

## THE BULLYING STOPS HERE!

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**ABSTRACT:** Bullying is a problem to contend with in our schools. We aim to carry out a program that increases social skills levels in our students to combat and discourage bullying behaviour in our elementary schools. This program brings students, teachers, support staff and parents together for education and implementation of an anti-bullying program.

Bullying is in our schools.... we don't always see it.... we don't always hear it.... we don't always recognize it...but it is there! Most bullying lasts less than 10 seconds. That is a short period of time in our view, but can be an eternity for a child who is the victim of bullying.

A child passes someone's desk. The passer-by looks at the child sitting at his or her desk and simply says "LOSER!" The other kids sitting nearby giggle, then go back to doing their math.

If this is a regular occurrence (this child is a repeat victim of the other child) this looks like it may be a bullying situation. The children nearby, giggling (reacting to this incident) and not standing up for the victim, have just given "permission" for it to happen. When the teacher does not respond, the victim feels very alone.

Outside in the yard, a student is followed as he walks around the perimeter of the yard, being taunted until he can't take it anymore. He retaliates and pushes the bully to the ground, then hits him. The bully smiles, then runs to the teacher on duty and reports the aggression. The other students, who have witnessed what happened, don't want to "get involved" because they are afraid the bully will come after them. The victim is sent inside, where he waits to be disciplined by the principal.

Another student, reports to a teacher on duty that some kids are "bugging" him. He is told to just ignore them, and to go play in another part of the yard. Has he just been victimized again? Now he can't play in the part of the yard where his classmates are. The bullies are laughing because they are still there and he's not—and they didn't even get into trouble. They have the power.

While we can teach strategies to the victims of bullies, it goes beyond that. There are many skills for both the victim and the bully to learn: empathy, conflict resolution, communication skills, respect, assertiveness and problem solving to name a few. Above all, the students must learn that bullying is unacceptable and we can do something about it. It is a cycle that should be broken.

### **Background: Why We Need a Bully-Proofing Program**

One of the reasons we need a bully-proofing program is to protect the victims, and to educate everyone about the aspects of bullying. According to a study done by Wendy Craig, a psychologist at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario (Craig & Pepler, 1997) about one in seven boys between the ages of 4 and 11 bully others, while 1 in 11 girls are bullies. The cost of being a chronic bully or victim is high—and involves the mental health, juvenile justice, special education and social service systems. Research by Dr. Alice Charach, a Toronto psychiatrist, revealed:

- Of boys named as bullies in grades 6 through 9, 60% went on to have at least one court conviction by the age of 24;
- Children identified as aggressive in grade 3 (age 8) are much more likely, as adults, to have trouble with criminal behaviour, spousal abuse, alcoholism, antisocial personality and other psychiatric disorders;
- Bullies are four times as likely as nonbullies to be involved in serious repetitive crimes. (Charach, Pepler, & Zeigler, 1995)

From Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Canadian Crime Statistics, 1992:

- Since 1986, the rate of youths charged with violent crimes has increased twice as fast as the rate for adults;
- Since 1986, there has been a 102% increase in the number of youths charged with violent offenses;
- More recent statistics state that during 1998-99, violent crimes made up 22% of all cases in Canada's Youth Court, and about half of those were for common assaults including pushing, slapping, punching and verbal threats.

Canadian studies have recently documented that nearly half of the 15-year-old boys and one-quarter of the girls took part in bullying activities at school (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1997). An Ontario study by Craig and Pepler (1997) concluded that bullying occurred regularly on the playground and that the majority of bullying episodes took place close to school buildings. Adults were found to intervene in only 4% of cases.

### **Second Step Study**

The Second Step Program (Grossman, 1997) is a social skills program for children from kindergarten to grade eight. It contains three modules: empathy training, impulse control and anger management, usually taught over a four-month period.

The Second Step Study (Grossman, 1997) was conducted to evaluate the teaching of social skills to elementary school students. Students were assessed before the Second Step Program began, two weeks after it ended

and six months later. At the final evaluation, those who had taken the course exhibited about 30 fewer acts of aggression every day than children who didn't take the course. The participants also exhibited more than 800 neutral or positive acts per class every day than children who didn't take the course. Aggressive behaviour—including hitting, kicking and shoving—increased in students who did not take the course. (Grossman, 1997)

Second Step is used in more than 10,000 schools in the United States and Canada. In the model described below, teaching a variety of integrated social skills is part of the bully-proofing program.

### **What Has To Be Done**

In order to provide safe and inclusive school communities for all students, schools need to adopt a collaborative, comprehensive framework, involving administration, teachers, school support staff, community resources and supports, families and students. This includes both prevention and intervention programs.

### **Goals of a Bully-proofing Program**

- To provide a school environment where all feel safe and included;
- To build social responsibility in all students;
- To develop respect for differences, feelings, rules and self-respect;
- To provide support and protection for the victims;
- To reduce aggressive behaviour;
- To increase problem solving and conflict resolution skills;
- To increase understanding and empathy for both the bully and the victim;
- To develop an awareness of the life-long consequences and costs for the bully, the victim and the community;
- To increase awareness of the steps all people can take to reduce bullying and increase the feeling of safety in schools and communities.

### **The Bully Proofing Model**

- The model starts with a *School Plan and a Planning Committee*. This committee includes the Principal, a teacher component (by divisions) and nonteaching staff (Child and Youth Workers, Educational Assistants, lunch room supervisors, and parent representation). The plan begins with an assessment of the bullying situation. The school climate survey or yard map can determine the students' view of the situation. Quite often, it is vastly different from the teachers' perspective. The Principal can review suspension forms, behavioural records or journals that would indicate bullying behaviour.

- It is important to have *staff commitment* to the program. Training programs and in-house training are crucial. Everyone needs to know the different types and levels of bullying, including verbal, physical and emotional. They also need to know what it looks and sounds like, and how to intervene with both the victim and the bully. Bullies very quickly determine which teachers or support staff will look the other way or not acknowledge bullying taking place. This “permission” fuels the fire of bullying and they then use it as a tool to intimidate others. It is also important to educate the students in the same manner. They need to know what bullying is all about and be able to label it.
- The *Safe School Policy and Code of Conduct* can reflect the statement that bullying will not be tolerated within the school environment. Classrooms can have rules against bullying posted for all to see.
- *Parent and community involvement* is an important aspect of the program. Parents need to know what bullying is, as well as being informed about how they can support their children, whether they be victims, bullies or witnesses.
- *Resources and programs* must be made available for the staff to implement. Teachers tend to prefer resources that are easy to use, require little planning and take about a half hour per lesson. With school planning, there can be a “theme” whereby the entire school is working on the same skill at the same time. This can be reinforced through announcements, “bully-tin” boards, special assemblies, as well as classroom and school newsletters.
- *Early Intervention and Skills Training* is essential for the students. Here, they acquire information and strategies to deal with bullying as well as pro-social ways of dealing with conflict, anger management, communication and problem solving skills, and empathy, to name a few. Children need to know that when they turn their backs, walk away and do not report bullying that this is giving permission to the bully. More kids give permission than adults. I firmly believe that calling someone a “rat” because they report on someone else was started by a bully. Kids need to be aware of what tactics the bullies will use and how to respond to them. Training also has to emphasize that we are responsible for each other and we can learn to offer support on the playground to someone who is the victim of bullying.

### **An Action Plan for Administrators**

The action plan that will be put into place by the Principal contains many steps:

- First, he or she will have to share his/her beliefs, values and strong desire for implementing a safe schools initiative with teachers, support staff and parents; and obtain commitment from these groups to support and be part of implementing an anti-bullying program.

- Second, (s)he must organize a committee that will make decisions regarding rules or codes of conduct that will be posted in all classrooms. There will be five specific areas to focus upon: awareness of the issue, modeling of appropriate behaviour, curriculum support of the anti-bullying message, social skills training and counselling.
- Next, in-house training for staff should be planned. This could be provided by the Child and Youth Counsellor, and would cover topics such as: types and levels of bullying, impact of bullying, intervention with both the victim and the bully, as well as intervening with students who witness bullying.

Other activities required:

- Provide curriculum support and lesson plans for each division—flexibility to be provided so that present resources may be utilized and therefore cost does not prohibit or delay implementation.
- Plan an introductory assembly for students—one skill to be highlighted at a time for a cumulative effect.
- Review bullying surveys and plan supervision to enhance yard security.
- Hold meetings with the Safe School Committee. Develop a set procedure with a consistent set of consequences for dealing with incidences of bullying.
- At staff meetings, report on implementation; discuss, agree upon and reinforce a uniform or consistent way all school personnel will handle and record bullying; and provide encouragement, support, enthusiasm and appreciation for project implementation.
- Hold a parent information night.

## INTERVENTION

Bullying issues are best dealt with on a number of levels. Interventions should be addressed at the school level, the classroom level, an individual level, and at home.

### School Level

An intervention program is really part of a good discipline and behaviour program for the school. The single most effective deterrent to bullying is adult authority. Adults need to be able to identify bullying, separate it from normal peer conflict and stop it. The social environment of the school is critical.

Some key components to school level interventions include: warmth and positive involvement of adults, firm limits for unacceptable behaviour and consistent use of nonhostile, noncorporal consequences for rule violations. In some instances, a school may be so concerned about the level of bullying behaviour that they may consider developing an individual safety and support plan for the student who is bullying. A safety and support plan is a set of external controls and limits designed to

help a student gain control over his/her behaviour and to protect other children. An effective plan also supports the student's participation in age-appropriate activities with peers. The goal of the program is not to punish or give consequences but to teach appropriate pro-social behaviours that can earn the student positive acceptance by peers.

### **School Climate Survey**

The school climate survey is an indicator of how the students see and rate bullying at their school. It includes items such as: How often have you been bullied at your school? How often have you seen others being bullied? What types of bullying occur? Why do kids get bullied? How well do the teachers handle bullying? and What more can teachers and administrators do to help stop bullying? On the back of the survey is a yard map where the students can put an "X" to denote spots where bullying takes place. This information can be used to increase supervision in that area. It must be noted however, that the results are opinions only and reflect the success of the child's recess on that particular day.

### **The Classroom Level**

Class rules should be posted in each classroom along with expectations of behaviour. Every class should be giving clear messages such as "We do not bully others," and "We help others." This message diffuses the "permission" that enables bullying to continue. It is possible to empower the class to make bullying unacceptable. Teaching them the skills necessary to deal effectively with the problem does this. These skills must be taught on a continual basis while reinforcing the positive choices the students are making.

Teachers need to help children distinguish between tattling (or "ratting") and good citizenship. This critical social skills component must be built into daily life. The Ontario Curriculum has recognized such areas as conflict resolution skills, cooperation with others and problem solving as essential skills that are assessed under the Learning Skills section of the report card.

It is important to watch for a change in behaviour that might signal early signs of distress in pupils: not wanting to go out for recess, not using the washrooms at recess, or "losing" personal items. With this in mind, ensure that all accessible areas of school are patrolled at break, lunchtime, between classrooms and home time. Teach the child how to report bullying. Teach the teacher to listen: "He's bugging me again!" could be bullying. Ask questions to get more information from the student.

### **Skills Training**

At the classroom level, students can be taught pro-social skills. The units of instruction are: Empathy, Bully-Proofing Strategies/Assertiveness Training, Respect/Prevention of Stereotyping, Anger Management/Conflict Resolution, Effective Communication, and Healthy Relationships/Personal Safety.

These units are for Primary, Junior and Intermediate Levels and each deals with the same theme but with different resources in each unit. Therefore, an entire school can construct an anti-bullying program that enables all grade levels to participate at the same time.

### Strategies

Students need to be taught “what to do” to combat bullying when it is happening. They also need to understand the power behind the bullying. Essentially, the bully has the power to make his or her victim feel bad. I tell the children when they react, they are giving the bully what he or she wants. Picture this—at the start of the day, a bully walks around with an empty balloon. When he gives out an insult to purposefully hurt someone’s feelings he watches very carefully. A reaction can be as small as a shrug of the shoulders or as big as the victim calling names back or even chasing after the bully. Once the victim reacts, some of his personal power goes into the bully’s balloon. By the end of recess the bully has a huge balloon, having made various children react to his taunts. But potential victims can break the cycle by not reacting. We talk about payouts. If you are a bingo or lottery player and you don’t get anything for your money, you eventually lose interest. Bullying can be much of the same. For it to continue, there must be a payout (your reaction). If you cease this behaviour (the payout) then the bully will look elsewhere for his reward. At the end of the recess, there is nothing in his balloon. He has not forced you to give up any of your personal power and his balloon is empty. This way of thinking is paired with strategies like *Ignore* and *Walk Away*. Some children however need to be taught how to ignore. Cognitively, the children need to change their thinking around the insults. We put dollar values on them. An insult about a child’s clothing is worth twenty-five cents. An insult pertaining to hair or body shape ranges from one dollar to three dollars. The big ones however, are usually about the child’s mother and are valued at five dollars. It takes a strong person to resist sticking up for his or her mom! Bullies usually use this one when they are desperate for a payout. I have the students evaluate how much the insult is worth, then have them process just how badly the bully wants them to react. In this way, they can feel like they are in control of the situation and it is easier for them to ignore or act assertively. If they use their words to deal with the bully, they have to be assertive. A whiney voice or an angry tone will only be seen as a reaction and the bully will win. The message is: “Say it like you mean it, but not in a mean voice.” Role playing to practice choices and to play out the assertive role can be very rewarding. I also give students homework to practice cognitively. While they are on the yard or sitting on the bus, they see many instances of verbal bullying. They are asked to practice in their heads what they would do or say if they were the ones being picked on at that moment. This gives them rehearsals that they can put into play when it is their “turn”.

A huge impact on bullying is the ability for other students to stand up for the victims. Bullies seek permission to target someone and when we take away that permission they don't know whom to trust. I teach the kids to verbalize "We don't treat people like that at our school." When the victim is viewed as having a solid support system, the bullying diminishes. They are also taught not to put down the bully, but to use respect and teach the bully how they want to be treated. They are included in play, asked to volunteer and given opportunities to gain appropriate skills and to receive positive feedback for pro-social behaviour.

### **Selling it!**

There are various ways and means to promote the program within the school environment to both the staff and the students. These suggestions can be spearheaded by the Child and Youth Counsellor. Here are some suggestions:

- Hold regular assemblies promoting a safe school environment. Have staff participate in skits that highlight specific skills.
- Develop a school logo and display it prominently—on buttons, t-shirts, in the foyer of the school, in classrooms (e.g., Emily Carr Public School, London Ontario, developed SMARTS—S for Self-Esteem, M for Mediation, A for Acceptance, R for Respect, T for Tolerance, S for Safe School).
- Hold an art/essay/poetry competition on the theme of anti-bullying—display all entries—have winners interviewed by local television, newspaper, or both.
- Have students create and display paintings, posters, short stories, or cartoons written by students with the theme or skill of the month.
- Institute a "Caught You Doing Something Good" program. Nominee's names go into a draw box and the winner's names are announced over the PA system and they receive a small prize. All certificates to be displayed in the school.
- Create a "Bully-tin Board" displaying information about the schools anti-bullying campaign—rules against bullying, strategies, results of competitions, etc.
- Start a "Bully Box" where kids can report incidences of bullying—this should be in each classroom and at the office.
- Start a peer helper or peer mediation program.
- Institute a "Leadership Award" to be given at graduation. The requirements for being eligible for the award should have an emphasis on leadership in conflict resolution, problem solving and respect for others.
- Start a Recess Recreation Leadership Program where students in higher grades are taught the skills of being a good leader, conflict resolution skills and various recess games—they are then responsible



for taking equipment out on the yard at recess, teaching and supervising games to younger students as well as helping with solutions to small problems. This can help decrease bullying by giving some younger students something constructive and fun to do at recess. “Loners” who may be targets for bullies are encouraged to participate in the group activity where there is a policy of “Always room for one more.”

- Hold a “Show and Tell” night for parents and have students show off what they have been learning in the program. Perform skits that show “Poor Choice” and “Good Choice” for conflict resolution and bullying strategies.
- Have “Reading Buddies” read from a selection of storybooks about bullying.
- Hold a “Bully Free Week,” a “Week Without Violence” or a “Peace Week”
- Hold a variety of activities to heighten awareness, tolerance, and respect for various groups, religions, cultures—these can include assemblies, information carousels, displays, ethnic food luncheons, etc.
- Hold a song writing contest—this can be done on an individual or class basis and have participants sing it as part of the morning or afternoon school announcements.

### **The Home Level**

Bullying must also be addressed at the home level. Parents need to be informed of the differing aspects of bullying and how it impacts on both the victim and the bully. Parents sometimes need support in this area. They need to be made aware of the “permission” factor as well as the various types of reactions to bullying and how this feeds into the negative cycle. The need to be able to empower their children without relying on “Hit them back twice as hard!”

A Parent Information Night is an ideal setting to give out and discuss information, as well as inform the parents about the school plan to combat bullying. By making it a comfortable topic at home, parents encourage the child not only to report bullying but also to make good choices. Parents can also practice skills with their child such as assertiveness, and ignoring.

### **An Individual Level**

Being bullied is tough—it wears at your self-esteem, makes you lonely and then you sometimes do or say things that get you into trouble. (This is what I call the reaction-action...you react to what the bully has done or said and YOU get into trouble.) Kids need support while they are going through this. The classroom program can address the necessary information and strategies, but some kids who are being bullied need

additional support to make good choices. They might need an individual safety plan, someone to report to when bullying happens or a daily or weekly check-in with someone they know cares. They also might need one-on-one or small group work to learn and practice the effective strategies.

The bully also needs support. Sometimes they have developed a behaviour that is hard to break out of because they think others put a value on that tough reputation. They need to be taught choices around conflict, compromise and how to get positive attention. Sometimes bullying just doesn't work anymore. As one child said to me: "Being a bully isn't as much fun as it used to be!" (translation—his victims were growing up bigger than he was and they were turning the tables).

### **How to Respond to a Bullying Incident**

It is important to respond quickly to stop the bullying taking place. This is a message for the bully, the victim and the witnesses. The victim needs to know that you are hearing him or her, but due to the Reaction/Action it may not be apparent who the bully is! The bully may also be very adept at putting the blame on the other person or eliciting "witnesses" that will support him or her. Be aware of nonverbal cues: eye contact and body language that may give you an indication of who is intimidating whom. Ask an independent witness for factual information. Check records to see if similar incidents have been recorded.

To provide support for the student who was bullied:

- Acknowledge the incident;
- Gather more information;
- Make a plan to ensure the student's immediate safety.

Initiate a *tracking procedure* that will record the incident and alert the person who is the contact for intervention (i.e., Principal or vice-Principal). The contact person will gather more information as required, continue the safety plan of the victim and arrange a follow-up that may also include contacting his or her parents.

In dealing with the bully, the contact will:

- Apply an intervention strategy for the bully (whatever consequences are appropriate to the situation): warning, detentions, community service, etc.;
- Contact parents after second report (or first report if warranted);
- Offer support for appropriate skills training.

### **Complete documentation**

Maintain regular contact with the victim through follow-up checks. Ask if the plan was put into place and if it is working. If not, alter the plan

so that it has more chance of success. Continue to support the student by check-ins and by reinforcing positive choices and reporting further incidents to an adult. It can be determined at this time if it would be beneficial for the victim to engage interaction with a counsellor for additional support.

### CONCLUSION

A Bully-Proofing Program is not a quick fix for the problem. In fact, when everyone is educated about what bullying looks and sounds like, the incidences of bullying may actually seem to rise. This is mostly due to the fact that more people are aware and are starting to report more regularly. This is a crucial time as it sets up the students' expectations that something will be done.

CYCs offer support, knowledge, resources and enthusiasm to your Principals, teachers and the students you work with. Bullying can be reduced!

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