

BULLYING

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Bullying is a form of aggression in which individuals oppress others who are typically younger or weaker than them in gratuitous, unjustified, deliberate and repeated attempts to dominate and inflict hurt (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Ladd 2001; Rigby 2006a; Slee 1995a, 1995b; Slee & Rigby 1994; Smith & Sharp 1994). Bullies typically choose to exercise power over others not in anger but in what could be termed a 'proactive' rather than reactive form of aggression (Salmivalli et al. 1998).

For a range of research and definitional reasons, firm rates of bullying are difficult to establish, although figures tend to settle on up to 10 per cent being victims, 13 per cent bullies and 6 per cent being both on a reasonably frequent basis (Espelage & Swearer 2003; Olweus 1993). The consensus is that almost one in five students is subjected to bullying at least once a week in schools and over half experience it during their school lives, with a third of students saying that it makes them feel unsafe at school (Demaray & Malecki 2003a; Pepler et al. 1993; Rigby 1996; Slee 1994b, 1998; Smith & Sharp 1994; Tattum 1993a). Indeed, bullying is so widespread that, 'No study of social behaviour in any school anywhere in the world has shown an absence of bullying' (Noble 2006: 68).

Types of bullying

Although early literature on the subject focused mainly on physical bullying, more recent research has examined its more furtive forms. Direct or open bullying comprises *direct physical attacks* such as pushing, shoving, punching, tripping up, damage to the victim's clothing or possessions, and striking with or without weapons; and *direct verbal attacks* such as taunting, name calling or using a person consistently as the butt of jokes (O'Moore & Minton 2004). Sending threatening messages by phone or email is a more recent form of verbal bullying. *Extortion* entails the extraction of money or other possessions under threat, or being forced to commit antisocial or illegal acts such as theft or vandalism.

Relational bullying is an attempt to control or manipulate others by constraining their friendship ('You can't be my friend unless...') or by restricting access to social events such as parties (Crick et al. 2001). These methods can entail talking about others behind their backs, using code names for victims which they suspect refer to themselves, spreading malicious rumours, threatening to expose shared confidences, and leaving anonymous notes or phone messages (Crick et al. 2001; James & Owens 2005; Olweus 1993; Owens et al. 2001; Rigby 1996, 1998; Salmivalli et al. 1998; Slee 1995b; Smith & Sharp 1994; Tattum 1993a). Exclusionary manoeuvres span ignoring someone briefly or for extended periods, hiding from and thus isolating them, excluding them from groupings, to outright prolonged ostracism (Owens et al. 2000a). Public displays of exclusion include using huddles, loud talk and extravagant greetings with only the 'in' members of a clique (Shute et al. 2002). This social bullying is often accompanied by nonverbal signals that are aimed at conveying disgust or anger while asserting one's own power or status (Shute et al. 2002). These include stares, 'bitchy'

looks, looking someone up and down in a disparaging manner, rolling the eyes, using a sarcastic tone of voice and tossing the head in 'telegraphic' displays of emotion (Shute et al. 2002).

These nonverbal means in particular ensure that relational bullying remains covert, allowing perpetrators to disguise their aggressive intentions and give deniability (James & Owens 2004). The bullying has maximum effect on the victim with minimum risk to the perpetrator, as any reaction or report can be met with accusations that the victim is paranoid. Further relational bullying can be inflicted on the victim in retaliation for reporting.

A final form of bullying is *sexual harassment*. This involves sexually-toned verbal comments about girls' physical appearance, circulation of rumours affecting girls' sexual reputation, physical touch, and visual harassment such as using pornography or defacing school posters of women to embarrass or intimidate girls (Drouet 1993; Owens et al. 2005b). Girls may be required to perform favours (not necessarily sexual) at the threat of having sexual rumours spread about them. Whereas most perpetrators of such forms of heterosexual harassment are males and use these acts to gain status with their male peers, while regarding their taunts as jokes or as flattering to females, their victims find them threatening and nasty and they may feel obliged to avoid areas in which males congregate (Owens et al. 2005b).

A particular class of sexual harassment focuses on the recipient's sexual orientation, with gay, lesbian and particularly bisexual adolescents suffering up to double the usual rate of verbal and physical bullying (Murdock & Bolch 2005; Rivers 2001). They often endure not only the interpersonal bullying of school peers but also mobbing by unknown assailants and continuous sociocultural harassment from overt and covert negative messages about their sexual orientation (Henning-Stout et al. 2000). The combination of a homophobic school climate, low teacher support and victimisation reduces these students' psychological sense of belonging within their school and result in poorer academic performance and increased behavioural difficulties (Murdock & Bolch 2005).

These forms of bullying arise when students have superior psychological strength to their victims. This same condition commonly applies in relationships between teachers and students. Thus, although usually spoken of with reference to peers, it is important to highlight that *teachers* can also be the perpetrators of bullying in schools (Rigby 2003). Finally, we also need to be aware of the bullying of teachers by colleagues or by their students (Rigby 2003; Terry 1998).

Age trends

As they age, children are less likely to be victimised physically and more likely to be recipients of verbal and relational bullying (Olweus 1993). This is probably because bullies' social and verbal skills become more sophisticated with age (James & Owens 2004; Owens et al. 2005a). It appears that bullying is most prevalent towards the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school (Espelage & Swearer 2003; Marsh et al. 2004; Rigby 1996; Slee 1994a; Slee 1994b). Meanwhile, the tendency to bully remains fairly constant (Olweus 1993), suggesting the need to interrupt the pattern early in the life of bullies lest it persist throughout their schooling years (and beyond).

Although in the early childhood years (under age 5), young children are of course aggressive in reaction to immediate events, they tend to lack the premeditation required for proactive bullying of individual targets (Crick et al. 2001). Common to this age range,

however, is exclusionary manoeuvres (often taking the form of ‘You-can’t-come-to-my-birthday-party’) which are intended to hurt but, again, are an immediate reaction to a peer’s perceived transgression (Crick et al. 1999; Porter 1999). When nothing is done to prevent it, however, by the ages of 5-7 years, rates of bullying and victimisation resemble the incidence for older children (Alsaker & Valkanover 2001; Kochenderfer & Ladd 1996).

Gender differences

It is unclear whether boys and girls are socially aggressive at similar rates (as found by Crick & Grotpeter 1995) or boys remain more prone both to bullying and victimisation (as found by Marsh et al. 2004). It is certainly clear that boys of all ages are more likely than girls to be both perpetrators and victims of physical bullying. It also appears that from the age of 8 years, boys reduce their relational aggression (Henington et al. 1998) whereas, in keeping with their more intimate social groupings, girls increase theirs (Crick et al. 2001; Owens 1996; Owens & MacMullin 1995; Owens et al. 2001, 2005a; Perry et al. 2001; Salmivalli et al. 1998). By adolescence heterosexual relational bullying involves both male-female (romantic) pairs as well as the single-sex pairings characteristic of younger ages (Crick et al. 2001).

Location of bullying

Most bullying takes place in the playground, with one-third occurring on the way to and from school, although this usually involves those who are being bullied in school as well (Boulton 1997; Olweus 1993). When both physical and relational bullying are considered, both girls and boys report being bullied more in coeducational than in single-sex schools, with girls in coeducational settings also being sexually harassed more than in single-sex schools (Rigby 1993, 1998).

Effects of bullying

As young people seldom report to adults that they are victims or perpetrators of bullying, the immediate effects of bullying as listed in Box 11.2 can signal the need for investigation. At the time of direct or covert attacks, victims are likely to feel confusion at why they have been targeted, followed by covering up or denying the reality of their victimisation (Owens et al. 2000c) or, perhaps less adaptively, blaming themselves for it (Juvonen et al. 2000). Subsequently, they may admit to their misery which spans loneliness, hurt, fear, loss of self-esteem (particularly with respect to peer relationships), anxiety and fear for future relationships (Egan & Perry 1998; Juvonen et al. 2000; Marsh et al. 2004; Owens et al. 2000c). They might next seek to escape by joining other friendship groups or retaliate, but this can exacerbate – and be seen to justify – peers’ subsequent victimisation of them (Owens et al. 2000c). In turn, these effects create a vicious cycle in which their sensitive demeanour causes others to see them as ‘easy marks’ and thus repeat their abuses.

Long-term outcomes of bullying vary: some victims report few long-lasting effects (Juvonen et al. 2000) whereas others experience ongoing maladjustment (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Ladd 2001). Some have few lasting effects socially but enduring emotional effects (Olweus 2001; Rivers 2001).

Prolonged harassment is likely to lead to absenteeism from school (with 10 to 15 per cent of persistent absentees giving bullying as their reason), or leaving a school altogether; increased health complaints (possibly because stress undermines immune system functioning); impaired capacity to relate to others; and emotional effects including anxiety, low self-esteem, impaired self-efficacy, depressive tendencies, feelings of isolation, unhappiness and loneliness, and suicidal ideation (Espelage & Swearer 2003; Hunter & Boyle 2004; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Ladd 2001; Owens et al. 2000c; Rigby 1996, 1999, 2001, 2006a; Slee 1995a, 1995b; Slee & Rigby 1994; Smith et al. 2004). At the same time, victims' learning can suffer (Rigby 1996, 2001). Finally, as might be expected, victims become intimidated and lack confidence and therefore are less likely to seek social support or report the abuse to adults (Hunter & Boyle 2004).

Although students typically recover from the emotional effects of short-lived bullying (Juvonen et al. 2000), protracted victimisation has an added and perhaps more persistent *social* impact characterised by social mistrust and alienation (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Ladd 2001). Reactions to extended bullying can be similar to those found in post-traumatic stress (Mynard et al. 2000), with effects persisting even after victims of extended harassment have escaped the abusive setting (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Ladd 2001).

Box 11.2 Signs of victimisation from bullying

Physical signs

- unexplained physical injuries
- unexplained damage to clothing and property
- disappearance of money
- somatic complaints
- sleeping difficulties resulting in tiredness at school
- loss of appetite
- are unusually ravenous when they come home from school (having had their lunch stolen)

Social signs

- involvement in quarrels or fights in which they appear defenceless
- victims of constant teasing
- isolation at play and lunch times
- try to stay close to adults at play and lunch times
- lack of out-of-school-hours contact with classmates
- few invitations to social gatherings of peers

Emotional signs

- appear distressed, anxious, subdued, unhappy or tearful but refuse to say what is wrong
- changes in mood and behaviour
- explosive anger
- low self-esteem
- fear of going to school
- requests to leave the school

Academic signs

- sudden difficulty asking or answering questions in class
- decline in school performance (output) and/or processes such as concentration
- reduced participation in class activities
- absenteeism

Sources: Field & Carroll 2006; Olweus 1993; O'Moore & Minton 2004.

Explanations for bullying

Tattum (1993a: 3) does not mince words when he calls bullying, 'the most malicious and malevolent form of antisocial behaviour practised in our schools'. While a perfectly natural human reaction, this view gives rise to demonising its perpetrators, yielding a range of ineffective responses within schools.

Behaviourism

The authoritarian theories (notably behaviourism) advocate a zero-tolerance policy, with clear anti-bullying rules and consequences for their violation. To ensure detection of incidents, this approach advocates more 'visible and vigilant' playground supervision (Boulton 1994; McGrath & Stanley 2006b; Olweus 1993). However, as most bullying goes on behind teachers' backs, schools would need saturation coverage of the playground, bus stops, lunch areas and toilets, to make even a dent in the incidence which, even if it could afford the expense, would result in a siege mentality across the school, which would be detrimental to the school climate (McEvoy & Welker 2000).

Thus, although you must protect students, for a range of reasons most researchers favour non-punitive (non-behaviourist) approaches to bullying (McGrath & Stanley 2006a). First, those who do not share the school values will not be won over by rules of the 'be nice to each other' variety (see, e.g. Orpinas et al. 2003). Moreover, if you define bullying as a breach of school rules, it will be impossible to specify and thus respond to nonverbal and other subtle forms of bullying. Second, it can be difficult to glean sufficient facts to determine who is at fault. Third, blaming and punishing perpetrators will not prompt their empathy or repentance nor deter future bullying and may provoke bullies into subsequently exacting revenge on their victim. Last, a more philosophical objection is that the imposition of power over bullies simply replicates and reinforces their use of power over their peers.

Cognitive theory

The cognitive perspective holds great sway on this issue, with much research focusing on the presumed social skill deficits of victims (e.g. Fox & Boulton 2005; Perry et al. 2001). However, other than being physically less equipped to fend off attacks, victims differ little from non-victims (Marsh et al. 2004). Non-aggressive victims do have friends at school – albeit sometimes other victims who thus offer little protection from harassment (Pellegrini et al. 1999) and their friendship skills outside of school (Smith et al. 2004) and their social skills after the cessation of the attacks are normal (Olweus 1993, 2001). Therefore general social skills training seems unwarranted.

A second cluster of skills sometimes thought lacking in victims is their inability to be assertive under threat (Hodges & Perry 1999; Schwartz et al. 2001). This hypothesis

is based on their observed tendency either to submit or to react aggressively to attacks, neither of which is effective and both of which signal emotional distress that invites further torment (Fox & Boulton 2005; Pellegrini et al. 1999).

A third possibility arises from awareness that while aggressive children initially direct their hostility towards many group members, they soon focus consistently on those peers whose sensitivity, nonaggression and lack of friendships make them high-risk targets (Kochenderfer & Ladd 1996; Olweus 1993). This leads to the hypothesis that victims' low self-esteem leads to these characteristics and, in turn, causes their failure to deter future bullying (Marsh et al. 2004). However, it seems clear that these emotional effects are in large part the *result* of the bullying, rather than being its cause. Evidence for this view is provided by the research finding that young children's school adjustment was normal prior to bullying but deteriorated once bullying began (Kochenderfer & Ladd 1996).

Other evidence that these hypotheses may be in error is that curricula aimed at remediating the assumed skill deficiencies of victims have achieved little success. Few gains were noted by Fox and Boulton (2003), perhaps because an individual focus on victims that ignores the dynamics of the peer group is unlikely to be successful.

Naturally, the victims – even if socially or emotionally vulnerable – would not be victimised unless others behaved antisocially. This leads cognitivists into an examination of the deficiencies of perpetrators, fed by awareness that the tendency to bully is a fairly stable characteristic across time and is associated with many types of maladjustment, including academic underachievement, school drop out, aggression towards teachers, school property and siblings and, in later life to have higher rates of delinquency, criminality, and perhaps depression, with greater likelihood of becoming abusive spouses and parents and of being abused themselves (Elinoff et al. 2004; Marsh et al. 2004; Olweus 1993, 2001, Rigby 1996; Slee 1995b, 1998; Smith & Sharp 1994; Tattum 1993a, 1993b). Deficit orientations uphold that bullies are impulsive, believe in dominance and in being manipulative or violent to gain status (Olweus 1993; Smith & Sharp 1994; Tattum 1993a) or that they lack commitment to acting morally and the moral sensitivity and reasoning needed to make moral decisions (Marsh et al. 2004; Sanders 2004).

This view, as operationalised in the form of social skills packages teaching perpetrators the likes of cooperation, anger management and conflict resolution skills, has achieved modest effects at reducing aggression and bullying in early to middle primary school (see Leff et al. 2001; Samples 2004; Smith et al. 2004) and at improving attitudes to bullying even into the high school years (Van Schoiack-Edstrom et al. 2002). However, they make little impact on bullying *behaviour* in high school (Stevens et al. 2000) and adolescents are contemptuous of efforts to include such curricula at their level (Owens et al. 2000a).

This is probably because they reject the implied view of themselves as socially incompetent. Indeed, many proactive aggressors are outgoing and confident, enjoying a wide base of peer support both within and beyond their aggressive clique (Pellegrini et al. 1999; Rodkin & Hodges 2003). Rather than being socially inept, their broad popularity gives them the 'social authority' to control the peer relationships around them (Crick & Grotpeter 1995). They understand people very well and use this information to their own advantage (Espelage & Swearer 2003). These findings and the unlikelihood, given the high rate of bullying, that so many individuals could be maladjusted, suggest that bullying persists not because of the malice of its perpetrators, but because it *works*.

Manipulation of who is 'in' and excluding outsiders establishes, maintains and strengthens bonds within one's peer group, while differentiating one's group from others (Bukowski & Sippola 2001; McMillan & Chavis 1986; Nishina 2004; Owens et al. 2000b).

As well as enhancing group cohesion, bullying also appears to be a strategy for establishing power or dominance within groups (Pellegrini 2004). This is verified by research showing that the incidence of dominance and bullying coincided (Long & Pellegrini 2003). The dominant gain access to resources: in early childhood to toys; by later adolescence, access to peer status and to heterosexual relationships (Pellegrini 2004). Other reasons that adolescents have given for social bullying include to alleviate boredom, create excitement or as revenge for gossiping or for the poaching of same-sex friends or boyfriends (Owens et al. 2000b).

The third explanation for bullying rests on the fact that half of all bullying involves a group of students with a ringleader harassing a single peer (Olweus 1993, 2001). Individual perpetrators in these 'mobs' are not socially impaired but the group setting results in the diffusion of responsibility which allows individuals to evade personal awareness of their part in causing the victim's distress (Olweus 1993; Pikas 2002). Some hold no malice against the victim – and may even feel shame for their actions – but participate in the bullying to avoid becoming victims themselves or to elevate their own status within the peer group (James & Owens 2005; Owens et al. 2000b; Rigby 1996).

Egalitarian views

The inadequacy of cognitive conceptions of the skills deficits of victims and perpetrators gives rise to the egalitarian perspective. This recognises that bullying is a complex behaviour that is embedded in systems (family, classroom and school) that inadvertently model, maintain and reinforce domination and intimidation (Pepler et al. 1993; Tattum 1993b). Whereas bullying has been thought to prevail more in larger schools, city schools, and in those whose communities experience socioeconomic disadvantage, racial discrimination, or high rates of violence, it is now apparent that even when schools have similar structural characteristics or student populations, the rate of bullying in one school can be up to four times higher than in another, while students in classes with high rates of aggression become more aggressive themselves over time (Olweus 1993; Rigby 2006a; Rodkin & Hodges 2003). These differences have been attributed to the school ethos and teacher practices. School factors that allow bullying to occur include status differences between students and teachers and among the various grade levels of the student population (Nishina 2004); neglect of victims within schools; lack of intervention with bullying ('turning a blind eye'); and a school ethos that does not question oppression (Olweus 1993), which includes the oppression of students by authoritarian teaching. In such a climate, there will be too few countervailing forces to dissuade students from using their power in antisocial ways against vulnerable peers.

SAFE SCHOOL (ANTI-BULLYING) PROGRAMS

An egalitarian approach to bullying recognises that students are likely to resist and even be contemptuous of adult-imposed, authoritarian interventions (Rodkin & Hodges 2003). Thus, anti-bullying measures need to be nestled within a communal school

organisation, which fosters supportive relations, common goals and norms and collaboration and involvement across all sectors of the school (Payne & Gottfredson 2004).

Slee (2001, 2006) proposes that schools enact a five-phase anti-bullying program described by the acronym PEACE:

- P represents the *preparation* stage of collecting data about bullying in your school and gathering resources to inform an anti-bullying program;
- E stands for *education* about what is meant by bullying and which procedures to use to deal with it;
- A means taking *action* at all levels;
- C stands for helping victims cope. However, because in lay understandings the word *coping* implies 'putting up' with adversity, I shall replace this term with O'Moore and Minton's (2004) term, *countering* strategies;
- E stands for *evaluation* of the effectiveness of the program.

Preparation

In the preliminary phases, a small working party of teachers, parents, students and community representatives needs to be convened to gather data and resource materials for future dissemination across the school. Given that teachers in secondary school spend little time with students individually or in their peer groups and given that the covert nature of relational bullying makes it difficult to detect, teachers may be aware of less than half of the bullying that is occurring at their school (Leff et al. 1999). Therefore, the administration of sociometric measures within classrooms can help identify students who are neglected or rejected, while questionnaires to all teachers, parents and students about bullying can give the school information and thus the impetus to adjust its responses to bullying (Noble 2006; Rigby 2001; Rodkin & Hodges 2003).

Education

Teachers, parents and students need to receive some straight-forward information about the various forms of bullying, its signs and its effects on victims. At the same time, misinformation needs to be countered, such as myths that bullying is an inescapable part of life, that it toughens people up, that some students 'ask' for it, or that words cannot harm us (O'Moore & Minton 2004). Nevertheless, while education will win over empathic bystanders it will be less influential with perpetrators and thus must be supplemented by other measures.

Action

The first form of action entails *primary prevention* strategies. These are aimed at changing those aspects of the school environment that are permitting the victimisation of others. The place to start is suggested by the contention of the egalitarian theories that when teachers relate fairly with students, they in turn are more likely to do so with each other and more likely to seek and welcome teacher support in their conflicts. A cohesive school and class community (from the principal and teachers down) that is

based on prosocial interactions will create a climate of acceptance in which injustice towards others is less tolerated. Some specific primary preventive measures include the following.

- Schools will need to enrich playgrounds and offer structured activities at breaks to give students something productive to do (Boulton 1994; James & Owens 2005; Olweus 1993; Leff et al. 2003; Owens et al. 2000b; Whitney et al. 1994).
- Teachers can avoid the isolation and consequent victimisation of vulnerable individuals and orchestrate higher levels of peer acceptance by displaying warmth and care towards all students (Rodkin & Hodges 2003).
- Although curricular *measures* have been shown to have little effect, primary schools in particular might include anti-bullying themes within regular subject areas, in class meetings, or within a 'caring community' program. In the context of other measures to enhance social cohesion in classrooms and across the school, information conveyed naturalistically might mobilise the large numbers of peers who feel empathic towards victims, helping them to resist colluding and even enabling them to come to the aid of victims, without inflaming the situation or endangering themselves or the victim (Rigby & Bagshaw 2006).

Secondary preventive measures entail giving both victims and perpetrators emotional as well as practical support (Hunter et al. 2004). This is particularly necessary for those students who are both victimised *and* instigators of bullying ('bully-victims') as their aggression is often seen by teachers to justify their victimisation, with the result that they receive low levels of teacher support (Demaray & Malecki 2003a). Emotional support will help victims to feel better, while instrumental support is designed to help them during an incident and to deter future attacks (Demaray & Malecki 2003a).

Interventions form the third layer of action. One disturbing feature of bullying is the perception of 25 to 60 per cent of students that teachers seldom act to protect them (Olweus 1993; Slee 1994a). Pikas (2002) asserts that, notwithstanding the laudable aims of primary and secondary preventive measures, these are expensive in terms of time and resources, sometimes to the point of being impractical. He argues that instead the most appropriate way to prevent bullying is to be supremely effective at responding to incidents and thus avoiding a repetition. Taking action will require that you be receptive to students' complaints of bullying, particularly its subtle forms such as nonverbal manipulation (Shute et al. 2002). It will also require a non-punitive response that accepts victims, perpetrators, bully-victims and onlookers alike, while clearly repudiating their behaviour.

At younger ages (below nine years), and for individual rather than gang bullying, simply telling the bully to stop might be effective (Smith et al. 1994). For students aged over nine, various approaches have been reported for dealing with perpetrators. These include Pikas's (2002) method of shared concern employed for gang bullying, Maines and Robinson's no-blame approach (McGrath & Stanley 2006a), restorative responses (Armstrong & Thorsborne 2006) and counselling of victims and their parents (Fuller 2006).

All these approaches share a recognition that although perpetrators are responsible for their actions and for their effect on victims, the aim is to solve the problem rather than punish the perpetrator/s. The steps involved in these methods differ slightly but, in essence, they aim to repair relationships by listening to victims and dispassionately conveying their feelings to perpetrators and any colluders, either

individually or as a group. This explains that victims are in a bad situation, without accusing perpetrators or asking them to admit guilt. Pikas (2002) also aims to support collaborators so that they do not need to fear retribution or worry that they will become the next victim. Thus empowered and with their empathy aroused, you invite perpetrators to suggest ways they could help improve the victims' circumstances and ask for a commitment to these measures. In follow up meetings you would check that these are working. Perhaps even less confronting to perpetrators is the solution-focused approach described in chapter 7 and outlined in vignette 11.1.

Peer mediation, which trains students to help their peers to negotiate an agreed solution to conflict between them, may be beyond the capabilities of younger children and may be inappropriate for the complex issues posed by bullying. However, it may be suitable during adolescence, when adolescents' imperatives to belong and be popular – which give rise to the problem – can also generate its solution. Peer mediation at this age may be more successful than interventions by teachers, particularly given adolescents' belief that teachers should stay out of their conflicts (James & Owens 2004; Owens et al. 2001; Shute et al. 2002). However, selection, training and supervision of mediators must be handled sensitively so that mediators are not exploited or undermined when antisocial peers denigrate them for colluding with the 'establishment' (Smith & Daunic 2002).

Taking action will also entail collaborating with parents of both bullies and victims. Parents of bullies need to be told about their child's behaviour, without their child being condemned and without themselves being criticised. To avoid angry parents punishing their children at home, it will be crucial to communicate that this is a school-based problem which the school intends to solve. Solution-focused interventions may be useful if parents of bullies attempt to convince parents of other perpetrators to ostracise victims or their parents (Field & Carroll 2006); if parents of bully-victims overlook their child's culpability in the bullying and claim victim status only; or if parents of victims feel powerless to help their child, or may inflame the situation by confronting the bullies or their parents themselves. The strength of the solution-focused approach is that it does not require unanimous agreement about the facts of the bullying, but just an acknowledgement that victims are having a difficult time.

Action will also involve the use of support services such as school counsellors, outside health professionals or the police. Finally, for intractable bullying the school must reserve a final option of suspension of bullies. Although isolating perpetrators is a violation of community cohesion, so too is their behaviour, and the physical and psychological health of victims must take precedence in those rare cases where perpetrators have had every chance to cease their harassment but have been unwilling to do so. While there are some legal remedies for victims of bullying – such as provided by anti-stalking legislation or the imposition of apprehended violence orders, violation of which is a criminal offence (Nicholson 2006) – once parents and victims have needed to resort to the criminal courts to protect themselves, the school should have suspended the offenders.

Countering strategies

Given that preventive and interventive methods will never, sadly, eliminate bullying, it will continue to be necessary to enfranchise victims to resist harassment (Fuller 2006). This then is the fourth aspect of the PEACE plan (Slee 2001, 2006). As Rigby (2001) affirms, the most successful intervention is to help children to help themselves. As

already outlined, social skills training seems unnecessary in most cases, although victims can be apprised of the most effective strategies for handling an incident. In the junior primary years, the most successful strategies can be to enlist the support of a friend; by late primary school conflict resolution skills such as assertiveness in the form of 'brave talk' can be useful in countering bullying (Rigby 1996, 2006b; Sharp & Cowie 1994). An 'invisibility' strategy of avoiding those areas where most bullying occurs can be useful in the interim (Fuller 2006). Subsequently, students need to know how and to whom they can report incidents and to feel confident that their report will be met with empathy (O'Moore & Minton 2004). Solution-focused interventions could highlight these and other resiliency skills that victims employ.

Evaluation

Once your policy and procedures are in place, you must check whether they are working – that is, helping victims to feel safer. Your measures can then be formalised into a whole-school policy on bullying, which will be part of an overall 'safe school' policy about aggression and discipline in general and be guided by your social justice, pastoral care and protective behaviours policies (Rigby 1996; Roland 1993; Sharp & Thompson 1994). Your bullying policy will have the same components as any of these others, beginning with a definition then a series of statements proclaiming that (McGrath & Stanley 2006b):

- bullying is an issue for all members of the school community;
- everyone has a right to feel safe;
- all school members are responsible not to take part in bullying;
- all are responsible to report bullying;
- the school is committed to preventing, minimising and responding to bullying.

Vignette 11.1: A solution-focused approach to help victims of bullying

Preamble

Interview the victim, starting with non-problem talk such as what the child would be doing right now if not talking with you. Find out some of the child's interests.

Statement of the problem

Young people will be reluctant to say that they are being bullied so instead you can bring up the problem by stating that you, another teacher, or the child's parent is worried about him or her. You can follow this up with the question, 'Are they right to be worried about you?'

Having received assent that the worry is justified, you will need to state that answers to the next three questions will not get anyone into trouble. These questions are:

- 'Who do you find difficult to deal with at the moment?'. There is no need to ask what the named students are doing, as this can make the conversation deteriorate into problem-saturated talk.
- 'Who else is around when (named peer) is being difficult?'. This allows you to identify bystanders who could be recruited to help.

- 'Who are your friends?' or, for those who are now completely isolated from their peer group, 'Who would you like to be your friend?'

Explain to the victim that you will be recruiting those named to work together to help the child be happier at school.

Garner support

Meet as a group with the children named by the victim, explaining that you have chosen them because you know they can help to make the victim happier at school. Do not mention bullying or talk about the events as this could degenerate into accusations of fault and blame. Instead, discuss with them times when they have been unhappy at school and express empathy that it is not easy to be so. Then ask for their suggestions of what can be done to help the focus child. As they raise suggestions, you can compliment those that seem promising but check that they are realistic: 'That's a good idea. Would that be difficult or easy for you to do?'. When they volunteer that it would not be difficult, you can compliment them on their kindness. While not asking them to be friends with the focus child or demanding a commitment to carrying out the suggestions, you can end this session with a comment that you think their plan will work to make the victim happier at school.

Review

A week later, meet with the victim to hear what has been better over the past week and ask how he or she managed to make that happen (e.g. responding to or trusting the friendlier overtures of the former bullies). Contact also the child's parents for their feedback about his or her progress.

Next, meet with the support group (of former perpetrators, bystanders and potential or actual friends) and ask what each has done over the previous week to make the focus child happier at school. There is no need to refer back to their original suggestions as it does not matter if they employed those particular strategies, only that they did something to make the situation improve for the victim. Congratulate them personally and as a group for a job well done and ask if they would like to continue for another week.

Conduct one more review and, if no further problems surface, cease the intervention.

Comment

Young (2001) reports that the advantages of this method are that the bullies are not punished, which prevents their retaliating against the victim for disclosing the abuse, and ensures that no injustice occurs in instances where the victim is also provocative or a bully at other times. Most parties are relieved not to have to discuss the actual bullying behaviour but focus instead on finding a solution. Once that is achieved, the details of who did what to whom become irrelevant anyway.

Source: Young 2001.

FURTHER READING

McGrath, H. & Noble, T. eds 2006 *Bullying solutions: evidence-based approaches to bullying in Australian schools* Pearson Longman, Sydney

O'Moore, M. and Minton, S.J. 2004 *Dealing with bullying in schools: a training manual for teachers, parents and other professionals* Paul Chapman, London

Rigby, K. 1996 *Bullying in schools: and what to do about it* ACER, Melbourne

Rigby, K. 2007 *Stop the bullying: a handbook for schools* 3rd edn, ACER, Melbourne
Slee, P.T. 2001 *The PEACE pack: a program for reducing bullying in our schools* 3rd edn, Flinders University, Adelaide, SA
Sharp, S. and Smith, P.K. eds, 1994 *Tackling bullying in your school: a practical handbook for teachers* Routledge, London

For early childhood teachers

Sprung, B., Froschl, M. and Hinitz, B. 2005 *The anti-bullying and teasing book for preschool classrooms* Gryphon House, Beltsville, MD

Websites

National Coalition Against Bullying: www.ncab.org.au

Child and Adolescent Psychological and Educational Resources (CAPER):
www.caper.com.au

Ken Rigby's site: www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying