

5

Bullying

■ From bullying to safety

Bullying can be one of the most difficult issues facing a school. Its consequences can be devastating to the point even of suicide. In this chapter we will explore some of the ways we have worked with episodes of bullying through working with the bullied as well as the bullies and using ideas from earlier in the book. We will also explore other forms of bullying and situations when children go into a rage response.

In one school we visited, teachers and administrators had tried all sorts of measures to stop the bullying that was happening in the playground. Many of the measures tried that are assumed to address bullying directly had not worked and they were worried that there was a sense that it was getting worse. This can be compared to the Aikido Principle where one needs to pay attention to the periphery of the energy, as this is where there is most momentum (Pearce 1999). The centre has too much energy and tends to escalate situations. In our experience we also need to understand the logic of what is going on in the interactions, in the way that Maturana discusses there is a "perfect" logic or fit in every system and this needs to be made sense of before change will happen.

■ Understanding bullying behaviour

Cronen (2000) has very eloquently discussed how every action taken is taken as a consequence or in coherence with the "moral orders" of the participants. They suggest that all of us have multiple contextual beliefs that may come from society, our cultures or religions, the family, peer group and our own life experiences, as well as many other sources. When we act into a particular context, these beliefs will influence what we do. These influences have been named our "moral orders" and they may guide the morality of our actions. When we hear people talk, these moral orders are evident through words like "I must do this or I should never... I always... I ought to...etc". They are

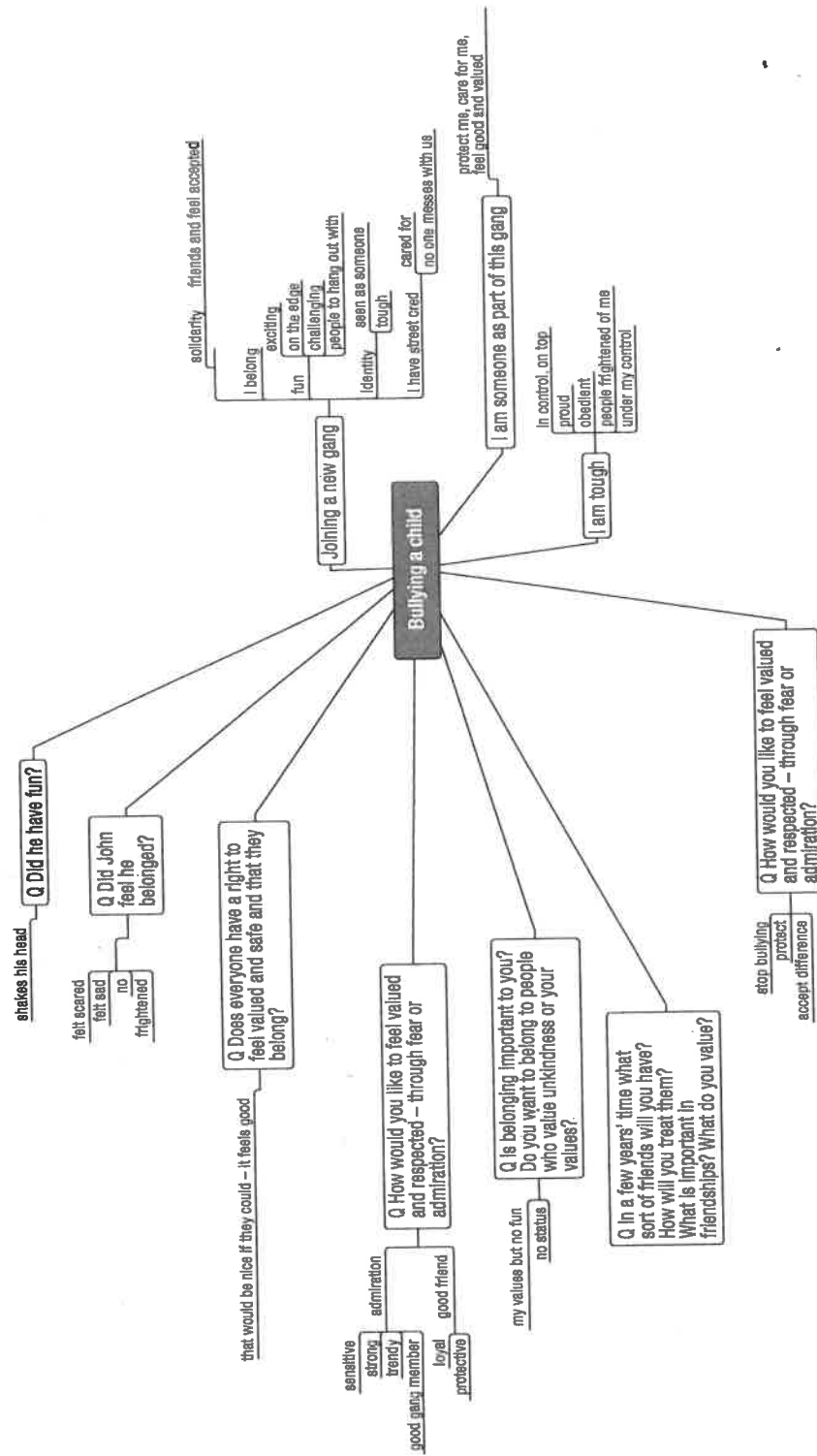


Figure 3: Mind map – bullying a child

relational and contextual, which means the beliefs and actions take on different importance in different contexts and in different relationships. Behaving very generously and politely with adults when wanting to impress them, and behaving differently with children who you may also want to impress.

The moral orders may obligate us or prohibit us from doing certain things. The other moral orders that are often evident in actions are the undecidable or unsure, where we do not know what to do in the context, and the moral order that it is permissible to do something.

Thus every action someone takes has intentionality and morality for him or her in that episode of interaction. It may well not be our morality, or a universal one, or even theirs in other relationships where there is a different intentionality. But still there is a moral order operating in every action. That morality merges as a consequence of an intentionality and the relational context. Often when that intentionality is realised there is a moment of "Yes, that's it". This has been called by Dewey a **consummatory moment**, an "*Ah ha moment*" that gives validation to the actions. Your identity is confirmed as a result of the actions; the identity story brings a recognition by important others.

We have found that unless we make sense and bring into awareness through language that intentionality and morality and the importance of the consummatory moment, it is very difficult to change behaviour and the way people relate. Alternative ways of achieving these consummatory moments are more evident when this happens. If we are critical and do not understand, then people become indignant; they defend or justify their actions if challenged or told they are immoral or behaving badly.

Within episodes of bullying children act with moral orders that fit their intentionality. In order to understand this we have questioned children in detail of their experience of the episode, their feelings, associations, thoughts, ideas and mental pictures of how they saw and experienced the episode. Bullying may get repeated if there are consummatory moments experienced that are not acknowledged and alternative ways of experiencing them explored.

For example the moral orders and intentionality might go as follows: "I really want to be part of this group/gang. It will give me an identity and street cred. To be part of the group *I have to do this, I must be seen as strong and never show I do not approve.* It is *OK* to feel excited, but I am *not sure* it is fair to pick on him but to be part of the gang *I have to.*" The consummatory moment maybe the recognition from the gang that you have succeeded to be courageous/cruel etc. You now belong. Initiation rites into a group maybe requested and completed so as to experience the sense of recognition and identity story that is desired.

The issue of intentionality in the moments leading up to the bullying behaviour need to be understood so that we can begin to make sense of the moral orders which have allowed this behaviour. The ingredients of the consummatory moment also need to be recognised. This issue of how intentionality creates different moral orders with the consequent consummatory moment in this context and these relationships, is key to successfully creating different ways of behaving. Examples of how we have done this follow.

■ Managing episodes of bullying in a school

When addressing bullying as an issue in a school, it important to work at a number of different levels: with the child that has been bullied, with the individual or group of children who have bullied, and then more general work with the class or school (as discussed earlier in Chapter Three), to create a different way of being and relating to others. Questions about specific issues that have been raised in the bullying episodes may also be included.

Conversations with children who have been bullied

When a child or children have been bullied, it is very important that dignity is restored as soon as possible, so as not to create these children into victims, who will then feel more vulnerable to further abuse. We usually see the child with family members or a friend because parents are understandably very concerned and protective. We go through the *experience* of the episode in detail while highlighting and focusing on the moments of resistance within the episode of bullying (Wade 1997). We look for their moral values and associations that were felt or thought about during the episode. These may be thoughts they had, that protected them, or things they said or did. We look for abilities within the resistance. By questioning, in detail, about these moments, abilities that have often not been thought or talked about emerge. We also amplify these abilities and demonstrate they have been used at other times; for example, we may look for other times they have had the courage to stand up to taunts and find out in detail what they have done to cope with these episodes. We spot the abilities they have used in managing the situation.

By focusing on moments of resistance, people begin to see themselves as having dignity and value rather than as helpless victims. As one youngster told us, he had been gracious to the bully, telling him that his behaviour was nothing to be proud of and he might feel bad about it later. Although this had been ridiculed, it was still an act of resistance. In these ways the bullied begin to see they have got dignity and each act of resistance is an assertion of their integrity. They begin to see for themselves that they do have the competence

and strength to handle things and that they are people of value. In many ways they begin to see themselves as having more inner strength than the bullies, and the bullies, being the ones who are powerless and frightened.

We also bring out the values they feel have been denigrated by the bullying. As one child said: "I felt like I was being treated worse than any normal person would treat their worst enemy or vermin. No one should be treated like this; it is inhumane". We were then able to talk about her beliefs in human rights and how people should be treated. This re-affirmed her identity as someone who had strong values.

Role-play or coaching in how to maintain their dignity is also effective, using the abilities and strategies they have become aware of, perhaps even being generous to the bully. If the situation seems to be getting out of control we suggest they walk away "whistling a happy tune", with very strong positive coping thoughts. Friends can be very useful in keeping courage rather than victim in the foreground. Many children lose the sense of helplessness, fear and sense of powerlessness. Both child and parents come to a different realisation of their own value and dignity.

Making sense of the bullying episode

In order to help people change their behaviours it is important to make sense of this, what seems inexplicable, behaviour. The intentionality, the moral orders, meaning and the emotional narrative that was *experienced or being lived* at the time of bullying needs to be brought into language and understood. The consummatory moments also need to be seen and alternative ways of achieving them explored.

This is most easily done through the process of mind mapping the episode. So we might put "Bullying a child" in the centre of the board, and then ask very specific questions about the "present moments" (Stern 2004) of what was being experienced at an emotional level in this episode.

"What were the important feelings at the beginning, when it all started, what do you remember"

"We see him as boring and pathetic and I wanted to show my friends how tough I am"

JUSTIFICATION

"So, what did you experience; what did it feel like?"

Made me feel in control, on top... Strong, I felt proud

PART OF CONSUMMATORY MOMENT

Proud of what?

Of making someone frightened of me, obedient to me, under my control. The gang will believe in me. I felt I will really belong now; they will be pleased.

MORE CONSUMMATORY MOMENT

Were they there and was it important they were there?

My friends, the gang, yeh very, it was very important... They needed to see me as powerful; I have only just joined this gang, I desperately wanted them to see, I deserved to be... I became one of them. I was a true member.

WITNESSES AND CONSUMMATORY MOMENT

What does belonging to this gang mean to you?

I belong, I have an identity.

AFFIRMATION

What sort of identity?

I am someone important to be with this group. It gives you street cred.

AFFIRMATION

What else goes through your mind about being part of this group?

They protected me, we have fun together.

AFFIRMATION

Anything else?

A sense of solidarity and safety, no one messes with us, we are protected. I belong.

I guess they give you a lot.

Yes

What is the feeling of all the things you have mentioned that matters most?

That I belong and feel valued; it gives me people to hang out with and street cred.

CONSUMMATORY MOMENT, ACCEPTANCE AND IDENTITY

Detailed questions about the emotions and emotional meaning or narrative given to these episodes are explored bit by bit. Further details can be seen in the mind map.

When this has been explored and there is a sense of meaning that gives some understanding to the behaviour, the intentionality, the morality and the consummatory moments experienced by the person, the actions and morality can then begin to be challenged and alternative ways of achieving the consummatory moments found.

Does everyone have a right to feel safe and be part of a group like you do, to belong and feel valued?

GENERALISING HIS CONSUMMATORY MOMENT

It would be nice if everyone could, as it feels good.

Do you think Johnny felt part of a group?

No

How do you think he felt?

I am sure he felt scared, and sad but he is a wet and deserved it

Do you think he wants to feel like he did, does anybody?

Probably not.

CHALLENGING MORAL ORDERS

Did he feel protected, valued?

No

How do you think he felt?

Very alone, frightened and awful

Who do you want to feel safe with: people who bully or people who really respect and like you?

That is unfair

So he might also want to belong and feel part of a group?

Hmmm....

How would you like to feel valued and respected, through fear or admiration or love?

Through admiration of course

What would you like to be respected and admired for – what sort of things do you value about yourself?

That I am sensitive, that I am strong, that I am trendy, that I am a good gang member

Does that mean you are a good friend too?

Yes I am. I am very loyal and protective of my friends

Would your parents or friends outside the gang have been admiring of you for what happened?

CHALLENGING IDENTITY IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

... No

Belonging is very important to you, do you want to belong to people who value unkindness or do you want to belong to people who value you for some of the things that are really you?

The latter I guess but they are not so much fun; they also do not give you any sort of status.

POSSIBLE FUTURE INTENTIONS

What stories would you like these others to have about you that are admiring?

Don't know

What would you have to do to get those stories told?

Behave more sensitively; live by my values, not be such a coward in trying to please.

How would you behave in a similar situation in the future to get those stories told of being sensitive and yet strong?

Pause ... Not sure

What ways could you lead others so that you feel you are living by your values?

Stop people from bullying others and perhaps even protect the four eyes and swots.

How?

By saying everyone is different – he chooses to work, we choose to have fun. He cannot help wearing glasses; we should feel sorry for him not be horrid to him.

So you could become a really good strong leader, who could be admired for generosity and humanity?

I suppose so.

By continuing to ask questions of these youngsters, and by understanding the importance of the experience within the consummatory moments, these can be fulfilled with more acceptable actions. In this case being someone who is a leader and values people for who they are. These other ways of behaving

might perhaps give them a sense of living a more authentic dignified life, with their family or social values.

This process of mind mapping the gang's responses and meanings is also very useful so as to get them to make sense of what they are doing and how they are attracting people to belong in ways that may not be what they want as individuals. Looking towards their future dreams will often bring this out more clearly. See Chapter Seven.

■ What you ask is what you get

Talking bullying out of the classroom or school

The other context it is helpful to address is the process of dreaming schools, as discussed in Chapter Three, which offers another way to create new and pervasive moral orders of respect and dignity for everyone in the school, using some of the issues that emerge in the mind maps. In this example, there were discussions about the value of belonging, to whom and for what reasons, and what that meant as well as how you respected people for what they were. Leadership as a way of being was also widely discussed and mind mapped.

Some specific examples

Some of the situations we have worked with have been instances of children being taunted racially, threatened physically, excluded from a group, teased about things they cannot change, e.g. appearance, wearing glasses, large nose, intelligence, etc. The questions we craft to try to create a different way of relating need to be specific to the type of bullying. Using a problem/dream approach makes the immediate shift into a different focus. It is very important to craft questions so that they bring forth desired behaviours and give people a clearer way of what to do and how to do it in the future.

Conversations have started generally in the classroom on the topic of human characteristics we like/love about people. The teacher's attention is tuned into the moral orders that are obligating unkind or bullying behaviour, so that some of these moral orders can be challenged inquiringly but neutrally, so as to try to address and change them.

There have been general small group discussions within the class about the characteristics we look for in friends. 'What is important to each of us? How do we want to be treated and how do we treat others?' Getting the children themselves to be aware of people having different moral orders and being curious about them and where they came from is often very powerful. Challenging them without shaming often will allow other beliefs to emerge.

One 16-year-old boy, who had verbally abused and bullied a black youth, began by being very derogatory in these discussions, but when asked who he felt was the most forgiving, humanitarian man in the world, he said "Nelson Mandela". There were further discussions on Mandela's integrity and brilliance. He was suddenly put into a quandary as to his own unthought-through beliefs, about people of a different culture. He began saying, "Why have I always been so biased? Look at the great footballers. Many of our local shopkeepers are not white and they provide a very different service to the larger supermarket; they are so much nicer." His moral orders began to change as his thoughts were brought out into language in a different and wider context.

Both racial and gender issues have been tackled using Appreciative Inquiry. The process of enquiring appreciatively will focus on the frustrated dream with questions designed to look for times when interactions have been excellent. So, if the children and staff are worried about the level of sexism or racism, then the dream of how things could be, has become focus for our questions. To come up with these questions we encourage the class to think about what constitutes a good interaction or play between sexes, races etc. They have had discussion groups, done some research and written essays to inform their area of inquiry. They then have developed the questions about times when things have worked out really well or delightfully. The episodes cited in the questioning process have often been the small group discussions themselves.

In the interviews, the partnership is with someone of either a different race or different gender. Questions are asked about good times experienced with someone from a different culture/gender. 'What did you enjoy about the other person and what did you learn about the differences between you? What interested you most? When else?' The next stage is to have these stories told in groups of six and creating proclamations from each group. Doing these appreciative interviews creates a sense of warmth between the young people who get to know the person they are interviewing in a different more appreciative, respectful way.

Gender project

We have set up appreciative questioning across gender. In a school in which aggressive masculinity was causing problems a Gender Project was set up to transform the ways in which boys and girls interact in order to that make them feel valued and respected.

Boys and girls were paired. The young women were interviewed by the young men about a time they have felt a man has respected them and they

have shown respect to a man. 'What happened? What did he say? How did he respect your opinion or your voice? How did you respect his? What did you see as his values that you might admire and what values do you think he saw in you?'

The young women then interviewed the young men around the question, 'Tell me a time when you really felt that you respected and valued a girl? And what was it like? What did you do, how did she respond and then what happened. What does that episode tell us about you and your abilities and values? What does it make you reflect on in your interactions with girls?'

Sharing in smaller groups, how their stories took these aspects of relationships and how people learned and got ideas from each other. Teachers noticed how respect between boys and girls grew as the young people acted out what they learnt. It was an important way of formalising these interviews in the class. It led to very serious discussions on how to treat people of different sexes and of different ethnic backgrounds. There was never any discussion of what constituted disrespectful behaviour. The focus was constantly on what created respect and what created ways of acting towards each other ethically in the world.

Modern bullying

Teenagers are now using more and more sophisticated ways of bullying. Boys have tended to use their physical strength to intimidate whereas girls have often used psychological means. Their relationships are often more intimate with one another and then become vulnerable to gossip or broken confidences about personal 'secrets' told in confidence. Texting, emails and the internet have made it all the more powerful and global. Teasing may involve ideas about wrong fashion and body shape: leaving people out of party invitations or breaking up friendships through inviting someone to be part of a different group and then betraying her, are some of the stories we have been told. The consequences of this type of bullying, if not dealt with, can be serious with long-term fears about relationships and self-confidence, and even suicide.

We have approached this type of bullying in a similar way. We have mind mapped the episode as previously discussed, by asking lots of questions about the "present moment" experience and bringing out the emotional narrative (Stern 2004), and the relevant audience for the bullying behaviour. Again the intentionality and morality of the behaviour has to be understood and made sense of before any change will emerge. In our experience, themes that emerge are because friendships and appearances are very important to girls and jealousies and concerns about being left out, may become motivators

to gain popularity through unkind, bullying behaviour. The consummatory moments have been around being seen as a sexy hard girl whom everyone wants to be friends with. Mind mapping is again useful to make sense of the episode of behaviour and its consequent consummatory moments through exploring the emotional narrative.

Another way of addressing some of the emotional narratives is to look at the frustrated dream and work on what values they want to live by. Again we use appreciative questions about what we value and respect about people we love, like our parents and friends. What would they be proud of that we have learned from them in the way we treat our classmates; think of times when we have behaved this way. Subsequent small group discussions occur, on ways of behaving that we respect and that ways we would like others to tell stories about us for having behaved like that.

Discussions with the drawing of mind maps around the meaning of jealousy and then trying to understand the moral orders behind jealous behaviour have been very useful. Through the mind map many ideas were demonstrated (see Figure 4). In many ways the class began to see the bullies as the victims rather than the bullied. These discussions have been very fruitful, as they have given ideas of different ways of responding. Ability spotting and appreciating the so-called bullies, so they no longer feel of no value, helping them be more "normal", has alleviated the situation. See Figure 4.

Working with the gang

In one situation when there had been a gang of youngsters who had bullied some younger boys, we interviewed, with the teacher, the whole gang of boys together to try to understand their moral orders to make sense of whether this was a gang morality or an individual. All the boys were youngsters who were not doing very well at school and all of them felt 'school failures' who claimed to enjoy the same things like music and smoking, hanging around looking cool. They felt that bright, uncool or what they called 'ugly' kids did not have a life. When questioned on what having a life meant to them both now and in the future they began feeling sad and saying their futures looked a bit bleak. Suggestions were made as to how they could maybe join gangs with the other kids so both could learn from each other. The bullied kids could learn how to have fun now and the bullies to learn from the others how to prepare to have fun in the future. In doing this interview it was very important to be utterly neutral towards what was being said, keeping curiosity to the fore and taking very seriously what the young boys were saying. Seeing spaces where there were incongruencies for the future and being able to ask about them helped these boys change their moral orders.

Sometimes it is the gang leader who has the most to lose and appears to have the strongest moral orders and it is very important that these and his consummatory moments are understood and affirmed, but not condoned, so that he has the opportunity to find other ways of fulfilling the consummatory experience of validation. It then frees the rest of the group to move to a different position.

When there has been violence that goes beyond bullying

We have found that some children resort to violence. They are not habitual bullies but they tend to lash out at other children or appear to get very angry with peers or teachers.

As we have stated before, anger is seen as an invitation to restore dignity. Unfortunately it usually, in its consequences, destroys dignity. It makes things even worse; someone's dignity has been degraded through their outburst. The angry child may have behaved in ways they later may feel ashamed of. So for children who resort to violence when frustrated or when they feel humiliated or annoyed we have organised a programme involving these young people and their parents.

We have used an adaptation of the ideas used in many anger management programmes, but adapted them to be more relational and invitational.

Creating anger as an invitation

Initially we get children to begin to recognise the physiological or bodily responses each of them experience as the anger mounts. These are idiosyncratic and individual. They may be palpitations, hyperventilation, flushing, feeling hot, clenching of the fists, and stiffening of the body. Whatever their individual response, they need to be aware of it and tune into it as an early warning – or, as we say, a guardian angel, who is warning them they may erupt. We get children to be aware of their own responses and ask parents and the network to help the child focus and act on these warnings.

When children show anger we invite them to think about what their 'automatic thoughts' are at that moment – these usually are to do with a feeling of things being unfair or that they have been mistreated in some way. These thoughts are written down. Each of these thoughts we see as an invitation to someone to do something. The invitation they are offering is worked out with them and then they are helped to put that invitation into words so they can begin to articulate the invitation rather than flare up angrily. For many of these children this is enough to help them begin to think of more assertive ways of offering invitations to their parents, teachers or peer group.

Rage

However, there are some children who appear to go into a 'rage' where they feel out of control and cannot stop the destruction and havoc their feelings are energising. For these children we have devised a programme that we insist the parents participate in.

When the school has asked us to be involved with these very angry and potentially violent youngsters, we usually invite the parents and children to a series of three meetings, which we hold in the school.

At the first meeting we discuss ways that anger is managed at home and try to help the family think about the invitations that are being offered through the anger and how those can be put into words that have meaning in the family and can be responded to, to avert the anger. We also use Wittgenstein's (1953) idea that when language stops action begins, so one might say that people who are violent do not have the grammar to think of alternative ways of expressing themselves. This grammar can be explored and expanded. Alternative ways of acting in situations where they feel their dignity or status has been humiliated can be discussed and role-played. Ideas like stating things assertively, walking away, apologising, suggesting there may have been a misunderstanding are all tried. It is helpful to gain an understanding of the moral orders within the family which are felt so deeply and that are being threatened. The young person may well live the same moral orders. For example "No one criticises my mother or religion or culture." These sorts of moral orders need to be respected but loosened through validation and questioning.

Since 2004, in the second session, we have been telling the story of the Tsunami and the way the elephants behaved. We use this as an analogy of rage being like a Tsunami and how the consequences often create more humiliation and loss of dignity.

The story we tell is: anger and its management are very like a Tsunami – if you do not escape from it, it destroys you, your self-esteem and your dignity. You need to become just like the wise elephants in Sri Lanka who sensed the oncoming waves and disaster and left the situation. They headed for the hills. So we again teach children and their parents to be aware of the physiological warnings that are usually there before the anger erupts – just as it was for the elephants.

Anger if not attended to moves into an uncontrollable rage where the person feels out of control and flooded and everything ends in disaster. Just like the Tsunami wave, it destroys everything in its path. However, if youngsters can be helped to sense their physiological warnings – like flushing, hyperventilation, tingling fingers, and palpitations – then they can walk away from the situation, just as the elephants did. They can be encouraged to make clear

assertive statements at a later stage, or, as they get used to this way of reacting, at the time.

We discuss ways parents can help their youngsters to be as wise as the elephants. We also look at ways the parents could help each other and their children so they are not further humiliated.

In the third session we look at times when they were able to manage a rage situation successfully. We question them as to what they did and how they felt about themselves and what others thought about them for having coped so well. They are encouraged to visualise other situations, which might trigger the feelings of humiliation but where they have managed to walk away or act assertively and consequently feel very proud of themselves.

We have found including the parents to support and understand their youngster of immense value as the child feels validated and supported.

■ Conclusion

Bullying is a very complex and challenging situation to cope with. Societally it has invidiously become acceptable with films being made about girls behaving in very unkind ways, with the haves and the have-nots. The behaviours of the people in the films and reality shows have perhaps validated this and made heroines of the haves. Our experience has been to try to work more globally and appreciatively turning the problem on its head by looking at what really attracts us to people and what stories we really want told about us.

In the next chapter we will explore some of the ideas teachers have come up with to nurture and further the relationship between home and school.

TAKE AWAYS

- Address bullying in schools in non-direct ways.
- Work with the person who has been bullied by looking moments of resistance in the bullying episodes. Spot abilities, competencies and values.
- Prevent people from staying in victim roles by restoring dignity and a sense of being a person with values.
- Mind map the episode with the bullies to understand the experience and emotional narrative, which will bring out the intentionality, moral orders and consummatory moments that can be understood and brought into awareness.
- Once these have been understood start to challenge the morality and behaviour.

- Create general conversations in the classroom about respectful behaviour.
- Do appreciative interviews around carefully chosen questions that will create desirable and respectful ways of behaving to others.
- Recognise emotions such as anger as an invitation.
- Key into physiological signs.
- In rage situations use the analogy of the Tsunami.

6

Strengthening and growing connections between home and school

In some of the previous chapters we have looked at the kinds of the struggles people in schools experience within different relationships and a variety of contexts. Frequently when there have been problems with children at school, the communication between parents and teachers has become a challenge in the search to create collaboration and ways forward. Teachers will often ring parents when they have a difficulty with a child. Usually parents do not want to hear criticism of their child by someone outside the family. Parents may become defensive, blame the school or tell the school it is the school's responsibility. Parents have also told us that they sometimes feel they are back at school themselves and feel as though they are talked to as if they are also the naughty children. This construction leads to parents often being unable to respond and thus silenced.

Ways of calling and talking to parents are discussed and some innovative ideas teachers have created to develop mutual interest and excitement both at home and in school where homework has been used to promote positive and appreciative dialogue between everyone.

■ Callings and invitations

The staff of a school asked for ways of communicating differently in the hope of creating collaboration and making changes in the relationship, which would carry them and the parents through any difficulties that may arise. Working appreciatively relationships have been healed and grown in new ways.

In the training events and in their normal work contexts, we encouraged the teachers to role-play ringing the parents and thinking of new ways of approaching the parents describing the behaviour of the child differently. For example, we suggested that, before talking about the difficulties, they should describe the problem behaviour as an ability, or name some abilities and talk about the child's potential and something that the staff members valued in the child. We then suggest they start by calling forth parents' love or concern:

"We know what caring/loving/proud/concerned parents you are; we would like to invite you to a meeting to discuss how we can all work together, as a team, including your child, so as best to manage his ebullience, energy, shyness, determination, (whatever the issue is) so that he can use his abilities to get the most out of school and life."

As an exercise, we asked the teachers to imagine calling a parent at the end of the day when something amiss had taken place in school. For example, a child had been biting, kicking and spitting at other children.

We invited them to imagine the sort of co-operation and collaboration they wanted to create, beginning to explore the positive images of what they would like to create long before actually ringing the parents, thinking this through, perhaps by discussing it with another staff member, to form a strong picture of what they wanted to achieve.

Once they had created a positive image of the hopes, they could then begin to think through different ways of approaching the parents, and start to see how they could realise this through the way they called the parents. This has often led to a change in the staff member's emotions and thus to a different way of speaking. Central to creating this telephone call is getting very clear what you want to achieve. What is the preferred outcome you are looking for and that the parents and the child might also be looking to achieve? Asking this question of yourself and then following it up with questions to help you to think through what actions would most elegantly achieve it leads to more possibilities in the relationships.

Gradually positive things were tried out. For example, "Good evening Joanna, I am Andrew's teacher. I wanted to talk to you about your son. Your son is a keen pupil and has a lot of good resources (these are then listed and identified)." At this point some teachers felt that opening with the words, "Your son is a 'keen pupil'..." lacked authenticity and might even shock the parent into a suspicious state of mind, but others felt that the sheer directness would provoke, at best, a sense of appreciation and at worst a sense of curiosity.

The opening continues: "As you know he is full of energy and strong willed. Some of the consequences of this have been difficult for him. We would like to find ways that could be more helpful and creative for him in his learning. We would like to discuss with you how we could all work together, as a team, to allow his competence and abilities to shine. We would value your contribution to this process and would like to form a team in which you would play an invaluable part. Could you come to a meeting at the school to talk together about these ideas?"

■ Creating a network of resources

This is only the beginning. We might then discuss, with the parent on the phone, who else might be important to the child, to the teacher, to the parents in creating this team to achieve the outcomes to which everyone would be committed. Often we will explore whether there is another relative or professional and anyone else who the family feel should be at a meeting. So once we have begun these explorations, calling and speaking to others often become a significant theme in the life of the school. Exploring the effects of appreciative and affirmative calling, naming and addressing, expands the options for reinvigorating the culture of a school. Equally importantly, it begins to create collaboration and respect for those involved. We usually include in the meeting the child who is the reason why it is taking place. It is a rare occurrence for the child or young person not to be present at one of these meetings. What we are keen to do is to use the meeting so that the child's voice can be heard, so that as the child begins to be heard, he/she can participate in creating the dream that we may be discussing and begin to negotiate with those present or with others after the meeting for them to be his/her support team in the process of growth.

■ Future Planning meetings

When teachers meet with the child, the parents and other professionals around a concern they have for a child, we have called these meetings Future Planning meetings. A context is thus created that will help everyone focus on the future hopes and dreams for all present with regard to this child. Any problem that is brought up is talked about by asking what the frustrated dream is that arises from the problem description. Focusing on the future in the meeting gives all in the meeting dignity. Misdemeanours are not talked about, so there are no invitations to justify or deny difficulties. The meeting is given energy to bring out a child's potential, teachers and parents have felt uplifted by the new story and all have worked together to try to realise the young person's dream. As we have offered training to teachers in these ways of holding meetings, a number of new dimensions to working with problems as frustrated dreams have been developed. These family, parents, child and network meetings have become a normal and accepted part of school life. Teachers are conducting these meetings with and for each other. In some schools the teachers work as a collaborative team. For example, if a teacher feels that she is already too closely involved in the situation, she might ask another teacher to be the interviewer and conductor of the meeting. This gives her a way of being able to participate and talk more freely than if she

is also conducting the meeting. So what some teachers have done is to repay each other for doing this task. One class teacher might lead such a meeting for another class teacher and vice versa.

■ Dreams bearing fruit...

These meetings link together school, pupil, parents and others who may be significant for the pupil. Using the practices of a dream conversation creates a special atmosphere and affirmative outcomes emerge very frequently. We have begun to work with the notion of the life-giving power of dreaming, imagining and fantasising in our conversations with individual young people. Once a dream, a hope, an aspiration is identified, we try to walk the person through the intricate details of the dream, to paint a detailed picture of every interaction that takes place within it. It is our experience that it is in describing the richness of the detail of the dream that makes it more possible for the dream to influence the present. Doing the dreaming process is fascinating because it literally changes both the present and the future through the process of imagining.

What asking future questions and dream questions does is change the future and the present. Firstly it gives people choice to explore which of the possible or imagined futures they would like to put their energies into. At the same time it creates a new context for the present opening up new ways of living together. One young teenager who was with her mother in an interview some months after a tragedy had taken place in the family, suddenly said, "Stop, stop! This is great! When we talk, about the future the tragedy of the present seems much less painful. Once we know that we have a future so the tragedy no longer feels like a dead end. It's a new place to begin to create that future".

This is a way of opening, in really tough situations, possibilities until now not heard. It is because of this that we call these meetings Future Planning meetings.

In a meeting with teachers, parents and a 13-year-old young person, Fiona, who had chronic fatigue syndrome and did not want to go to school, we asked: "What are your dreams?" As we waited with interest and curiosity for the answer, she said, "I want to be a champion tennis player and play on the centre court at Wimbledon". What a surprising and an innovative gift for us to work with! Working in the worlds of imaginings, we talked together about the life of that tennis star: travel, lots of money, great people, fit physique, tough work, admiration and much more. As we took Fiona's dream seriously and as her parents began to share the wonder of it all, this young woman's delight and pleasure were almost palpable. Any consideration about

whether this was realistic or unrealistic never entered the talk.¹ Instead, the energy and commitment that flowed from this conversation were empowering and transformative.

We began to see how the dream of the future could be the wellspring for possible new actions in the present. What are the elements of the present that are essential to attaining the dream? These included intensive coaching at tennis lessons, physical activities to become strong and fit, language classes to ensure that you could converse when travelling, mathematics to manage finance and the investments. Coloured by the richly textured landscape of the dream, returning to school became for Fiona more than a chore, it became the absolute necessity to build towards that dream. While talking with the teachers about what they wished to contribute to Fiona's dream, to be her support team, she listened avidly, editing their ideas and adding to things they could do to adapt lessons and schoolwork more in the service of her dreams. The teachers enjoyed this process too as they saw a different child with aspirations they could participate in and encourage. Through the process of the interview a new co-operation developed between them. We talked about these developments and what were the landmarks of achievements in the road to the Wimbledon vision. We also discussed some obstacles along the way and how Fiona might overcome them in achieving the dream. We particularly addressed the chronic fatigue and how both home and school had supported her, so she could manage to attend school, and how the school nurse could be supportive. Extra time spent in the library was envisaged. The work the physiotherapist had done to encourage her was also discussed.

In our experience one of the important parts of the dream involves the actions that are taken immediately after a meeting like this. So the conversation proceeded to envision those first steps along the road of change linking important people at home to the action that initiates the process of change. The discussion in the meeting began to envision how, 15 years previously, Fiona actually woke up and got to school the next day. How proud she felt of her determination to get there and her parent's support. Once again these explorations involved the intricate detail of what happens. "When and how and what next..." So we talked with Fiona and her parents about what they did after that meeting in the school. Was it not in the afternoon? How did

¹ The aim of these conversations is to enjoy the dream, however unrealistic, and to go with it, to look for values and metaphors inherent in the dreams, and to work with these. By respecting these and taking them seriously they begin to live the steps that will realise their dreams. We are using the potency of dream talk to give people a sense that there is a future for them. If they begin to believe there is a future, it will inevitably create positive changes in the present. Throughout the process we do take care to ensure that neither children nor adults are being set up for failure, so every step is a moment of joy.

she spend the rest of the day? What did she do and what did the parents and friends do to help her begin the road? How did she spend the evening so that when she woke up in the morning she took those great steps into the next part of the dream fulfilment? What did her mother and father do to help her go to bed in way that assisted her to go to school the next morning? Was she responsible for waking up or did her mother and/or father had to wake her? What did she have for breakfast? She told us as far as she could remember that she had taken responsibility for waking up and that her mother had checked that she was up. Her father had driven her to school in good time without a rush.

Mother and father entered into the spirit of her commitment and said that they had become her support fan club. The teacher similarly began to get involved. They asked questions like, "What did we do to make it easy to come to school? Did we say something to the class? Or did you manage it yourself?" Fiona said that she had managed it herself. She remembered her class teacher had just kept an eye on her for the first few days so that when she met one or two difficulties she went to the teacher and got some help. She also talked about how her mother and father spent time with her each evening going through the school day and talking about what went well and anything she wanted help with as the days went by. She said that this was "Just for the first week so that I got off to a good start." We call this visualising the immediate present beginnings of new steps on the road to fulfil the dream. In this part of the questioning we bring into consideration all the different members of the team, especially connecting with people at home because they are there all the time. Once they see the importance, not only of what they do, but also the way that they do it, they gain an understanding of how to support the young person's activities. They begin to focus on what will make it easier for them to make the immediate changes they are engaged in.

The meeting ended with Fiona expressing her sense of positive selfhood, now freshly acquired, through the belief that family and teachers have in her, which they all demonstrated through entertaining the dream and seriously planning its achievement.

■ Feedback and achievement meetings

Formal meetings between teachers, pupils and their parents are being conducted once a semester on appreciative and achievement-oriented lines (see Chapter Two). For example, instead of focusing on a lack of achievements, the discussion looks at what has been achieved, what learning has been gained from these achievements, and how these can be elaborated. Any difficulties are managed by asking the youngster what they would like to do even better

or if they have ideas about the subjects they feel they might need extra help. The teachers found by approaching it this way the children were very clear about their weaknesses and difficulties and the children took responsibility for working on them and kept their dignity. As one youngster said, "I do not have to be told what I am not good at, I know, so why put me down by going on about it."

As a guide for these review meetings we developed, with some of the teachers, some headline questions which they could use. They could talk about, in the school participation, what the child has done really well, can be proud of and can celebrate. Following on from these pride and celebration details, they could talk about what the different parts are of school life that the pupil is maybe already doing and could develop further. Then talking about some new developments in school that the child could undertake. Finally there might be a discussion of things that needed to be dropped and replaced with new ways of acting and studying. This keeps the whole process in a positive image conversation and at the same time addresses aspects of school life which could be seen negatively.

■ Encouraging dialogue between parents and children

During our work in Sweden, one group of teachers reported that they had discovered some recent research that concludes that parents in Sweden spend, on average, three minutes a day with their children in exclusive, quality and dialogic time. Apparently, the story of what makes a good parent has changed. Parents now spend huge amounts of time and energy creating opportunities for their children to learn a musical instrument, play sport, and do all sorts of extra curricular activities. They form car pools to transport children to these activities and so the opportunity and time for talk is no longer present. Some people in Sweden believe that the increase in destructive and violent behaviour of some young people could be related to the paucity of exclusive, quality and dialogic time with parents, grandparents and other people at home. Teachers have imaginatively given homework to address this situation.

Homework

One group of teachers decided to approach this linking of children with parents through some tasks for the children to do at home with their parents. Homework was given with the purpose of creating opportunities to interview

one's parents (or other significant adult²) around a number of appreciative themes. For instance, the children might be asked to interview their parents about high points in their childhood or school experiences. Interesting stories emerged and children and parents have talked enthusiastically about their lives. The children have questioned and been intrigued by their parents' achievements and their fun at times when they were naughty themselves.

The teacher might also ask the children to go home and tell of a high point from that day at school and to talk to their parents about why it had been such a good experience – or perhaps tell their parents about the most interesting thing they had learned at school that day. These ways of connecting school and home have encouraged the parents to talk to their children about what really interests them or excites them. As a consequence of this, parents have done more things that are of interest to the child, as well as find books and videos about their interest. The parents of one child, who was fascinated by history, took him to look round the Tower of London. They got relevant books from the library and the whole family entered his world and animated conversations ensued.

A variant of the homework was also to tell parents the best things teacher or a friend did for or with you that day. The children were asked to write this up as an assignment. Teachers felt they learned a lot from what the children had appreciated and it encouraged them to behave in a more appreciative way in the future. It also helped the children to begin to tell and actively focus on the positive stories of school and life.

Alternatively, homework might be given on a Friday to be reported back on Monday. This could be about, for example, things they have done over the weekend. Children then might be invited on the Monday to interview each other around the theme: 'Tell us about the most fun thing you did with your parents this week end.' Upon being given this homework, apparently children ran home and asked what they could do, what would be fun for the parents, and what would be fun for the children. The following Monday, the children talked with great pride about what they had done and what they had enjoyed about it. It might have been a walk, or a board game, or cooking a meal together, or going to a football match or any of a number of activities.

The following weekend the children were asked to interview each other on what they had done for their parents that had been most appreciated over the

² In talking about children's home lives in the classroom, we try to take care to avoid making assumptions about what children's families look like and what their home life is like. We try to ensure that we are not setting up children from stressful homes for failure or for needing to lie about their weekend experiences. We cannot assume that children's family lives are positive. For some children, school may be a respite from family. All these considerations need to be taken into account in how homework is constructed and how families are described.

weekend. Some had taken parents a cup of tea/coffee in bed, others had tidied their rooms, others washed the car etc. The children shared, with delight and pride, what they had done and talked with each other about what had been most appreciated by the parents and why. The pride displayed by the children about giving pleasure to their parents was moving.

Learnings

The reporting back and being witnessed by the other children and teachers became an important part of the exercise as it gave a status to the child talking and to their parents. Children reported back with enthusiasm and pride, stories from their parents' childhood or from activities within the family. They answered questions excitedly. As children listened to the other children telling stories it broadened the children's experience of possibilities. Stated differently, it broadened their grammar for a larger range of possible interactions between parents and children. Many of the children got further ideas from the other children about ways parents and children interact and activities they might share.

Parents felt as though they were getting to know their children in a different way and to enjoy and respect them in new ways. Contact between parents and teachers was also much more friendly and collaborative. Teachers reported that as they now had more personal information about the parents, their relationships with the parents became much richer, more informal and friendlier. The parents became other interesting adults, not just parents to their children. Teachers also began to see how little things they did for their pupils were seen and appreciated. Similarly teachers felt more seen and valued by the parents.

After these sorts of experiences, linking home life and school life, one of the teachers wrote the following:

"Almost all the students did these interviews with enthusiasm and when reporting the stories from the interviews in the class they really talked about their parents in a positive way. It must have been a new experience for both the students and the parents. They had a special opportunity to talk with their parents and through listening they both discovered new aspects of life to be proud of. This changed the relationship between parents and children and between families and the school for the better."

■ Conclusion

Extending the network of relationships around a child so that children feel parents and teachers are collaborating and are sincerely concerned about

their future has made the work of teachers very much easier. They have felt much more energised reporting on positives and dreaming futures and feel they have been very supported by the parents. The children have also felt better and more confident to share stories between school and home as they feel the persons in each context are valued by the others.

In the next chapter we have included a case history, which is fairly detailed, of a young person who was a big challenge for the school and home. It demonstrates the work they did together and also looks at some of the philosophical ideas used in the work.

SUMMARY

- Encourage a positive and collaborative relationship between teachers and parents. This is made easier by treating the parents as people who are keen to participate in creating a future for their children.
- Encourage parents to be appreciative and affirmative about their children. This will give both parents and child a sense of dignity and that cooperation happens naturally.
- Hold joint meetings with parents and encourage conversations of pride. These will ensure the children have a network of caring collaborative people around them.
- Work with future dreams of the child and show how caring adults can further these hopes and dreams. This will give dignity and generates energy for everyone.
- Support teachers endeavour to use homework in a creative way. This encourages interactions and conversations between parents and children and results in more positive interactions between everyone.
- Encourage children to learn about new possibilities and opportunities by listening to what other children have done.