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Introduction

THE ISSUE OF BULLYING AND SCHOOL SAFETY

Increasingly, youth across the nation are being confronted in their classrooms, in school hallways, and in their neighborhoods with fists, with knives, and with guns. Although statistics show the incidence of youth violence has decreased since 1997, nearly three million violent crimes still occur on or near school campuses each year, with increasingly tragic results (U.S. Department of Justice 1997).

From 1998 to 2000, students in California, Michigan, Colorado, Florida, and Arkansas have been affected by youth violence in their schools. Classmates and, in some cases, school faculty have been killed. Youth involved in these cases share few commonalities: the school violence occurred in rural, urban, and suburban settings, and it was perpetrated by children from both two-parent and single-parent households and from every socioeconomic status. In 2001, the Secret Service released its comprehensive report on youth violence in schools, exposing the possibility that violent youth actually did share a connection: being the victims of bullying in school. Charles Andrew Williams, a fifteen year old who reported that he was teased by peers, told friends of his plans to carry out violence at his school in Santee, California. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold of Columbine, Colorado, reportedly endured endless bullying and teasing from the “jocks” at their school and targeted the athletes during their violent rampage. In instances in Littleton, Colorado, and Pearl, Mississippi, victimization of the violent perpetrators by bullies supports the Secret Service report and has created the perception of a strong causal connection between bully-victim relationships and youth violence in

THE NEED FOR ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMMING

Increasingly, school administrators and faculty are faced with the new responsibility of creating safer schools in addition to their traditional mission of developing academic goals and helping children reach them. Anti-bullying programming, like other conflict resolution education, emphasizes developing students' social skills and their abilities to collaborate during conflict situations. Researchers have found that developing children's social skills has a positive impact on academic achievement, particularly with at-risk children (Johnson and Johnson 1987). Hence, support for social skills programming in the school is key for further developing children's cognitive capabilities in the classroom.

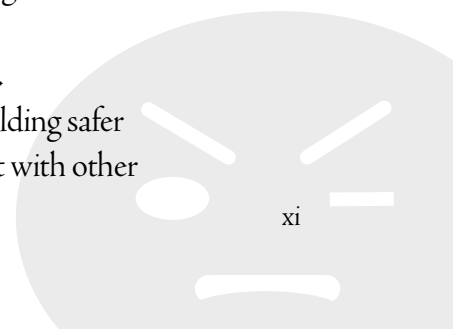
Furthermore, studies have indicated that children today are often afraid to attend school, with 18 percent too afraid to go to school on a regular basis. Approximately 7 percent of these children fear attending school due to incidents with bullies. According to the Office of the Attorney General (July 2000), 80 percent of adolescents reported being bullied, and 71 percent of students reported that teachers or other adults in the classroom ignored bullying incidents. Clearly, social skills development programs that emphasize constructive problem-solving strategies for bullies, victims, and witnesses benefit students' current and future school success.

** Eighteen percent of children fear going to school, 7 percent fear going because of previous incidents with bullies.*

ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMMING WITHIN A SAFE SCHOOL CONTEXT

Education programming targeting anti-bullying has been successful in isolation in countries such as Great Britain. However, much of the work has focused on reducing bullying behaviors and not on developing the social skills of victims or changing the behavior of witnesses. Anti-bullying programming has often been viewed as a separate social skills training program rather than a piece of building safer schools.

Anti-bullying programming is an integral component for building safer schools. As such, it should always be combined and consistent with other



The Bully, Victim, and Witness Relationship Defined



BULLYING DEFINED

Bullying is most commonly defined as a set of aggressive behaviors toward others that are characterized by three criteria:

1. Bullying is intentional aggression that may be physical, verbal, or more indirect (relational).
2. Bullying exposes victims to repeated aggression over an extended period of time.
3. Bullying occurs within an interpersonal relationship characterized by a real or perceived imbalance of power. Such power may originate from physical size or strength, or from psychological power, with children who have great peer influence exhibiting greater power in bully-victim relationships.

Physical, verbal, relational, and sexual bullying behaviors may occur over an extended period of time in the classroom, hallways, playground, or traveling to and from school. Although most bully-victim relationships involve only one of the types of bullying, some bullies will incorporate physical, verbal, sexual, and/or relational behaviors within their relationships. Figure 1.1 summarizes and defines types of bullying behaviors.



BULLYING BEHAVIORS



Bullying behavior is intentional aggression that may be physical, verbal, relational, or sexual.

Physical

Hitting, Kicking, Punching, Pushing, Choking

Every day for two weeks in the beginning of the school year, Ryan would come home with bruises on his arms and neck. He told me that he played football at lunch and that it always got a little rough. I thought he must have stopped playing because the bruising stopped, but one day I saw him changing out of his school uniform and he had terrible bruises on his legs and cuts around his ankles. He finally told me that kids at school were constantly kicking and hitting him in the locker room. Just the other day they decided to practice “hog tying” his feet with strapping tape. — Jannice, mother of Ryan (9)

Verbal

Threatening, Teasing, Name-Calling

My daughter Mary Jane (age 6) has to wear thick glasses as a result of recent eye surgery. She was never really popular, but now she is taunted and teased every day about the way she looks. Several students just won't leave her alone. —Meredith, mother of Mary Jane (6)

Relational

Spreading Rumors, Ostracizing/Exclusionary Behaviors

My wife and I just went through a sticky divorce, and I got sole custody of our three children. We moved a short distance from our home. My daughter (13) complained of stomach pains and didn't want to go to school. I thought she just missed her mom, but she finally told me that her classmates were avoiding her like the plague because someone started the rumor that her mother was unfit and didn't get custody because she was a drug-using prostitute. —Martin, father of Karen (13)

Sexual

Inappropriate Touching, Threatening, or Teasing that Are Sexually Harassing

My daughter, Lynette (age 12), now refuses to wear some of her new, favorite school clothes. She finally confessed that she was ridiculed in school for her clothes being too revealing. One day during gym class, some of the other girls took her favorite (dry clean only) blouse and threw it in the showers to shrink it even more. They said they were tired of my daughter getting all of the attention from the boys. —Tina, mother of Lynette (12)

Figure 1.1



SOURCES OF INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

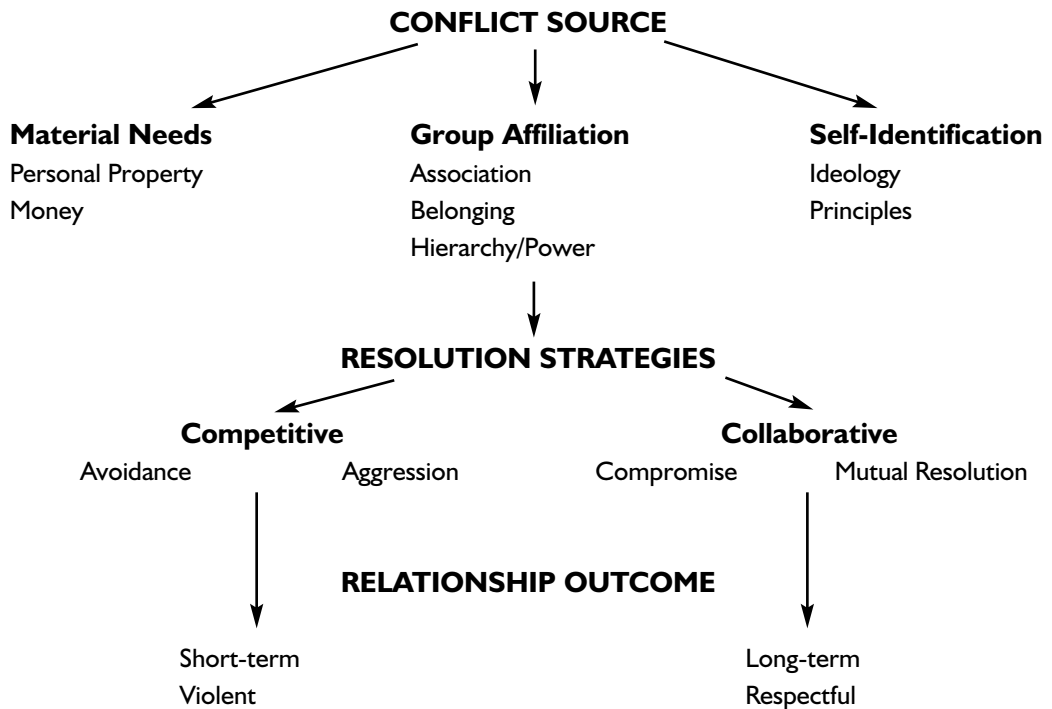
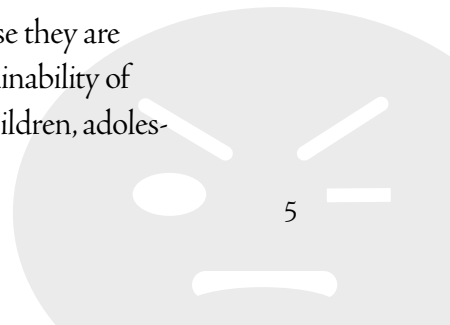


Figure 1.2

These different sources of conflict will more likely lead to different strategies of conflict resolution. Developmentally, children begin to use more sophisticated methods of conflict resolution because of the changing nature of friendship patterns and their developing cognitive capabilities for processing information. Children who oppose each other due to issues of space and property (fighting over a ball or a book) tend to resolve the conflict using competitive methods (physical aggression or giving in). This type of conflict resolution is less likely with children in a dispute over ideological /belief systems (e.g., disparity over preference of sports teams). Young children are more likely to use competitive methods of conflict resolution because they are unable to think in a highly abstract manner and because sustainability of friendships is not a priority. Unlike early elementary school children, adoles-





FORMS OF AGGRESSION



Accidental aggression includes behaviors that may be classified as accidental and occur without intent to harm or injure. Accidental aggression is not a component of bullying behavior.

Expressive aggression includes aggressive behaviors that result in a pleasurable sensory experience for the aggressor. Expressive aggressive behaviors are often not bullying behaviors.

Instrumental aggression includes behaviors used when children exert their will on another child. Aggressors engage in these behaviors not with the purposeful intent of hurting another child, but rather to get their way.

Hostile aggression is aggressive behaviors that are often premeditated and done with malicious intent to harm or injure another person. Hostile aggression is displayed during bullying behaviors.

Figure 1.3

Aggression

Although conflict and its resolution may occur with or without aggression, aggression usually does not occur without conflict. Aggression is defined as any behavior that results in physical or emotional injury to a person or animal, or one that leads to property damage or destruction. It can be verbal or physical. Not all forms of aggression are considered bullying behaviors.

Children engage in a number of different types of aggression that aren't necessarily bullying behaviors. Feshbach and Feshbach (1978) identified four different types of aggression that children express: accidental, expressive, instrumental, and hostile (see Figure 1.3).

Accidental Aggression

Accidental aggression includes behaviors that may be classified as accidental and occur without intent to harm or injure. Young children, particularly, are at risk for this type of behavior as their gross and fine motor skills are yet to be fully developed. Children frequently bump into each other getting to the drinking fountain or during play yet do not do so out of malice. Accidental aggression is not a component of bullying behavior.