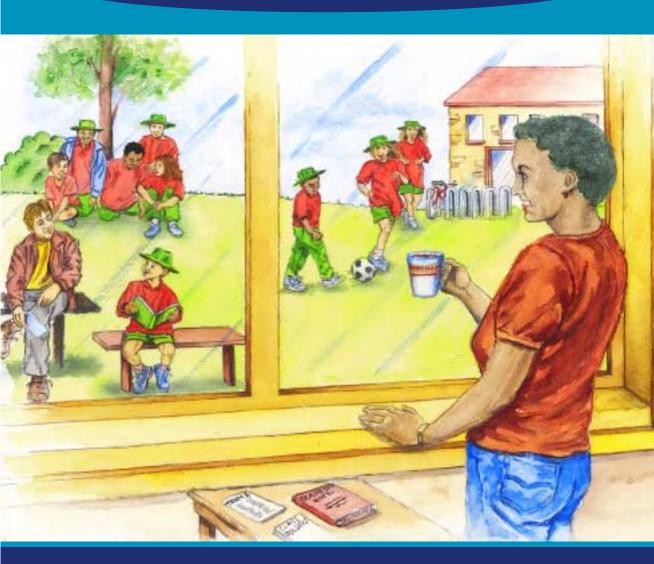
A guide for teachers and carers

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The description of bullying at preschool on page 3 is from Main, N. 1999. 'Children's perpetration of violence in early childhood centres: beyond conflict'. Paper presented at the 'Children and Crime: Victims and Offenders Conference'. Australian Institute of Criminology, Brisbane, 17–18 June 1999.

The recollection described on page 3 is from Mellor, A. 1993, 'Bullying and how to fight it'. The Scottish Council for Research in Education, Glasgow, page 4.

Foreword

Bullying in schools is an area of considerable concern to the community and the Australian Government. Teachers are very familiar with this issue and work hard to minimise the incidence of bullying in educational settings. This Australian Government initiative aims to provide a tool for teachers of young children, to assist in addressing bullying.

Most work on this issue relates to older children — very little has been done in relation to children aged 4-8 years. However, research indicates that the early years of life are a crucial time for the development of an individual's health and wellbeing.

This means we must learn how to address problem behaviours such as bullying as early in a young person's life as possible, to reduce the risk of long-term damage.

A child who has been the victim of bullying can experience problems with their physical and psychological health, educational attainment and social development.

Of equal concern, a child who bullies another child is at risk of becoming involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour later in life.

As many as one child in six in Australia is bullied by another child or group of children on a weekly basis — an alarming statistic given the possible consequences.

It is important for teachers, carers and parents to recognise bullying behaviours and work together to help children who bully and children who are bullied learn to live and play together in a healthy, positive way.

The Australian Government is committed to helping children get off to the best start possible, and is developing a National Agenda for Early Childhood to support this goal. The Government has also provided national leadership in producing the 'National Safe Schools Framework' with the support of the States and Territories. The Framework provides an agreed national approach to help schools and their communities address issues of bullying, harassment, violence and child abuse and neglect. It emphasises the importance of parents and teachers working together to create safer, more supportive learning environments. The Government has committed $4.5 million to fund specific teacher professional development, school grants and resources in support of the Framework.

Bullying is a significant issue and resources to address it are a very practical and important place to begin. Every child deserves to grow up in a safe, healthy, well-balanced and supportive environment. We are all responsible for ensuring this happens.

The National Crime Prevention Program has funded this information booklet and another for parents, as well as a 30-minute video featuring early childhood educators and parents who have had to deal with bullying among young children, to help you handle bullying among the children in your care.

Chris Ellison
Minister for Justice and Customs
Senator for Western Australia

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the problem of bullying in schools has become widely recognised, especially by teachers. Knowledge and experience of how to tackle this enduring problem is continually expanding, thanks to the work of teachers and researchers. This booklet is intended to assist teachers of young children aged between four and eight years attending childcare, preschool and early primary school. It does so by outlining current ideas and approaches and making suggestions on how bullying among young children can be prevented or reduced.

The booklet focuses on preschool carers, kinder-garten and primary school teachers, who all play an important educational role. In early childhood, emphasis is on guiding a child's social and emotional development; later, increasing attention is paid to more academic learning but without losing sight of the whole person. In this booklet, those who work with children in schools, kindergartens and child care centres are referred to as **teachers**. This term should be seen as inclusive of all child educators.

How young children interact with their peers can have important implications for the way they will behave in later years as adolescents and adults. While most young children live peaceably and happily with others, some persistently act aggressively or become targets for the bullying behaviour of their peers. These children need special help. Not only are they often unhappy and troubled children, but they are also likely to continue feeling that way unless effective means of prevention or intervention are applied. If we do not help them to change when they are young, it will be much more difficult when they are older.

The task of countering bullying is everybody's business. Before a child starts school, bullying behaviour is largely the responsibility of parents. Later that responsibility is shared with teachers. This booklet will examine and suggest things that teachers can do to counter bullying.

Questions teachers ask

Why focus on bullying and not simply on aggressive behaviour?

It is not easy to answer this question because bullying is an aspect of aggressive behaviour. Aggression often occurs between people of equal power. It may be expressed in all directions, not only towards those who are less powerful. Of course, aggression, also, needs to be addressed.

However, bullying behaviour is unlike some aggressive behaviour in that it always happens where there is an imbalance of power. As with all aggressive behaviour, bullying can be expressed directly, as in physical and verbal attacks on a person, or indirectly, as in excluding someone.

But bullying merits special attention. It involves a systematic abuse of power. Individuals differ in the power they can exercise over others and children need to learn not to abuse that power. As far as possible, children must learn ways in which they can prevent others from abusing them.

How much bullying actually goes on between children?

* Bullying goes on in all schools and preschools. Assessing how often it happens is not easy, but research in Australia based on children's reports suggests that about one child in six is bullied in one way or another at least weekly.

Boys tend to be bullied more than girls and also to engage more in physical bullying. Girls are more likely to engage in indirect forms of bullying such as deliberate exclusion.

Of course, bullying varies in intensity and harmfulness. Most bullying consists of name-calling and verbal abuse. This does not greatly bother some children. But substantial numbers of children are very distressed, especially if the bullying is unremitting, goes on for many days or weeks and there seems to be no end to it.

Can bullying be stopped?

Many well-researched interventions have been carried out in different countries, and these have shown that bullying can be significantly reduced.

Research also shows that interventions are much more successful when they are carried out among young children in preschools and primary schools. This is a good reason to begin with this age group.

* Rigby, K 1997, 'What children tell us about bullying in schools'. Children Australia, 22(2), 28–34.

3 Bullies and bullying

A common stumbling block in addressing problems of bullying among children lies in the way people use, and react to, the words 'bully' and 'bullying'. While most teachers are sensitive to these issues it is useful to discuss and clarify them.

Bully suggests to most people someone who is despicable and who deserves to be punished. Such labelling and treatment is counterproductive, whether we are thinking about young children, adolescents or indeed adults. People often feel affronted when a young child is described in this way.

Bullying behaviour is a different matter. We all know of individuals and groups who continually seek to hurt others who are less powerful than themselves, which they may do by physical or verbal means or by deliberately excluding them. This is generally called 'bullying behaviour', especially if it keeps going on and on. It occurs among people of all ages, from preschool to old age. The following is one of hundreds of similar observations made in researching the behaviour of preschool children in Australia at playtime.

> 'Jim (a preschool boy) goes over to the corner where Sal is playing with a group of girls on a pile of pillows. He growls at them, puts his face very close to theirs and grimaces. They scream and grab the pillows around them. Jim tells them to share the pillows. He then lies down on the pillows and the girls say "we had them first". Jim does not respond and the girls move away, going back only to retrieve their shoes. Jim then moves from the pillows and gets a piece of string. He grabs Sybi and puts the

string around her neck, pulling it around her neck. Sybi cries. A member of staff comes over and tells him to play with Ian. He turns to Sybi and says "cry baby". Jim then goes over to Melanie and, while smiling, pulls her hair.'

It will do nobody any good to brand Jim as a 'bully', but we do need to examine carefully what is happening in order to stop this bullying behaviour for the sake of Sybi and Melanie and all other children who find themselves in similar positions – and for the good of Jim himself.

People often have sad memories of being bullied when they were children at school, as in this recollection:

> "When I was at primary school I got picked on non-stop for two years. No-one talked to me. I hadn't done anything to get blamed for and I still don't know the reason I got picked on. I wasn't any wealthier or poorer or from a different race. I used to cry myself to sleep every night. I was miserable … I'd hate to think this was happening to anyone else."

Bullying occurs when somebody who is less powerful than another person or a group is deliberately and (typically) repeatedly hurt without in any way deserving that treatment.

4 The stages of bullying

In order to help with bully/victim problems, it is useful for educators to identify how bullying begins, who are commonly targeted and what the outcomes may be.

Beginnings

A child or a group of children is targeted by peers more powerful than they are. They may be bigger, stronger, more able to hurt another verbally, more popular or well supported and more able to exclude others.

The target

Although any child may become a victim of bullying, children are more likely to be bullied if they are physically weak, introverted, timid, anxious and unassertive, or if they belong to a group against which there is such prejudice that they can be isolated. This could include belonging to a racial or religious minority or being disabled.

Outcomes

How or whether the bullying continues depends on a number of factors. These include:

• **The degree of imbalance between the person doing the bullying and the victim.** It is especially difficult for a child to resist a group or a more powerful individual. Even so, with appropriate advice and support for vulnerable children the imbalance can often be reduced.

• **The strategies available to the victim:**
  – being able to respond assertively or (if appropriate) nonchalantly
  – being able to avoid threatening situations
  – seeking (and receiving) effective help from others.

  Teachers can help children acquire such skills (see page 14).

• **The way bystanders behave in the situation,**
  – by encouraging the bullying
  – by passively standing by and seemingly condoning the bullying
  – by actively helping the victim.

  Teachers can discuss with children how to act to discourage bullying (see page 16).

• **Whether staff recognise what is happening and intervene appropriately**.

• **The actions subsequently** taken by teachers with those who have been involved in the bullying.

5 The impact of bullying

Bullying can have serious consequences for children who are repeatedly bullied and for those who persist in bullying others. Those not directly involved in bully/victim problems at school can also be affected.

Those children experiencing repeated bullying can suffer these effects:

- **loss of self-esteem** which can persist for years after the bullying stops
- **increasing isolation,** without friends, alienation and distrust of others
- **depression** and, in extreme cases, thoughts of suicide
- **absenteeism** commonly increases; the ability to concentrate may be reduced and school work may deteriorate
- **families may be affected;** they may become distraught, hostile towards the school or centre that their child attends, and desperate to find a solution
- in some cases, the bullied child may **contemplate revenge** and feel justified in attacking others.

Those who bully others

- unless helped to change, **may persist in abusing their power** over others in their adolescent and adult years and become a danger to others in the workplace and in their homes
- are **deprived of the satisfaction and happiness** that comes from cooperating with others on an equal basis.

Other children

- Children who neither bully nor are victimised often **feel threatened and insecure** when they observe bullying occurring.
- **Their freedom is limited** as they must be on their guard from being attacked themselves, and they may feel saddened or upset by what they see going on around them.

Verbal bullying such as name-calling and indirect bullying, such as exclusion, can be at least as harmful as physical bullying.

Beginning the intervention process

Addressing bullying needs a **whole community** approach, not one in which just a few people tackle the problem. Teachers, children and parents should all be involved and prepared to work towards developing and implementing an agreed plan. The first step for teachers is to reach a consensus in understanding the problem and deciding what needs to be done about it.

We know from research that teachers commonly have very different perceptions of what kinds and degrees of bullying are going on, with some of them seeing little or no bullying of any kind happening and others seeing a great deal. The crucial task is to find out what really is the case.

First, it is useful to **talk with colleagues** about their understanding of 'bullying'. Once there is agreement as to how bullying is to be defined and what kinds of actions are involved, some of the troublesome differences in assessing the situation disappear.

Only the children know how others are treating them and how they are being affected, so we must find out from them directly.

It is very hard for some children to speak up about being bullied in a group setting. One of the best ways is to make use of an **anonymous questionnaire** (see Resources). Some question-naires have been developed for pre-literate children using drawings. These can be used in the early primary school years. With preschool children, however, observational methods may be more appropriate.

Parents can provide important insights and need to be involved. When teachers in preschools and kindergartens meet with parents they can explore the child's relationships with their peers and identify any problem behaviours. Meetings with parents of older children tend to be less frequent, but can still include discussions about their children's relations with their peers at school. This can be as important as discussing a child's academic progress.

7 Making a plan

Once there is a reliable picture of the kind and frequency of bullying going on between children, the time has come to make a plan to tackle it.

Successful interventions to reduce bullying around the world have typically included the following:

- The development of an **anti-bullying policy** which provides guidelines for action and effectively coordinates the activities of the community in addressing the problem (see page 8).
- The **systematic education** of children to bring about changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours that will help them to be free of bullying (see page 9).
- The application of **intervention methods** to solve problems of bullying when cases occur (see pages 17–19).

There will be accounts at each school or centre of what has been proposed in the way of policy statements, pertinent curriculum material, lesson plans and intervention and counselling techniques (see Resources). These accounts warrant careful examination by everyone concerned with the care and teaching of children.

What is to be done should have wide support, not only from all staff members, but also, where possible, from children and parents. The support from children may come through discussion of appropriate classroom and playground behaviour.

8 Developing an anti-bullying policy

The purpose of an anti-bullying policy is to make it clear where the school or centre stands on the issue of bullying and, in general terms, what is to be done about it. It is not the same thing as a Discipline Policy or a Behaviour Management Policy, although these policies also play an important part in countering bullying and may include an anti-bullying element.

The policy should provide principles and guidelines with inbuilt flexibility, not detailed procedures to deal with every conceivable case. Here are some suggestions about what such a policy may contain:

- a strong statement of the school's or centre's **stand against bullying**
- a succinct **definition** of bullying, with illustrations
- a declaration of the **rights** of individuals in the school community: children, teachers, other workers and parents – to be free of bullying and (if bullied) to be provided with help and support
- a statement of the **responsibilities** of members of the community: to abstain personally from bullying others; to actively discourage bullying when it occurs; and to give support to those who are victimised

- a general description of **what is to be done** to deal with incidents of bullying. For example: 'The severity and seriousness of the bullying will be assessed and appropriate action taken. This may include the use of counselling practices, the imposition of sanctions, interviews with parents, and, in extreme cases, suspension.'
- an undertaking to **evaluate** the policy in the near and specified future.

The policy must have strong community support to be effective and should be developed in consultation with staff, parents and children. Once developed, ensure that everyone associated with the school or centre knows what it contains. If applicable, there should be versions for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds who may have difficulties in understanding written English.

Educating children about bullying

Educating children about bullying can be planned under four headings: knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours.

Teachers may seek to develop in children:

Knowledge and understanding
(see page 11)

• what is meant by 'bullying' and what forms it can take
• what harm it can do
• why bullying behaviour is unacceptable
• what can be done to stop it.

Attitudes and values
(see pages 12 and 13)

• sympathy for children who are bullied by others
• feelings of abhorrence at the idea of people bullying others
• a sense of shame at being instrumental in bullying anyone
• empathic feelings towards others, especially those who are victimised
• a sense of responsibility for helping those who are unfairly treated
• acceptance of people different from themselves.

Skills (see page 14)

• the capacity to protect children from those who bully
• the capacity to control negative emotions such as anger
• the ability to challenge bullying behaviours used against others
• conflict resolution skills that can be employed to help children to resolve differences peaceably.

Behaviours (see pages 15 and 16)

• refraining from bullying others
• helping to resolve disputes that could lead to bullying
• restraining or discouraging those who would bully others
• providing help, acceptance and support for children who have been bullied.

Educating children about bullying can be done most effectively when there is a readiness on the part of children to share their thoughts about bullying with others in their class or group (see page 10).

Children talking about bullying

Some general considerations

While most children strongly dislike and fear bullying, many of them are far from convinced that things can be improved by talking about it. As children get older they become less convinced that class or group activities will help. Care is needed in how the matter is raised and addressed. For instance, an approach that strikes children as angry or threatening can be upsetting, and some children may fear that they will be further exposed either as bullies or as wimps and targets for bullies.

The problem

The problem commonly faced is this. How can children be helped to feel secure enough to share their personal observations and experiences about bullying? It is only when children feel they are in a safe and supportive environment that they will be able to discuss bullying in an open and constructive way with each other.

Age groups

Clearly, approaches to addressing bullying will differ according to the ages of the children. Younger children are typically more trusting and ready to speak openly, but less able to explore the complexities of definitions and the motivations of children who bully others. Some may not have the words or concepts that enable them to talk about the issue and may need help to do so. Older children may clearly understand what bullying means but may be reluctant to talk about it in a group.

Relationships with children

Regardless of age, a crucial factor is the teacher's relationship with the children. Children are more likely to disclose their true feelings and engage in constructive discussion if they believe they will get the support they need.

Building a trusting relationship is essential in exploring bullying with children and creating an ethos in which teachers and children can work together.

Expanding knowledge and understanding

Generally from an early age children begin to develop an understanding of what bullying is. In most families children are told by their parents that bullying is wrong. Some are reprimanded for bossing or seeking to hurt a younger sibling or smaller child. Teachers can build upon this rudimentary understanding.
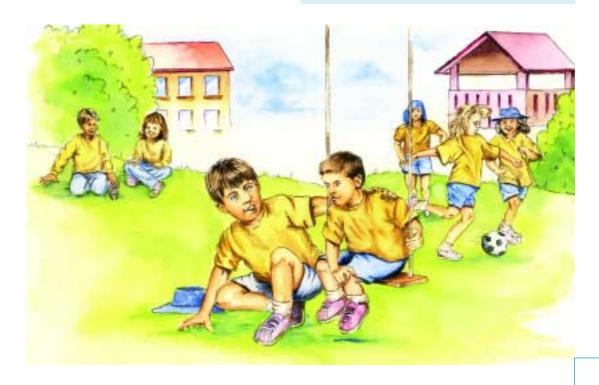
Suggestion

Ask each child to draw a picture in which somebody is being bullied. The chances are that their drawings will show a bigger person or a group of persons attacking a much smaller individual.

These drawings can be used as a starting point for discussions on what bullying is. In these discussions, the nature of bullying can be expanded to encompass situations in which there are different sorts of imbalances of power. Besides physical bullying, other sorts of bullying can be talked about, such as name-calling, insults, threats, hurtful gestures, rumour spreading and exclusion. With older children more subtle forms of bullying will be readily identified.

As a rule, it is better to elicit and build upon ideas from children rather than to tell them what they should think. Once we begin with this understanding, we can connect with the child's ideas of what bullying is.

Children can be helped to understand that they have a right to be free from being bullied by anyone and to ask for help when they need it. This is not the same thing as 'dobbing'. At the same time, children may be advised to be careful whom they tell. They should choose a trusted friend or an adult who can help them.

Encouraging empathic feelings

In countering bullying, teachers may encourage empathic feelings, more especially towards children who are victimised by their peers. When children have such feelings they do not bully others. Indeed, they are likely to take steps to protect or support them.

Commonly among a group of young children a substantial majority will feel sympathy for victims; a minority will be indifferent or even contemptuous. Some children can be reluctant to express their true feelings.

The first step is to create an atmosphere in which children feel secure and able to speak openly and honestly about how they feel about bullies and victims.

Ask children to talk or write about how children who have been bullied might feel. This will work once a trusting relationship with the others in the class or group has been established.

Build upon what children say and add factual information about the effects of bullying only when they are ready to receive it sympathetically.

If successful, this exercise will not only increase children's knowledge of how some children react to being bullied, but will also make them more inclined to take bullying seriously and feel more compassionate and supportive towards those who are victimised.

Although children appear to differ in their capacity for empathy, the overall level of empathic feeling can be raised by such a classroom or group activity.

Further activities include:

- Describing bullying scenarios and asking children to comment on the feelings of those involved, including targets of the bullying, bystanders and perpetrators.

- Telling stories or showing videos which enable children to identify with characters or animals that are being mistreated. Interaction with children during the telling of the story or in the subsequent discussion can help them to appreciate how others feel.

- Having children 'act out' incidents that involve bullying and then discussing how the 'actors' felt in their parts. In this way children can become aware of some of the reasons for bullying, for example, to gain admiration from others, to have 'fun' at someone's expense or to get even. Role playing of more complex situations becomes possible with increasing maturity.

There are resources available describing exercises that have been developed to raise levels of empathy among children. (See, for example, Suckling and Temple (2001) in Resources, page 22.)

Countering prejudice

A good deal of bullying, but not all, can be traced to prejudice. Because of their prejudiced attitude, children may feel justified in discriminating against some of their peers and trying to hurt them.

There are many **targets of prejudice** and they change from place to place and from time to time. The following are some current sources of prejudice in the Australian community which affect Australian school children:

- race and ethnicity
- religious affiliation
- disability
- gender
- social class.

There can be **various reasons for holding prejudiced views** and practising discrimination:

- It may seem to pay to discriminate against certain groups, especially when others share the prejudice. Increased status or rewards may accrue.
- Feelings of insecurity may be reduced when a child identifies with a prejudiced individual or group.

- The child may be ignorant of the true facts about a group towards which he or she is prejudiced.
- The child has adopted a set of anti-social values. (In some cases, these may derive from family or community).

Educating children about prejudice can be successful with some individuals when:

- It is no longer seen to pay to hold certain views or carry out certain actions, for example, there are few people (if any) supporting these prejudices.
- The child learns to admire or follow an individual or group that is not prejudiced.
- The child gets to know the relevant facts, for example, there is good and bad in members of all ethnic groups.
- The child comes to re-assess and consequently change their basic values and beliefs.

Improving social skills

We can identify skills that are helpful to:

- prevent children from being bullied
- enable children to help others who are being bullied or have been bullied
- make it less likely that children will turn to bullying to get their own way.

Skills to prevent children from being bullied

No one can be completely 'bully-proofed' but risk can be reduced by becoming more skilful in the following ways:

- acting assertively when necessary
- reacting nonchalantly when it is appropriate to do so
- making friends who will give support
- cooperating effectively with others.

Skills to help others

Possessing these skills can be useful, especially for the older primary school child:

- making good judgments regarding when and how to help children who are being victimised
- standing up for children who are being victimised
- being perceptive, and understanding how others are feeling
- offering support by being a good listener.

Skills to avoid bullying others

Children bully for many reasons, sometimes because they lack the following skills:

- being able to handle feelings of anger when they arise
- thinking before they act
- getting what they need from others by using cooperative means rather than by resorting to force or threats.

Some children who bully others may not be inclined to get angry, act impulsively or lack social skills, just as some socially skilled children may get bullied. But in many cases improvements in these areas do help to reduce bullying.

Promoting positive behaviour

Children's knowledge of the reasons for and the effects of bullying may be excellent, attitudes to victims exemplary, social skills highly developed, yet children may continue to be involved in bully/victim problems. And, after all, it is behaviour that matters.

Teachers should therefore ask themselves the following question:

How can we best ensure that the knowledge, attitudes and skills that have been developed through class activities actually result in children behaving so that bullying is reduced?

Some suggestions

Children are more likely to stop their bullying behaviour or to act to reduce bullying when they experience social and moral pressure to do so from people who most matter in their lives and whose opinions they respect. These normally include other children, parents and teachers. The influence of teachers on social behaviour is commonly greatest in the early years.

The teacher can often encourage and assist children, especially in the early primary school years, to formulate rules about how they would like each other to behave.

These rules sometimes emerge:

- We will not bully other children.
- We will help children who are being bullied.
- We will include children who are left out of our games.

Such rules can have considerable force, coming from the children themselves, and they greatly encourage children to behave positively. An educator's influence with parents is commonly less powerful. Nonetheless, discussions with parents or parent groups can lead to their recognising the need to encourage their children to act to counter bullying.

Sanctions, positive reinforcement and modelling

Direct methods of influencing children's behaviour may be justified. These include the imposition of rules and consequences that apply to more extreme or continually repeated bullying behaviour. Non-physical sanctions, penalties or consequences and serious talks with parents may occasionally be necessary. These, however, should be kept to a minimum, as controlling bullying behaviour exclusively by force or the threat of force can breed resentment and be counterproductive. Reinforcing positive and constructive actions by students to counter bullying is greatly preferable. But perhaps the most telling form of influence is through teachers modelling positive behaviours towards others in the presence of children.

Empowering bystanders

Most bullying goes on when others are around, and the role of bystanders may be crucial in determining whether the bullying continues or stops.

Suggestion

Discuss with children the kinds of things that bystanders typically do when they see bullying taking place.

Describe the roles that bystanders play and the effects they have upon the bullying behaviour. These roles can be listed as:

• the supporters of the victim

• the supporters of the bully

• passive observers

• those who go to get help

• those who leave the scene.

Examine with the children why each of the above acts as they do, and then explore ways in which bystanders can discourage, and help stop the bullying without taking unreasonable and unacceptable risks. Expressing displeasure at what is happening may be less dangerous than physically intruding and is often very effective.

Different kinds of bullying – verbal, physical and indirect – occurring in different situations can be described, and children can explore in discussion or through role play how bystanders could behave – and with what outcomes.

Approaches to intervention

Rather than deal with every case of bullying in an unplanned or spontaneous manner, it may be better to consider in advance what to do. This section distinguishes between what may be done when bullying is witnessed and what may be done in dealing with cases of bullying after the event.

When bullying is witnessed

An adult's presence will normally prevent some forms of bullying from occurring or continuing. Physical and violent verbal abuse commonly stops, however more subtle and insidious bullying may continue. Educators often feel obliged to admonish children on the spot, but it is sometimes wiser, if possible, to speak with the perpetrator and the victimized child afterwards. This may allow the child who has engaged in bullying to 'cool off', and avoids embarrassing the child who was targeted.

Dealing with cases

There is no standard or universally accepted way of dealing with incidents of bullying. Some suggested approaches are to:

- Speak informally with children who have bullied someone and encourage them to act more politely and constructively, pointing out the advantages of doing so.

- Adopt a direct approach in which a judgement is made about the magnitude or seriousness of the offence and an appropriate sanction applied. As far as possible, the offence is related to 'school rules' and the sanction is seen as a 'consequence'.

- Help the victim learn to cope more effectively with the situation and offer appropriate advice or counselling.

- Define the problem as one in which both perpetrator and victim have a need to re-adjust their relationship and are capable of being helped through a process of mediation.

- Seek to change the perpetrator's behaviour through a counselling or problem-solving approach designed to motivate responsible behaviour.

It is good to be aware of each of these approaches, their strengths and limitations, and circumstances in which they may be justified.

Selecting an intervention method

It is not always easy to decide which approach to use in a bully/victim situation. Assessing the seriousness of the bullying is the first step. In some cases this matter may be discussed with other staff members in order that consistent responses can be made in accordance with the school's or centre's anti-bullying policy. Here are some suggestions that may be helpful:

- **Informal approaches** may be appropriate in many cases where the bullying behaviour is of low severity. The effectiveness of these approaches will depend on the adult–child relationship. With repeated and more serious offences a more formal approach may be necessary.

- **Consequences** may be applied where an infringement of well-publicised rules is clear. In some cases of bullying a clear rule is hard to specify or interpret, and its misapplication can result in feelings of injustice, resentment – and complaints from parents. Still, where the bullying is severe and repeated, there may be no alternative.

- **Helping the victim develop more effective ways of coping** is sometimes sensible, for example, through giving advice on acting more assertively. However, in many cases the odds are greatly against the victim being able to solve the problem alone and intervention by an adult is necessary. A minority of 'victims' are seen as provocative, and they need help to change **their** behaviour.

- **Mediation** by educators or trained peers can sometimes help, particularly when the bullying is sustained by an unresolved – yet resolvable – dispute. In many cases, however, this method is inappropriate, because it is the perpetrator's behaviour alone that must change.

- **Counselling and problem-solving approaches** can often be effective, with medium-severity cases, if the counsellor or educator is conversant with such techniques as 'The No Blame Approach' of Maines and Robinson (1992) and the method of 'Shared Concern' of Anatol Pikas (1999) (see Resources). Well applied, these methods can elicit responsible action from perpetrators of bullying and effect remarkable transformations in their peer relationships.

The approach or approaches employed need to be acceptable to other staff members and consistent with the anti-bullying policy of the school or centre.

Creating roles for children

As children become older they are more able to assume roles that are helpful in reducing bullying. Although some preschool children can learn to have a restraining influence on others, training and allocating roles to children to counter bullying can only be done in a systematic way when children reach primary school.

Children influencing each other

This is evident when children who are known to favour positive ways of behaving are brought together with children who have bullied someone. The teacher may describe the hurt experienced by the child that has been bullied, and seek the group's cooperation in helping the distressed child. Left alone to discuss the matter among themselves, those who have caused the problem are influenced by the others to improve the situation. Maines and Robinson (1992) (see Resources) describe this approach.

Older children supporting and advising younger children

With increasing maturity, children are more likely to go to other children for help rather than to adults. Children are more often around when bullying takes place, at break times for instance, and usually have a much better, more realistic understanding of the nature of the relationships children have with each other.

Some children can be very helpful in preventing and solving bully/victim problems. The Peer Support Foundation in Australia provides relevant training (see 'peer-support' website listed in Resources).

Children as mediators

Some schools have enabled children to access **peer mediation training** and apply conflict resolution skills when resolving disputes that may involve bullying (see 'justaccord' website listed in Resources). Older children trained in peer mediation can become very helpful in resolving conflicts among younger ones.

Children as committee members

Teachers in some schools have chosen to work closely with a committee of children from different classes in collaborative activities to promote better peer relationships. This has led to committee members collectively welcoming and orienting new children to the school, speaking up at assemblies against bullying, seeking out children who are isolated and offering them support, and informing victimised children of their rights and the help the school will provide for them.

Clearly age and maturity will determine what children can do to help address bullying. Generally, the older the child the more appropriate are the roles described above.

For many schools and centres enthusiastic pro-social children (of which there are many) constitute a powerful untapped resource.

Teachers working with parents

Addressing the problem of bullying can be more effective when teachers and parents work closely together, not only at preschool level when contacts tend to be closer and more frequent, but also at primary school level.

A teacher may be obliged to explain to the parent(s) that their child is bullying others, or is being bullied by others, or is bullying others and also being bullied.

It is not productive to describe a child to parents as 'a bully' or as 'a victim'. The behaviours can be described accurately without labelling and thereby stigmatising the child. For example: 'Are you aware that your child has been calling another child names and upsetting him?'

The focus must be on the child's behaviour and how teacher and parent(s) can help to improve the situation together, not on who is to blame and who should be punished.

If a child is being victimised, **there is a clear obligation to provide protection and support, and explain to the parent(s) how this is being done**. The parent can be assured that the situation will be carefully monitored. Under some circumstances, it may be advantageous if the child were more assertive. How this can be achieved, while ensuring the child does not behave aggressively, can become a matter for joint exploration.

If a child is bullying others, denial on the part of a parent is understandable and not uncommon. **In providing clear evidence to the parent(s) of any bullying that has occurred**, the teacher may need to be firm in requesting parental cooperation. Anger or accusation in such meetings will make matters worse.

Where schools have obtained practical resources such as books or videos on countering bullying, these can be made accessible to interested parents.

21 Check list

This check list enables you to make an assessment of how adequately your school or childcare centre has responded to the issue of bullying. You can check how well it has done against each of the items below. This list may also be useful when a centre is planning a response to bullying.

		Inadequately	Adequately	Outstandingly
1	acquired resources for educating the school or centre community about bullying			
2	gathered facts about bullying at your school or centre			
3	developed policy by involving: • staff • children • parents			
4	produced an anti-bullying policy which: • describes what bullying is • recognises the rights of individuals to be safe from being bullied • stresses the responsibility of everyone to help counter bullying • indicates how bullying incidents will, in general terms, be dealt with • has the support of school or centre and the community			
5	discussed bullying with children			
6	included work designed to counter bullying in the curriculum			
7	supported victimised children			
8	handled incidents of bullying			
9	empowered children to take part in action to counter bullying			
10	held constructive meetings with parents on issues of bullying			
11	gauged the overall response of the school or centre to bullying			
12	made plans to review the anti-bullying work			

Note: Items with an asterisk (*) are useful in developing lesson plans.

Background reading

Olweus, D. 1993, 'Bullying at school', Blackwell, Cambridge.

Rigby, K. 1996, 'Bullying in schools – and what to do about it', Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, Melbourne.

Smith, P. K. and Sharp, S. (Eds.) 1994, 'School bullying: insights and perspectives', Routledge, London.

Smith, P. K. et al (Eds) 1999, 'The nature of school bullying: a cross-national perspective', Routledge, London.

Health issues

Juvenon, J. and Graham, S. (Eds.) 2000, 'Peer harassment in schools: the plight of the vulnerable and the victimized', Guilford, New York.

Rigby, K. 1998, 'Peer relations at school and the health of children', Youth Studies Australia, 17(1), 13-17.

General guidance

*Garrity, C., Jens, K., Porter, W., Sager, N. and Short-Camilli, C. 1994, 'Bully-proofing your school', Opris West: Longmont, Colorado.

*Lewers, R. and Murphy, E. 2000, 'The hidden hurt', Wizard Books Pty Ltd, Ballarat.

Linke, P. 1998, 'Let's stop the bullying', Australian Early Childhood Association, Canberra.

National Crime Prevention, 2002. 'A meta evaluation of methods and approaches to reducing bullying in pre-schools and early primary school in Australia'. National Crime Prevention, Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.

Rigby, K. 2001, 'Stop the bullying: a handbook for schools', ACER, Melbourne.

Sharp, S. and Smith, P. K. (Eds.) 1994, 'Tackling bullying in your school: a practical handbook for child educators', Routledge, London.

Slee, P. T. 2000, 'The P.E.A.C.E. Pack: a programme for reducing bullying in our schools', Second edition, Flinders University, Adelaide.

*Suckling, A. and Temple, C. 2001, 'Bullying: a whole school approach', ACER, Melbourne.

Sullivan, K. 2000, 'The anti-bullying handbook', Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Watts, V. 1998, 'An annotated bibliography of resources to assist schools in addressing school violence', Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton.

Aspects of countering bullying

Promoting social skills

Education Department of New South Wales 1999, 'A partnership encouraging effective learning (APEEL)'. This publication provides interpersonal skills lessons for Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 children, as well as training for teachers and advice for parents of young children.

Elliott, M. 1998, 'Bullying', Hodder: Children's Books, London.

Field, E. M. 1999, 'Bully busting', Finch, Lane Cove, Sydney.

Stones, R.1993, 'Don't pick on me', Pembroke, Markham, ON.

Promoting conflict resolution skills

Bodine, R. J., Crawford, D. K. and Schrumpf, F. 1994, 'Creating the peaceable school: a comprehensive program for teaching conflict resolution', Research Press, Champain, Illinois.

Johnson, D. W. and Johnson, R. T. 1991, 'Teaching students to be peacemakers', Interaction Book Company, Edina, Minnesota.

Non-blaming approaches

Maines, B. and Robinson, G. 1992, 'The no blame approach' (The video), Lame Duck Publishing, Bristol.

Pikas, A. 1999, 'New developments of Shared Concern Method', School Psychology International, 1–19. See also: www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/concern.html

Other resources on bullying in schools

Videos for in-service training for teachers

Education Queensland 1998, 'Bullying – no way! A professional developmental resource for school communities'.

This consists of 21 vignettes enacting bullying incidents about which viewers are invited to comment using questions provided in an accompanying book of the same title. The videos are suitable for teacher training in addressing bullying. Available from Open Access Unit, Education Services Directorate, Education Queensland. P.O. Box 220, Ashgrove Queensland 4006. Tel (07) 3377 1000. Fax (07) 3366 3849.

Videos for showing and discussing in class

*CTE. UK (1995). 'Keith: a story of a bully'. Sunburst Communications, USA 1994, 'No more teasing'.

Both these videos, suitable for middle to upper primary school, are available through Video Education Australasia, Bendigo, Victoria.

Tel (03) 5442 2433.

Websites

http://justaccord.com.au/resourcesforsale.htm

http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au

http:// www.curriculum.edu.au/mctyapdf/natsafeschools

www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying
This site provides links with a large number of sites offering advice to schools, children and parents throughout the world.

www.nobully.org.nz/
A New Zealand site of particular interest to primary school children.

*www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/bullying/geninfo/index.htm
A useful site provided by the Education Department of Victoria.

www.doe.tased.edu.au/equitystandards/discrimination/support/intro.htm
This Tasmanian site provides anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy support materials.

www.kidshelp.com.au/NEWS/nov99/Bullying.htm
Information for young people on bullying, provided by Kids Help Line.

www.peersupport.edu.au/faqs.asp
Provides information on the work of the Peer Support Foundation in relation to bullying.

Questionnaires

These include the Peer Relations Assessment Questionnaires (the PRAQs) containing versions for Junior Primary and Upper Primary children, teachers and parents. For further information on the PRAQ and manuals contact Dr Barrington Thomas, PO Box 104, Point Lonsdale, Victoria, Australia, 3225.

Tel (03) 5258 2340. Fax (08) 5258 3878.
Email: profread@pipeline.com.au
Also see www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/

Counselling service

A professional counselling service is provided by Kids Help Line for young people who are seeking support on issues related to bullying and harassment at school. The free-call number is 1800 551 800.