

**HOW CAN TEACHERS MEET
THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN
IN THEIR CLASSROOM
WHO ARE EITHER BULLIED
OR WHO BULLY OTHERS**

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I will try to put forward a few points of view which might be helpful in dealing with this ever present troublesome problem in schools.

Definition:

Bullying is long standing violence, either physical or psychological, conducted by an individual or a group, and directed against an individual who is not able to defend him/herself in an actual situation. (Roland, 1987).

Introduction:

It is not uncommon for people to regard bullying as a natural process, part of the inevitable and turbulent process of growing up. The common perception is that by enduring it and fighting back, boys and girls are toughened up and are then better prepared for life. Recent research has, however, proved that those long held beliefs are ill founded. The fact of the matter is that bullying should not have any place in a well organized school.

In the past ten or twelve years what has captured in a major way the attention of teachers, school authorities, psychologists, sociologists and the media is the dramatic increase in the stress and strain on teachers, and headteachers and the problem of indiscipline or disruption in the classroom. Unfortunately this imbalance of over-attention on teacher stress and pupil disruption in the classroom has been to the detriment of coming to grips with bullying in school.

The victim:

Bullying can take many forms. For example it can be physical, like a child being pushed, beaten, thumped or kicked. It can also be psychological when the victim is subjected to threats or indeed when the bully resorts to name-calling, which can be very offensive, and distressful for the victim.

Parents and teachers have to be always on their guard and on the "look out" so to speak, for tell-tale signs of bullying. The victim's behaviour can at times be the only clue that teachers and parents have about what is happening, because of the code of silence so often maintained about bullying.

For example the victim may:

- *be frightened of walking to or from school.*
- *be continually making excuses to avoid going to school.*
- *be doing poorly in their homework.*
- *regularly have clothes or books or schoolwork torn or destroyed.*
- *become withdrawn.*
- *cry themselves to sleep.*
- *begin wetting the bed, etc.*

The bully:

There are three main types of bullies: viz. the *aggressive*, the *anxious*, and the *passive bully*. I will deal with the *aggressive* type of bully as most bullies fit into this category.

Psychologists give a variety of reasons why children resort to bullying but agree on some of the following causes.

For example these children when growing up often have:

- *felt insecure, humiliated, inadequate.*
- *been bullied by parents or siblings.*
- *been physically, emotionally or sexually abused.*
- *not been allowed to show feelings.*
- *been subjected to enormous pressure to succeed.*
- *felt no sense of accomplishment.*
- *low self-esteem.*

From this analysis it shows that both victim and bully need urgent help and guidance. Parents and teachers play a vital role in children's lives while at school. But parents and teachers working in partnership form a strong team in enhancing self-esteem and self-worth in children and helping them to develop to their full potential.

The teacher:

In the light of the findings and research on the subject under review, there is absolutely no doubt that teachers hold the key to the successful prevention and treatment of bullying in school. The very fact that no school is immune to bullying is all the more reason for teachers to be vigilant and on the look-out for tell-tale signs. As stated already both victim and bully are in need of help and counselling, and as Andrew Meller says: "*They are not suffering from a disease but are involved in complex social situations, each of which is unique and requires individual action*".

Victims need to be reassured that they are not alone and that the teacher is their trusted friend, ready to listen and always ready to help them. The primary teacher is in a unique position, given that he/she spend over five hours each school day in the classroom with their particular class. Every effort should be made by the teacher to create an atmosphere in the classroom whereby the pupils feel free to express their feelings. The dedicated, vigilant and experienced teacher will quickly detect any form of bullying that may be prevalent in his/her class under such a relaxed atmosphere.

The bully – Causes – Ways of preventing bullying:

A body of psychologists (Tattum, Lane, Besag, O'Moore and Elliott), just to mention a few, believe that in order to effect any real change in bullying behaviour one must tackle the root cause of the problem. As a result of their findings they are at one in believing that *low self-esteem* is a major contributory factor in bullying. In fact this lends support to the existing strong body of evidence which indicates that self-esteem is the single most influential factor in determining behaviour. (Burns, 1982). Therefore it naturally follows that the teacher who *enhances self-esteem* in his/her pupils is going a long way in alleviating and preventing bullying, both in the classroom and school yard.

According to Burns, 1982, and Lawrence, 1978, the teachers with high self-esteem, have been found to

produce pupils with high self-esteem, but the converse has also been found to be true, according to the same experts.

The curriculum:

The implementation of a curriculum which meets the needs of the pupils, both *academically and socially* will help to teach pupils to have a *positive* view of themselves. And this includes *competence, self-worth and belonging*. (Thomas, 1980, Burns 1982, Lawrence, 1987, Wheldall and Marreth, 1989). Furthermore the same body of Psychologists believes *that the teacher who overlooks the emotional and social needs of the child in the classroom, and concentrates all efforts on achieving academic results are sowing the seeds in well prepared ground for bullying*.

Summarising:

Bullying is simply unacceptable. Even though it has probably happened to parents, there are no circumstances in which it can be condoned. We know that bullying interferes with social development, it can hinder the child's ability to perform at school, and at worst it can be a major contributory factor to serious childhood problems. It does not build a child's character, nor is it an inevitable part of growing up. It is an unpleasant and at times a devastating experience that can be controlled by vigilant teachers and parents.

It is known for a fact that bullying occurs in or around the school, and this is the easiest place to stop it. A well organised and vigilant staff who take supervision of the school yard seriously can be instrumental in keeping bullying to a minimum. A well disciplined and good listening teacher who not only listens to what pupils say, but also to what is not verbalised, can detect bullying easily and take positive steps to prevent it.

Finally, it is important to remember that children do not seek to be bullied, and being bullied is not an indicator of weakness. ●