

Behaviour Strategies

HELP FILE

Bullying

There are many books written about bullying and there are always some available in good bookstores.

This vast topic has a rich and varied history but the following points will I hope, assist teachers with this difficult and emotive problem.

Understanding why children bully / victimise others is of key importance in effecting change in this behaviour.

- **A child's behaviour is a message of how they feel and strongly reflects their ability to cope with the world. If children are not feeling right or are not coping, you will see it immediately in their behaviour.**
- **Look out for behaviour change in your pupils! Bullying is very frequently what's happening. Become aware when you see noticeable changes in behaviour – pick up on the message and ask yourself, "What's going on here? Is it bullying?"**
- **The need to bully others is centred on the experience of being hurt. A large number of bullies have already been bullied; by peers, other adults, family members etc., and their sense of belonging in this world comes from making others feel the hurt they feel. The bully always feels better when acting-out in this way and by far the most common feature of bullies is their poor self-image.**
- **Hurt can come from a wide spectrum – from a sense of failure or inadequacy at school to having been themselves physically or emotionally bullied or victimised. Sometimes a bully's behaviour can arise from feeling neglected or unnoticed. Get inside the bully's head. Ask yourself, "What's so wrong in this person's life that they do this?"**
- **On an empathic level, be aware that bullies have a strong unconscious need for others to feel as they do. This makes them feel OK, -- it's alright to feel hurt ... when I see others hurting I feel better. Also, Rudolf Dreikurs speaks about the unconscious goal of revenge, and the bullying / victimising cycle.**
- **The thing to keep in mind here is that one normally wants to pay back the bully with a bit of his own medicine, but as Dreikurs points out; revenge begets revenge and the cycle of revenge and punishment becomes a vicious spiral. It is important to remember that a permanent change of a bully's behaviour will only come from not feeling hurt. Children who bully others do not need to be hurt, rather they need to understand where their hurt comes from and for the hurt to be replaced with a sense of positive self regard. But along with this, bullying behaviour must be stopped.**

Bullying and victimising is not acceptable in schools and must be stopped.

The school and the teacher have a responsibility to intervene with bullying and victimising as children do not have the insight or skills to cope with these situations. Unless an intervention occurs, the bully often remains a bully, although the behaviour generally becomes more covert. We meet bullies in adult life. The behaviour works for them, so they continue it.

Managing bullying requires that the bullying behaviour be firmly admonished and controlled

Bullies must face the consequences of their behaviour. They need to be removed from the social environment in which they bully e.g. the playground. Only returning when they are able to show they can behave in an acceptable manner. That is, they have learned to take control of their behaviour and have learned not to bully. If the bullying is occurring only outside of school, the relevant authority must take the controlling action.

Counselling is essential and should be compulsory

Part of the process of rehabilitation should involve counselling by a teacher who understands bullying and is able to assist the child to get to the root cause of their behaviour and to learn to change that behaviour. A number of schools in which I work are training senior students in peer mediation and this can be extremely helpful in lowering the amount of bullying and victimisation that occurs within schools.

Children who bully / victimise need to see themselves differently, with opportunities to behave differently

Therefore equally important to counselling is "catching them doing it right", - changing the feeling of hurt to a positive feeling. e.g. instead of being seen as the class "dummy", being seen as someone with something to contribute to the class and acknowledged as such. Teachers have many opportunities to allow children to be seen in a different light. Offer opportunities for the child to show that they do not need to bully, but rather to act as a positive member of the group, supportive etc. of others. They often respond amazingly to being given class or school responsibilities.

The victim also needs to learn to act differently and be given opportunities to shine and show strength

On the other side you have the victim who also needs to learn not to be a "victim". They need to acquire assertive skills. Also to view themselves positively and feel a sense of worth and be given opportunities to shine. They may also need counselling.

Bullying and victimisation require that the school, the teacher, the parent, the peers, but most importantly bully and victim, take responsibility to learn to act differently

Both parties need support, from teachers and parents and peers. Both the bully and the victim need to acquire skills both assertive and supportive. They need to be "caught doing it right". They need to feel better about themselves, to feel more able and more worthwhile as people. A child with a sense of worth and positive self-esteem has no need to hurt others. **Jenny Mackay**