

3rd Edition



BULLY-PROOFING YOUR SCHOOL

**Working With
Victims and Bullies**
in Elementary Schools

Carla Garrity, Ph.D.

Kathryn Jens, Ph.D.

William Porter, Ph.D.

Nancy Sager, M.A.

Cam Short-Camilli, L.C.S.W.

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Preface

Aggressive behavior in students has long been a disruptive element in the educational arena. At a time when violence is so prevalent in our society, bullies have become a (sometimes lethal) threat to the physical and emotional safety of students. Many of us can probably recall personal or professional experiences with bullies. The recall of these memories is intense and awakens strong emotions, especially of fear and helplessness. The pervasiveness of the fear results in a feeling of powerlessness. Bullies bring this imbalance of power and fear to schools, as-well. After suffering unchecked bullying, self-destructive acts or desperate retaliation with lethal weapons is not uncommon.

A most discouraging situation is occurring in many schools today. Many children are unwilling to turn to staff for help with bullying because they-believe that not only will the staff fail to help them but that telling will make the situation worse. Although we as educators would like to believe that we can simply send children to handle these problems on their own, many need adult support to develop the coping skills necessary to protect themselves from the attack of bullies. The old adage “Just-hit ‘em back” is one of the myriad of unsuccessful myths surrounding bullying behavior and is in fact probably one of the most dangerous strategies with a true bully. However, there are many approaches that can defuse the situation and lower the potential for aggression. For instance, just having more adults among students has been shown to influence bullying behavior.

Eighty-five percent of the students in schools are neither bullies nor victims. This “caring majority” of students, though, observe the behavior and interactions of bullies, live with an uncomfortable feeling about their own safety, and often believe that if they get involved the aggressive actions will be transferred to them. Fear and power struggles are a reality in-elementary schools, and one of the goals within schools must be to bring these issues in line so they are manageable. The actions and influence of this caring majority are a powerful resource with which to maintain the value of kindness and decency. They are the untapped reservoirs of strength, the leverage for impacting change in creating a safe school environment for all children.

The *Bully-Proofing Your School* program operates on many levels within a-school. It is our belief that developing the caring majority’s intervention skills so they feel confident to be involved is crucial. Their power is-implicit by number, and explicit by positive acts of kindness toward victims. By developing a strong, reinforced identity, they can help set the-tone of a school and dictate its operating environment. This group can give strength and support to the victims and defuse the power of the bullies.

Bullies can occupy an inordinate amount of time from staff, students, and parents. Swift and precise adult interventions that avoid power positions and clearly establish bullying behaviors as unacceptable can prevent the wounds of repeated victimization. Escalating direct power struggles with bullies is exhausting and generally not effective. Intervening calmly and consistently before bullying behavior escalates can strip the bully’s power.

Many standard curriculum packages fail after three to four months because there is an expectation inherent to them that all staff members can-and will intervene in the same manner. A lack of congruence between an individual and a curriculum can cause the program to be undermined—one becomes uncomfortable with the new way and thus returns to one’s old style. However, this will not be the case with this program. We strongly

believe, and have designed this program around this tenet, that the acknowledgment of personal styles up front is crucial in formulating a team ethic comprised of multiple approaches achieving the same goal. Teachers need to identify and accept the skills they already have that can be implemented in a focused fashion to impact aggressive behavior, support the strength of the caring majority, and soothe the wounds of victims. The wheel doesn't need to be reinvented, just to be mounted and balanced.

The community should also be included in recognizing and supporting a “no-bullying” position. Addressing bullying behavior requires strong support from parents to prevent fractionalizing of the community. Understanding some basic tenets, such as that all parents believe their children are the victims and that very rarely are children self-confessed bullies, helps clarify the picture and enables collaborative relationships with parents to stop bullying.

Developing a comprehensive approach will lead to successful results in identifying and intervening with bullies. As a supplement to the *Administrator's Guide to Staff Development* and the *Teacher's Manual and Lesson Plans*, this book presents two curricula designed to be used in individual or small group formats: one for interviewing with bullies, the other for understanding and supporting the victims. These activities focus on kindness and inclusion for all students and, when used in conjunction with the rest of the *Bully-Proofing Your School* curriculum, will help change the balance of power within a school.

Chapter Three

Supporting the Victims

Selecting Students for Intervention

These sessions are suggested for any victimized child who could benefit from individualized support. In particular, these sessions should be offered to students who may require special education services or are considered at “high risk” of being victimized.

Effective intervention strategies against bullying used for Special Education Needs (SEN) students should include help with initiating and maintaining relationships as well as with developing coping strategies against teasing and bullying. A study by Jean Hodson (1992) in Sheffield, England, found, from interviews and observations, that students with SEN were teased significantly more than mainstream students (non-SEN) and formed fewer friendships. It was also found that mainstream students showed a preference for social interaction with other mainstream peers rather than with students with SEN. Research shows that students who are alone at playtime or do not have many friends or protective peer relationships stand the risk of being victimized.

This study indicates that SEN students may be at greater risk of being bullied by others. There are three factors enhancing the risk of being a victim. Characteristics such as clumsiness or other disabilities may be used as a pretext for bullying. A SEN student in the mainstream or integrated setting may be less well integrated socially and lack the protection against bullying that friendship gives. Lastly, some students with behavioral problems may act in an aggressive way and become provocative victims. Suggestions for identifying students who might benefit from the individual/small group victim intervention presented in this chapter include:

- ▶ Classroom teacher referral.
- ▶ Parent referral.
- ▶ Support personnel (e.g., special education teacher, counselor, school psychologist or social worker, teacher assistant) referral.
- ▶ Assessing the needs of inhibited or shy students.
- ▶ Assessing the needs of students who have no friendships.
- ▶ Assessing the needs of students who have suffered a loss of significant magnitude or trauma (such as abuse or death of a parent).
- ▶ Assessing the needs of students who are new to the school and not-making an adequate adjustment after a few months. (These students are of higher risk if they also have another risk factor, such as a learning disability.)
- ▶ Assessing the needs of students demonstrating physical weakness or petite size, especially in boys.

All children need help with bullying that is in the moderate to severe range (see *Figure 4* on p. 16). But some children require help with even mild bullying. These children include:

- ▶ Children who are shy or who lack social skills.
- ▶ Children who are isolated.
- ▶ Children who are learning disabled.
- ▶ Children who are repeatedly bullied.
- ▶ Children who have experienced a past trauma.
- ▶ Children who are using money or toys as bribes to protect themselves.

DEFINITION

Characteristics of Victims:

In general, characteristics of victims may include:

- ▶ Fragile self-esteem.
- ▶ Poor social skills.
- ▶ Learning disabilities.
- ▶ Social isolation/shyness.
- ▶ Anxious/insecure/cry easily.
- ▶ Bullied repeatedly.
- ▶ Suffered previous trauma.
- ▶ Emotional difficulties.
- ▶ Behavioral difficulties.
- ▶ Attentional problems.
- ▶ Physically weak.

Bullying Behaviors Chart

Mild	Moderate		Severe		
Physical Aggression:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pushing ▶ Shoving ▶ Spitting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Kicking ▶ Hitting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Defacing property ▶ Stealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Physical acts that are demeaning and humiliating, but not bodily harmful (e.g., de-panting) ▶ Locking in a closed or confined space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Physical violence against family or friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Threatening with a weapon ▶ Inflicting bodily harm
Social Alienation:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Gossiping ▶ Embarrassing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Setting up to look foolish ▶ Spreading rumors about 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ethnic slurs ▶ Setting up to take the blame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Publicly humiliating (e.g., revealing personal information) ▶ Excluding from group ▶ Social rejection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Maliciously excluding ▶ Manipulating social order to achieve rejection ▶ Malicious rumor-mongering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Threatening with total isolation by peer group
Verbal Aggression:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Mocking ▶ Name-calling ▶ Dirty looks ▶ Taunting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Teasing about clothing or possessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Teasing about appearance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Intimidating telephone calls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Verbal threats of aggression against property or possessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Verbal threats of violence or of inflicting bodily harm
Intimidation:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Threatening to reveal personal information ▶ Graffiti ▶ Publicly challenging you to do something 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Defacing property or clothing ▶ Playing a dirty trick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Taking possessions (e.g., lunch, clothing, toys) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Extortion ▶ Sexual/racial taunting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Threats of using coercion against family or friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coercion ▶ Threatening with a weapon

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Figure 4

Problem Cards for the Problem-Solving Game

PROBLEM CARD

1.

Jim cuts in line to go to lunch right in front of you.

PROBLEM CARD

2.

You and your best friend usually play together at recess. But for the past four days, your best friend has been playing with another group of kids.

PROBLEM CARD

3.

During a group project in class, Leslie starts arguing with you about how to spell a certain word.

PROBLEM CARD

4.

You and several other kids from your class are playing a board game during free time. Jeff cheats and takes an extra turn.

Grades K–5

Bully-Proofing Your School

**Working With Victims and Bullies
in Elementary Schools**

Now In a New Edition—The Most Effective Way to Make Your Elementary School a Safe, Bully-Free Place!

Countless school districts across the country have used *Bully-Proofing Your School* to create a supportive environment for their students, one free of fear, violence, and intimidation. *Bully-Proofing* is a comprehensive program designed to teach educators how to recognize bullying, how to shift power away from the bullies, how to prevent future incidents of bullying, and, importantly, how to nurture the values of kindness and decency in their classrooms. But *Bully-Proofing* is not a vague, “touchy-feely” system based only in theory—it’s a practical, easy-to-implement blueprint for decreasing physical and emotional aggression by mobilizing the “caring majority,” the 85% of students who are neither victim nor bully.

This third edition of *Bully-Proofing* builds on the strengths of previous versions by expanding treatment of staff training, systems interventions, student instruction, and victim support.

The *Working With Victims and Bullies* manual is intended to help school personnel understand the psychology of bullies and their victims. The manual lays out intervention strategies aimed at both supporting the victims of bullying and at helping bullies develop the skills needed to change their behavior. A guide to helpful books and videos and several pages of reproducible materials are included.

An Administrator’s Guide to Staff Development and a *Teacher’s Manual and Lesson Plans* are also available.

Bully-Proofing Your School will ensure an educational climate that is both positive and caring, an environment in which everyone—even the ex-bullies!—can learn without fear or humiliation.



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