

Outsmarting the Bully: What we can do to help

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Understanding Instead of Reacting

- Definitions
 - The Bully and What he/she Wants
 - The Bullied and What he/she Gives
 - Types of Bullying
 - Pseudo-Conflict
 - Bullying vs. Aggression

The Bully:

The bully is someone who actively seeks out weaker targets, and purposefully and repeatedly harasses them, with the primary intention being to express dominance and power through the infliction of harm

Impulsive/Reactive Aggression versus Bullying

Characteristics

- Attacks are planned and controlled
- Goal to dominate and control others
- Average to popular social status
- Express primarily interest and joy during bullying
- Bullying is often unprovoked
- More positive attitude toward violence and violent means to solving problems
- Not characterized by a loss of emotional control
- Bullies pick targets who are likely to submit to aggressive attacks

The Bullied:

The victim is someone who is the chronic target of a single or multiple aggressor(s) and does not actively provoke the attacks. Also known as the passive victim.

Characteristics

- Weaker than classmates
- More likely to react anxiously and appear insecure
- Fear of fighting and offer little to no risk of successful retaliation
- Less likely to defend themselves
- Highly reactive to attacks
- Rejected by peers therefore alone on the social stage
- Low Self-Esteem
- Most likely to receive and least likely to use physical aggression in their conflict

Types of Bullying

- **Direct (face-to-face):**
 - verbal or physical aggression, more common during unsupervised times, more commonly used by boys
- **Indirect, Relational, Social:**
 - done behind someone's back, malicious gossip, social ostracism, more common among girls, used more freely than direct bullying during supervised times

The Pseudo-Conflict

- These are not conflicts, not disagreements, instead they are pseudo-conflicts, the bully tries to make it seem like a conflict
- They are not set up for resolution, they are designed for the bully to win through the expression of dominance, power, and control over a weaker opponent
- Imbalance of power
- The bully tends to look for pain cues to signal that his/her aggression is effective, the victim tries to fit in and not look weak and therefore, delays the expression of pain, and so the bully escalates the level of aggression until he/she gets the rewarding cues

Understand Before Intervening

Gathering Information and Building Rapport

Gathering Relevant Information: About the Bullying

Severity of bullying

- Was physical or verbal aggression used, and if so, to what degree? Weapons?

Frequency

- How often does it occur?

Pervasiveness

- Where does it occur? How many different settings?

Chronicity

- How long has this been going on?

Talking with the Bullied Important Considerations

- Speak with him/her first, and alone.
- Can be highly motivated for change.
- May believe the messages they hear every day.
- Remember that bullied children try to put on a tough face because they are embarrassed
- They likely have experiences of bullying they have not yet shared. Reflect this.
- Reflect that you know that it is difficult and that you will work with him/her and not just react
- Ask about what they are afraid will happen now that they are talking to you.
- Learn about parents and their potential reactions to this issue and to their child.

Gathering Relevant Information: Characteristics

- Quality of social skills and presentation style
- Emotional presentation and suicidality (i.e., sad, anxious, angry, ashamed, embarrassed)
- Strengths and areas of need (self-esteem)
- Level of social awareness (rules of appropriateness)
- Gather information on social status, friendships, and support network
- What are parents beliefs about their child's victimization? How do they respond to their child's victimization. Do they see it as a problem?
- Motivation of parents
- School attendance
- Characteristics of their bullied experiences

Talking with the Bully:

Important Considerations

- He/she doesn't want to get in trouble.
- Power has its rewards.
- Will want to know who told on him/her
- Bullies tend to minimize victim suffering
- Be respectful, be non-judgmental, build rapport.
- To bully, he/she has to have a set of beliefs that allows him/her to violate another's rights.
- Learn about parents and their potential reactions to this issue and to their child.

Gathering Relevant Information:

Characteristics

- Beliefs about the acceptability of using aggression
- Perspective taking abilities (i.e., how does their aggression affect others, did their victims suffer, are there positive and negative consequences to bullying and what do they believe they are)
- What are parents beliefs about these same issues and how do they respond to their child's bullying? Do they see it as a problem?
- Level of impulsivity and observed ability to control aggression and anger
- Social status at school and home
- Parent motivation and involvement
- Strengths, leadership qualities, prosocial activities

What Can Be Done?

Prevention Strategies:

Taking an Umbrella Before it Rains

The School

Considerations

- Classroom Curriculum
- School-based program
- Fostering prosocial behaviour
- Developing a mentorship program
- Planning for identified children
- Parent involvement in School
- Considering the Bystander

Obstacles for Schools

- Adults are purposefully excluded from bully-victim situations, by the bullies, the bullied, and the bystanders.
- Student-staff ratio
- The reaction of parents when they find out that their child is being bullied at school.
- The reaction of parents when they are told their child is bullying others.
- The speed, variety, and frequency of bullying incidents

What can be done in the school?

Larger Scale

- Set and promote a clear school philosophy
- Give direction to bystanders
- Educate and inform guardians about the nature of bullying, the obstacles faced by the school, and the openness to a cooperative approach once becoming aware of bullying
- Gather information on bullying at your school (where, when, and how it is done, using class discussions, surveys, etc.)
- Develop organized, supervised activities during unstructured times (i.e., recess, lunch)
- Set up parent-staff think tanks and include some parents of bullies and bullied

What can be done in the classroom?

Smaller Scale

- Devote regular time in the classroom to talk about bullying, respect, safety, human rights and dignity.
- Arrange seating so that children are safer. Bullies in the front, closer to the teacher, harder to bully.
- Consider the level of your tolerance of classroom behaviour and expressed respect. Should one intervene on minor comments made by students?
- Plan for unstructured moments in class. Should students form their own groups for classroom activities?

What Can Be Done?

Tailoring Interventions that Work: Don't Use a Shovel to Rake the Lawn

Helping the Bully

Interventions with Bullies

Dealing with Aggression and Modifying Beliefs?

- Challenge beliefs about acceptability through development of perspective-taking skills, empathy, involve parents in sending clear messages that this behaviour is unacceptable, consider role of teacher in doing the same.
- Help child and family develop rules of appropriate conduct with clear negative consequences for bullying. Help parents coordinate efforts with teachers to offer greater monitoring and reporting of bullying. (Goal is to modify the bully's beliefs that bullying results in positive outcomes)
- Discuss prosocial uses of social popularity and strength. (i.e., leadership roles, supporting weaker peers).

Caution

Know the bully and what he/she is capable of. If the bully is dangerous one may need to take a different approach (i.e., involving the police).

What Can Be Done?

Tailoring Interventions that Work: Don't Use a Shovel to Rake the Lawn

Helping the Bullied Child

Support

(Message: I am not alone!)

- Work on self-esteem - identify strengths
- Provide with opportunities to express emotions and receive emotional support for sadness, fear, anger, shame, anxiety
- Role-play and strategize how to problem solve as a way of helping child feel more prepared
- Education about motivation of bullying so as to reduce self-deprecation
- Practice relaxation techniques (i.e., deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation)

Presentation Style

(Message: **Get your entertainment elsewhere**)

- Develop confident presentation (posture, voice, eye-contact, etc.)
- Anxiety management/ Relaxation training
- Reduce reactivity and increase tolerance and flexibility by exposing child to a steady diet of novel experiences
- Practice reactions to criticism and teasing
- Problem-solving skills to come up with solutions to reactivity
- Practice producing and reacting to non-verbal cues
- Assertiveness Skills development

Friendship Making Skills

(Message: There is strength in numbers!)

- Principles of good friendships (honesty, sharing, perspective taking, taking turns)
- General social skills training
- Conflict resolution skills development
- Have child identify potential friends or alliances at school and ways to encourage these relationships
- Organize play dates after school
- Participate in extra-curricular activities
- Have child identify potential friends or alliances at school and ways to encourage these relationships

Additional Considerations

- Prepare child for initial failure due to his/her reputation and help establish supports to continually encourage persistent use of new skills
- Involve teachers in treatment by encouraging them to provide greater monitoring and feedback
- Involve family in all levels of treatment and provide support to parents with regard to their worries about their child and potential sadness and guilt for not being able to protect their child

Caution

Be careful about setting the victim up for repeated failures by switching schools or settings before he/she has developed skills that can reduce the likelihood of further victimization

Social Bullying

Social Bullying: How to Help

- Identify the ring leaders and their supporters.
- Increase awareness within the classroom and within the school (i.e., use material such as the DVD, class discussions, special books designed for the classroom)
- With child, search out other children being ostracized and band together for support
- Consider getting an older or popular buddy that would be willing to include child in activities during unsupervised times
- Encourage child to develop friendships outside of school where people don't know his/her reputation and will therefore treat him/her more fairly

DVD Resource

It's a Girl's World
(2004, National Film Board of Canada)

A Few Final Thoughts

Sort of

Additional Thoughts

- Make bullying costly for the bully by designing poor outcomes, working with bystanders, creating an atmosphere of intolerance of bullying.
- Listen for subtle comments in class, and exclusions from groups and activities
- On the playground, look for larger groups of frenzied kids (bullies like an audience)
- Think about what happens when you turn your back or leave the room. Can the classroom be better arranged?

A Few Final Thoughts

Honest!

Principles to Keep in Mind

- Don't try to remove power, redirect it.
- Even the playing field when you can.
- Make people accountable for their actions and inactions. (Class discussions, private discussions)
- Where possible, help turn unresolvable pseudo-conflicts into resolvable conflicts.
- Make sure you do as you say and say as you do. Be Consistent with your message.

“Bullying is just a normal part of growing up.”

Movie Clip

Bang Bang You're Dead
(2002, Paramount Pictures)

Resources

- Bully Busters: A Teacher's Manual (Newman, Horne, Bartolomucci, 2000)
- The Bully Free Classroom (Beane, 1999)
- Bullying: Deal with it before push comes to shove (Slavens, 2003)
- Bullies are a Pain in the Brain (Romain, 1997)
- Odd Girl Out (Simmons, 2002)
- Stop Picking on Me (Thomas, 2000)
- The Parent's Book About Bullying (Voors, 2000)
- Easing the Teasing (Freedman, 2002)
- A Good Friend (Herron & Peter, 1998)
- It's A Girl's World, National Film Board of Canada (1-800-267-7710)



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