

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* A social skills enrichment programme for primary students



Lesson 13: responding to bullying behaviours

This lesson alerted your child to aspects about bullying; how to recognise a bully and bullying behaviours, and how to skilfully respond without giving the bully satisfying feedback. It is not possible to isolate your child from bullying encounters, but it is possible to take a few steps to sharpen their awareness and responses to this damaging behaviour.

Bullying =

“desire to hurt + hurtful action + power imbalance + repetition + unjust use of power + evident enjoyment by aggressor + sense of being oppressed by the victim” (Rigby, 2004). Teach your child the difference between bullying, being treated unfairly and not being able to get their own way. There are worlds of difference!

The role of the bystander to bullying

A new understanding about responses to bullying behaviours has emerged. It is no longer acceptable for anyone to stand by and witness someone being bullied without doing something about it. Everyone in the school and local community has an obligation to intervene in a way that keeps them safe.

Prepare for it

A casual response to a bully can go a long way to help a victim look as though they are resilient. Bullies often target a characteristic they think will be another's weakness. Alert your child to the fact that how they respond will either deflect the behaviour or encourage it. Many children need continuous coaching to carry this off with poise;

The quick answer

Help them rehearse two or three quick replies so that when they are 'put down' they might roll their eyes and say, "Yeah, you'd be right" or "None of your bees-wax" or "Whatever" or "Takes one to know one" and walk away.

Dog poo on the shoe

As somebody draws close to your child and is committed to annoy or tease them they need to twitch their nose a little and look hard at the teaser's feet. Help them to rehearse saying, "Oh, something stinks. You've got dog poo on your shoe!" Then walk away.

The teasing shield

This can be a powerful skin-thickener for children with strong imaginations. Help them to practice surrounding themselves with an imaginary tease-proof shield. The shield cannot be penetrated by hurtful words; they just bounce back at the bully. Teach them how to power it up with their knowledge that bullying is wrong and bullies actually need helping. Help them to practice maintaining a relaxed, smiling face as you deliver a barrage of mean words. With practice, this can become a very powerful defense.

The smart advantage!

As raised previously, the act of staying calm gives our brains the best chance to make the best choices. Teach your child that when someone says something hurtful or threatening they have choices to deal with the problem; smile, shrug, walk away, tell a joke, ignore, run, roll your eyes, duck for cover, flap your wings, be quiet or say you agree. Teach them to press the 'delete key' in their mind or to shrink those they are



having trouble with little babies with smelly nappies. In this way they can say, "It just doesn't matter", and it really doesn't.

Caution: these ideas are not concerned with the exchange of insults. Exchanging insults will be to your child's disadvantage. They are offered as an offhand way to give an unexpected response, recover a little control and disengage.

Talk about bullying

Conversation about bullies and bullying behaviours sends a signal to all children that 'bully psychology' is understood. Books like 'Queen Bees and Wannabes' by Rosalind Wiseman and films like "Mean Girls" have contributed to our understandings by popularising the psychology behind bullying. Let your children know they can talk to you, teachers, friends at school, friends outside of school, other trusted parents, a relative or a caregiver. Talking about it is healthy. It is not the same as 'telling tales.'

Listen

Avoid rushing in, trying to fix the problem or blame someone. As you listen the opportunity to understand the situation presents itself, and as your child talks they are better able to grasp what has taken place. It also gives them a chance to generate ideas to repair the situation.

Bullying is WRONG

All children have a right to feel safe at school and at home. All schools have bullying policies. Let your child know this. There are a number of excellent websites for adults and children to learn how to cope with bullying;

Mainly for children -

<http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au>

<http://www.caper.com.au>

<http://www.headroom.net.au/cubby/index.html>

<http://www.kids.novita.org.au>

Mainly for parents -

<http://www.antibullying.net/>

<http://www.cyh.com>

<http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Bullying>

<http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/exchange/9/bullying.htm>

<http://www.lfcc.on.ca/bully.htm>

<http://www.42explore2.com/bully.htm>

What to do when bullying happens

All schools take bullying seriously. Usually, a written plan is developed to help everyone recover and learn. A plan often follows this layout;

First, the nature and severity of the difficulty is clarified.

Decisions are made about how the victim and bully can be best supported. The victim's spirits may be buoyed by assisting them to develop a network of sensitive peer confidants. The bully may need support to learn how to interact in more acceptable ways. And, if other students have been involved, a set of procedures are created so that they know what to do to recover the situation.

A determination is made to see if the victim could safely participate with the bully in a process of restoration. This is an ideal way to move forward.

The victim is kept informed about what is happening. Frequently, schools respond suitably to bullying behaviour, but the victim is left out of the information loop. They then feel powerless and believe nothing has happened to rectify the situation.

Methods to monitor the interactions of both students, especially at break times, are arranged. By doing this progress can be measured.

Opportunities are developed for both students to 'check in' with a teacher or counsellor to help monitor progress.

Sometimes help is required in the forms of a social skills training or assertiveness training programs. The victim may need to develop 'fitting in' skills and the bully may need to learn how to use their need to control in a more pro-social way.

A time is made to meet, review and decide on whether the strategies put in place are helping. If the bullying problem continues, despite committed and thoughtful interventions, it is sensible to consider a change of class, or perhaps a change of school. The evidence suggests that most students who have suffered bullying are not bullied in new situations (Rigby, 2002a).

'Guide sheet: how to deal with bully behaviours'

You will notice this handout in your child's folder. Not only is it useful to base a conversation around, but it is something that can be used to refer back to in the future.



"Friendship is the golden thread that ties the heart of the world together."

John Evelyn