

# Bullying Interventions in schools: Six major approaches

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## Introduction

The content of this workshop is based largely on my 2010 book, “Bullying Interventions: Six Basic Methods.” Camberwell: ACER.

A DVD produced by Loggerheads in England provides further background and illustrates the methods. See Rigby, K (2010) Bullying in schools: six methods of intervention. See [http://www.loggerheadfilms.co.uk/productspage/?category=1&product\\_id=4](http://www.loggerheadfilms.co.uk/productspage/?category=1&product_id=4)

It is hoped that schools will consider **each** of the methods and employ those they believe are acceptable to the school and are applicable to the cases of bullying they deal with.

As an exercise school staff may like to complete a questionnaire called ‘The Handling Bullying Questionnaire’, which is being provided. This enables staff to indicate how they think cases of bullying might best be addressed.

Please note that this workshop and its content are concerned with interventions that are needed when cases of bullying arise, as unfortunately they do from time to time in every school. Of course it is also very desirable to work towards providing a school environment in which the relations between students are positive and students are not inclined to treat each other badly. A great deal of such proactive work in schools is being undertaken in many schools to prevent the occurrence of bullying and such work can reduce the number of cases that occur. But, as yet, no school has succeeded in eliminating all forms of bullying and schools must act as they see fit when bullying does happen. Students and parents expect them to do so. In many countries the law requires it. This workshop is designed especially to help schools to think about what they can do in tackling actual cases.

Please feel free to use these ideas and materials (with acknowledgements) in intervention workshops and contact me if you like with any questions.

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## **A case of bullying**

A 13 year old student is being repeatedly teased and called unpleasant names by another, more powerful, student who has successfully persuaded other students to avoid the targeted person as much as possible.

There is also evidence that the targeted student has been receiving threatening and abusive text messages instigated by the person who has been identified as the 'bully.'

As a result, the victim of this behavior is feeling angry, miserable, and often isolated.

Knowledge of what has been happening has come to the attention of the school and a teacher or counselor has undertaken to deal with this case.

*In this workshop we will consider how such a case can be addressed using alternative methods of intervention.*

## Interventions

These are what I see as the six major intervention methods available to schools

- The traditional disciplinary approach
- Strengthening the victim
- Mediation
- Restorative Practice
- The Support Group Method
- The Method of Shared Concern

The aim of this workshop is to provide, quite briefly, some experience of how these methods may be used in order to stimulate discussion on when and how each may be used (or not used) in given situations in cases of bullying that have been identified.

A much fuller examination of each of these approaches is available through published articles, books and DVDs and these should be consulted by schools that are interested in deciding how they are going to act. **Please consult the reference section.**

## **Applying the traditional disciplinary approach**

- Decide who will be the 'practitioner' and who the 'bully'
- Both should carefully read the case given on page 3
- The practitioner should follow the instructions given below. (The 'bully' should close the booklet and NOT be reading the following)

### **Practitioners instructions**

1. Begin by making it clear that you know what has been happening and that it constitutes bullying – and is 'completely unacceptable in this school'
2. Ask the student what he/she has to say about it. (But do not accept any excuses)
3. Point out that there are school rules against such behaviour and students who engage in bullying others are to be punished.
4. State the nature of the sanction that will be applied (Make it up)
5. Stress what will happen next if the bullying continues

Afterwards, discuss

- How the 'bully' felt about the treatment he/she received and what effect it was likely to have
- Under what circumstances would this approach – or one like it – be justified.

Note that applications of this approach vary with some authorities advocating preliminary discussions with classes about how students should treat each other and serious talks with the parents of students who engage in bullying. Sanctions are seen as necessary, in part because they send a message to all students that bullying will not be tolerated.

Some 75% of teachers around the world approve of this approach, yet the evidence does not suggest that it is usually effective in preventing bullying from continuing.

## Strengthening the victim: TARGET SCRIPT

If the target of bullying can respond effectively, the 'bully' need not be confronted by the school. Various ways have been suggested on how the targeted child can stand up to the bully, from martial arts training to the use of so-called 'fogging.' Below is an example of how the target may learn to respond, without making matters worse and actually discouraging the verbal bully who is clearly failing to get a rise out of what happens.

When the bully makes a statement (as in the script) look the bully in the eye and give your response calmly, nonchalantly, without any hostility.

**Role play this with your partner – the 'bully' who will be using the Bully Script.**

Bully: You have a great big nose

Target: True, it is large

Bully: It looks like a beak

Target: True, it does stand out

Bully: You are the ugliest kid in the school

Target: That's your opinion

Bully: You are wearing pov shoes

Target: You are not wrong

Bully: You must be stupid to keep agreeing with me

Target: That's true

Bully: You keep saying that's true

Target: That's true

In the next part of this exercise reply by asking a question which can surprise and put the bully on the 'back foot.' Look at the bully with mild curiosity.

Bully: You are such an idiot.

Target: Why do you think so ? (Wait for the answer)

Bully: Everybody hates you.

Target: That's interesting. Why do you think that ? (Wait)

Bully: You are always in the library at lunch time

Target: That's right. Why does that concern you ? (Wait)

Finally

Bully: All those kids in the library are nerds

Target: It may seem like that to you

Bully: You have no friends

Target: That's what you think !

## Strengthening the victim: THE BULLY SCRIPT

Your role is to make a number of statements designed to ridicule and upset the target

After making your statement listen to the target's response, then move on to your next statement.

Bully: You have a great big nose  
Target.....

Bully: It looks like a beak  
Target.....

Bully: You are the ugliest kid in the school  
Target.....

Bully: You are wearing pov shoes  
Target.....

Bully: You must be stupid to keep agreeing with me  
Target.....

Bully: You keep saying that's true  
Target.....

In the next part of this exercise the target will ask you a question, **which you should try to answer briefly.**

Bully: You are such an idiot.  
Target.....

Bully: Everybody hates you  
Target.....

**Finally**, just listen to the target's replies:

Bully: All those kids in the library are nerds  
Target.....

Bully: You have no friends  
Target.....

Now discuss with the 'target' how you felt (as a bully) on hearing the target's responses.

Also discuss **the conditions** under which you think this approach might work, or not work.

## Mediation

Mediation can occur when two students (for example 'bully' and 'victim' agree to seek help from a mediator, a teacher or trained peer mediator, to resolve the issue that is causing the conflict.



From Lewers and Murphy (2000, p. 61

### Procedure

As an exercise you might like to see how the case of bullying might be dealt with **using a mediation approach**. Assume that both the bully and the victim are prepared to come – without compulsion – to a mediation session.

Work in threes, role playing (i) the teacher (ii) the bully and (ii) the mediator

1. The mediator asks each of the students in turn to explain the situation as he/she sees it
2. The other student is required to listen without interrupting and, at the end, to summarise what has been said – to the satisfaction of the speaker.
3. Each is then asked to make suggestions as to how the issue might be resolved. The mediator records each suggestion without unnecessary comment.
4. Each suggestion is listed, then examined and discussed to discover one to which they agree will resolve the conflict.

Under what circumstances might this approach work, or not work ?

## Restorative Practices

Restorative practices are designed to restore damaged relationships between individuals or groups. They require that the 'offender' acknowledges wrongdoing and the harm he or she has caused, and then acts restoratively, eg..., through an apology and compensatory action.

This approach may be applied at a Community Conference at which the offender(s) and 'target(s)' meet, together with other interested parties, eg parents, or in a classroom with students as participants, or in a meeting at which the 'bully' and the 'victim' are present. For the latter, here is a *possible* script

*The practitioner follows the script given below with partners playing the parts of 'bully' and 'victim.'*

**1. In the presence of the victim, 'the bully' is asked the following questions:**

What happened?

What were you thinking of at the time?

What have you thought about since?

Who has been affected by what you have done?

In what way?

**2. The practitioner now switches to the victim:**

What did you think when you realized what had happened?

What have you thought about since?

What impact has this incident had on you and others?

What has been the hardest thing for you?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

**3. Next, it is back to the bully:**

What do you think you need to do to make things right?

How can we make sure this doesn't happen again?

After a restorative action has been suggested, undertaken and (importantly) accepted by the target, the case may be concluded, though the situation may continue to be monitored

- What assumptions does this method make about the nature of the bully?
- Under what circumstances do you think this method should be employed?

Adapted from Rigby, K (2010) *Bullying interventions in schools: Six major methods*. Camberwell: ACER.

## **Support Group Method**

There are seven steps in the method, beginning with an interview with the victim, then holding a meeting with a group of students including both the bullies and other students (but not the victim), and ending with meetings with the individuals who have taken part in the application of the method.

### **Step 1 - Talking with the victim**

The practitioner meets with the victim to establish the impact that the bullying has had. The victim is not asked to describe particular incidents in which bullying has taken place, but is encouraged to provide a detailed and graphic account of the distress that he or she has experienced. This may take the form of a piece of writing or a drawing that expresses how the child has been affected by the bullying. The victim is asked to identify the 'bullies' and to suggest the names of people to form a group who could help solve the problem. Assurance is given that no one will be punished.

### **Step 2 - Convening a group meeting**

This meeting includes the children who have been identified as those engaging in the bullying, and some other students who are selected by the practitioner because they are expected to be helpful in bringing about a positive outcome. The victim is not required to be present. Generally the group size is around 6 to 8.

### **Step 3 - Explaining the problem**

The practitioner draws attention to the problem and especially to the distress that the victim is experiencing, using evidence provided by the victim. Specific incidents are not described and no accusations are made.

### **Step 4 – Promoting shared responsibility**

It is made clear that no one is going to be punished and that the group has been convened to help solve the problem and that everyone has a responsibility to improve the situation.

### **Step 5 – Asking for ideas**

The practitioner asks for suggestions about how things can be made better for the victim. Each person present is asked to make a personal statement on what he or she will do to help..

### **Step 6 -Leaving it up to them**

Having explained the situation, the practitioner passes responsibility for the problem over to the group, thanks them for their support and indicates that there will be further meetings with each of the students to see how things are going

### **Step 7 - Final meetings**

A week or so later the practitioner meets with members of the group individually to ascertain progress. The victim is also interviewed as part of the monitoring process.

It is important to recognise that although no one is being blamed for the bullying this approach is quite confrontative and conveys that the children do have a joint responsibility to improve the situation for the victim. In extreme cases, as when there have been serious assaults, a disciplinary approach is seen as appropriate with the usual sanctions being applied, or even police action.

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## Possible role plays for the Support Group Method

1. Role play the interaction between the **practitioner and the victim** (see Step 1 on page 10). This involves:
  - (i) Carefully explaining your role, which is to help students who may be feeling unsafe and troubled by how they are being treated by others at the school
  - (ii) Gaining the confidence of the victim and listening carefully to an account of what the student has experienced
  - (iii) Ensuring that the victim understands that no-one will be punished and it is safe to talk about who has been involved in the bullying.
  - (iv) Obtaining a good picture of the distress that the victim has experienced to be shared later with the bullies.
  - (v) Recording the names of the bullies.
  - (vi) Arranging for another meeting later to discuss progress
  
2. Role play the group meeting with the ‘bullies’ – say three of them – and a similar number of other students who are likely to be supportive of the victim. (The victim is NOT present at this meeting)

The practitioner goes through the process described in Steps 3, 4, 5 and 6 on page 10.

The practitioner should ensure that everyone appreciates the distress that the victim has been experiencing and that there is a joint responsibility to help that person

Make sure that **everyone** present indicates what he or she are prepared to do to help

Emphasise that there will be a further meeting arranged to discuss progress.

The practitioner should leave the meeting once the students have become motivated to help – and the role play can continue briefly with just the ‘students’

**On completion of the role plays, discuss together the circumstances under which this approach is likely to work – or not work.**

## The Method of Shared Concern

This account is based upon suggestions made by Anatol Pikas, the author of the so-called Shared Concern Method

The method involves several stages

1, On the basis of reports or observations, identify and interview the 'suspected bullies' one by one. Below is a proposed procedure, assuming in this case that the interviewee is female (the same procedure is used if male).

- Greet her in a firm but friendly manner.
- Explain briefly **who you are** and **why** you have asked her to talk with you: that is, because you are **concerned about X** (the person being bullied)
- Share what you have heard or noticed about how X is feeling; that she/he has appeared upset, lonely and quite depressed. **But make no accusations.**
- Ask the student what she has noticed about **X**
- As soon as there is **any recognition** by the student that things are not so good, ask: **WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?**
- Listen to her suggestions – **or** make some yourself. Reinforce positive responses.
- Explain that you will be talking to others about how the situation can be improved
- End on a positive note, and **arrange for another meeting** at a **definite time** to see how things have progressed

2. Next, interview the targeted student and explain what is happening. Stress that no-one is going to be punished. Discover more about the case, for instance, whether there **may have been any provocation** on the part of the target. Gain the target's confidence! .

3. Meet with the suspected bullies again individually - and ascertain progress. **If adequate progress has been made**, convene a meeting **with the group of suspected bullies.**

4. At the 'bullies only meeting' help the students to make an **agreed plan** to resolve the conflict with the cooperation of the target.

5. At a final summit meeting – **with the target now present** - help the students to negotiate an acceptable solution.

*As an exercise, role play with a partner Stage 1 above. Then discuss how the suspected bully felt about the interview. Then consider and evaluate the rest of the process and suggest when it could be used.*

## Exercise on selecting a method

As an aid to discussing what choices may be made in the employment of a given method, readers may like to consider the following cases. Decide which one(s) may be most appropriately dealt with using the approaches described above. These are: (i) the traditional disciplinary approach (ii) strengthening the victim (iii) mediation (iv) restorative practice (v) the Support Group Method (vi) Method of Shared Concern. Bear in mind that **more than one method** may sometimes be applied in a particular case.

**Case 1:** An adolescent boy is found to have sexually assaulted a girl in the school playground.

**Case 2:** Several girls in secondary school have been identified as spreading rumours about another girl being a lesbian. She is very angry about it.

**Case 3:** A secondary schoolboy has been identified as continually upsetting another younger boy by taunting him about his father being in jail. When asked to reflect on what he has been doing the older boy feels ashamed of himself.

**Case 4:** Two young boys are continually arguing and upsetting each other at school. One of them has gained the ascendancy.

**Case 5:** A quiet, shy girl aged 9 years is continually being ridiculed by some girls in her class. She has started staying away from school. She tells the teacher about how upset she is.

**Case 6:** A child keeps complaining that other students keep saying they don't like him.

**Case 7:** A child in kindergarten is continually going around attacking and hurting other children

**Case 8:** Some girls keep ridiculing one of their mates because she is overweight.

**Case 9:** A teenage boy has viciously attacked another boy causing him serious injuries. The parents of the attacker are dismayed that their son should do such a thing. Legal action is pending, but an alternative course of action may be acceptable to the injured boy and parents of the victim.

**Case 10:** Abusive comments have been put on the internet about the alleged sexual behaviour of a 15-year-old girl. The culprit has been identified.

**Case 11:** Some girls have been constantly ridiculing a boy who has arrived at the school from an orphanage in Croatia, because he does not know who his father is.

**Case 12:** Nasty emails are being received by an adolescent boy ridiculing him on the grounds that he is gay. Inquires at the school reveal that a group of boys are continually harassing the adolescent.

**Case 13:** Three black adolescents have been bullying a white student whom they allege has been making racist remarks about them.

From Rigby, K (2010) *Bullying interventions in schools . Six Basic Methods*. Camberwell: ACER. This book provides suggested answers to the question.

## REFERENCES TO INTERVENTIONS

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### The traditional disciplinary approach.

This is consistent with the approach described by Dan Olweus.

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Note that practitioners using this approach typically also recommend the use of positive reinforcement to encourage pro-social behavior

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## **Comparisons and evaluations of the approaches**

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Rigby, K (2010) Breaking the cycle. *Education Review*, March Edition.

Rigby ,K (2010) *Bullying in schools: six methods of intervention*. See [http://www.loggerheadfilms.co.uk/products-page/?category=1&product\\_id=4](http://www.loggerheadfilms.co.uk/products-page/?category=1&product_id=4) This is DVD in which the six methods are demonstrated and compared