



The Bully Defence Strategy

In Australia, one in four students (between year 4 and 9) report being bullied every few weeks or more often (AEA 2010). For children with special learning needs the chance of being bullied is higher than other children. Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who are experiencing difficulties with communication and interaction with peers are typically included in this category or are at greater risk of being bullied because of these difficulties.

Our definitions for bullying and cyber bullying align to AEA (2010) definitions that describe bullying and cyber bullying as:

- *Bullying* is repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behavior that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons.
- *Cyber bullying* is repeated verbal, social or psychological behavior that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons' that 'is carried out through information and communication technologies'.

The short-term effects on children who are being bullied include anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, insecurity, social withdrawal/isolation, psychological distress, difficulty in concentrating and school phobia. However, bullying also has an impact for children in the child longer term. Long-term problems generally experienced include: inability to maintain personal relationships, a higher level of depression, mental health issues and problems with emotional well being.

What kind of support is available for victims of bullying?

Peers do not generally support victims of bullying. This is typically bystanders are scared of the being bullied themselves or they lack the confidence and strategies to intervene. Lodge and Frydenberg (2005) argue that 'teaching peers strategies to use when they witness bullying could be an intervention that effects change at the peer group level'. Moreover, education for bullies is also important for changing bullying behaviours. Nevertheless, these strategies are unlikely to have an immediate effect on victims, so it becomes crucial to teach victims how to manage and address bullying issues.

To be able to support children to manage bullying, it is important to understand the two types of bullying: *Overt* and *Covert* bullying. Overt bullying is also called direct bullying. It contains physical incidents such as kicking, hitting and verbal attacks. While covert bullying is also called *indirect bullying*. Covert bullying is often very difficult for others to notice. This is because the intention of the bully is to exclude the victim, attack social reputation, peer relationships and self-esteem. Cyber bullying falls under the category of covert bullying. Cyber bullying dissolves the boundaries between home and school and therefore the victim does not get a break from the bully at any time and place.

The Bully Defence Strategy further defines overt and covert bullying to teach children the appropriate strategies for dealing with bullying. The further four categories of bullying used in the Bully Defence Strategy are:

1. Physical bullying
2. Verbal bullying
3. Indirect bullying
4. Cyber bullying

These categories are designed to not only teach children how to deal with bullying but also enables the recognition of the various forms of bullying when it occurs. This means that children are better placed to protect themselves when they are being bullied or provide support to a peer who is being bullied.

References

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