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School age bullying : the victim's point of view

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Abstract

Bullying is a common problem in schools across the world including in the United States. This paper focuses on the problem of bullying from the victim's point of view. Bullying can be defined in a variety of different ways and occurs in a variety of different situations. Victims of bullies suffer from a wide variety of academic, social, behavioral, and emotional problems. A comprehensive approach that includes school counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents is needed to combat bullying within the school. Bully prevention and intervention programs can help victims more effectively if they change their orientation from focusing on the bully to focusing on the bully and the victim.

School Age Bullying: The Victim's Point of View

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By

Jacquelyn L. Miller

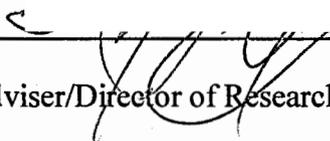
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Abstract

Bullying is a common problem in schools across the world including in the United States. This paper focuses on the problem of bullying from the victim's point of view. Bullying can be defined in a variety of different ways and occurs in a variety of different situations. Victims of bullies suffer from a wide variety of academic, social, behavioral, and emotional problems. A comprehensive approach that includes school counselors, teachers, administrators, and parents is needed to combat bullying within the school. Bully prevention and intervention programs can help victims more effectively if they change their orientation from focusing on the bully to focusing on the bully and the victim.

RUNNING HEAD: SCHOOL AGE BULLYING

School Age Bullying: The Victim's Point of View

Bullying is a common problem throughout schools across the world including the United States. Everyday students across the world dread going to school because they fear being teased, ridiculed, and physically harmed by their peers. Victims of bullying suffer from a wide variety of social, behavioral, and emotional problems. Once victims of bullying graduate, society will be left to deal with the harmful effects of the victim's bullying. The first comprehensive study of bullying in the United States included students from public, parochial, and other private schools. The study consisted of 15,686 students sixth through tenth grade that took a survey on the subject of bullying. Nearly one-third of the students reported being involved in bullying 13% as bullies, 11% as victims, and 6% as both. Nearly 10% of students reported being involved in bullying incidents at least once a week in the previous year. Bullying is most common among males and is most serious in ages 11-14 ("Bullies and Their Victims," 2001).

In the United States, a study done by Noll and Carter (as cited in Bullock, 2002) found one out of five children admitted to being a bully and 25 to 50% of children reported being bullied. Eight percent of the children reported staying away from school one day a month from the fear of being bullied and 43% of children reported having a fear of being bullied in the school restroom (Bullock, 2002). Bullying is a common problem in other countries as well. A survey of more than 150,000 students in a Scandinavian study reported 15% of students in elementary and middle school were involved in bullying behavior, as victims or

bullies, with some regularity. Approximately 9% were victims and 7% were bullies. A British study of over 6,700 students found that more than 27% of elementary students and 10% of middle and high school students reported being victims of regular bullying. In regard to bullying other students, 12% of elementary students and 6% of middle and high school students reported that they were bullies (Olweus, 2001).

Many bullying prevention and intervention programs focus on changing the bully's behavior and do not provide assistance to the victims of the bullying. By defining bullying, becoming aware of the characteristics of both bullies and victims, and recognizing the academic, social, behavioral, and emotional effects bullying has on victims, school personnel can then begin to understand the dynamics of bullying. By having an understanding of the dynamics of bullying, school personnel can develop and research strategies to help the victims of bullying. Some bully prevention and intervention programs include information to help victims like teaching them assertiveness skills, brainstorming a variety of different ways to handle bullies, and role-playing potential bullying situations. The focus of this paper is on bullying that occurs in school-age children. The problem of bullying will be analyzed through the victim's point of view.

Definition

Bullying can be defined in a variety of ways and occurs in a variety of different situations. Bullying consists of an imbalance of strength between bullies and their victims demonstrating a relationship of unequal power (Olweus, 2001). According to Olweus (as cited in Bullock, 2002), bullying is defined as continuous, unprovoked, hurtful actions by one child or children against another. These

actions may be physical and direct or psychological and less direct. Physical and direct bullying includes hitting, kicking, pushing, and rough as well as intimidating play. Psychological bullying includes name-calling, making faces, teasing, taunting, and making threats. Indirect bullying includes exclusion and rejection of children from a group. Now that bullying behavior has been defined, characteristics of male and female bullies will be discussed.

Characteristics of Bullies of Both Genders

Both male and female bullies demonstrate similar behavioral and emotional characteristics. According to Olweus (as cited in Bullock, 2002), bullies have aggressive personalities as well as physical strength. Bullies are impulsive, dominate others, and show little compassion. In the past it was thought that bullies had low self-esteem, but recent research by Bushman and Baumeister (as cited in Bullock, 2002) suggests that a high self-esteem increases the chance of aggressive behavior. Bullies often report feeling superior and justified in their actions. According to (Espelage, 2001), bullies are popular students and have the knowledge on how to manipulate adults while persecuting their peers.

Even though male and female bullies demonstrate some similarities in terms of behavioral characteristics, there are a few differences between the two. Male bullies are more likely to engage in physical and direct bullying. Female bullies engage in more psychological and indirect bullying. Female bullies are less likely than male bullies to acknowledge their involvement in bullying behavior. As females grow older, they tend to bully less, but the percentage of males who bully is similar at different age levels (Espelage, 2001).

Characteristics of Victims of Both Genders

Like the characteristics of male and female bullies, male and female victims demonstrate similar characteristics. Victims of bullies tend to, but not always, appear anxious, sensitive, quiet, lonely, and lack friendships (Bullock, 2002). Victims tend to be, but are not always, depressed and have low self-esteem. This lack of self-esteem leads to lack of confidence to seek help. Victims are desperate to “fit in”, but often have poor social skills making peer interaction difficult. Many victims blame themselves for being bullied. The process of blaming oneself leads to feelings of helplessness and this could be part of the reason that bullies pick on them (Kraizer, 1996).

Along with common internal characteristics, victims share similar relationships with family and similar physical characteristics. Victims have a tendency to be close to their parents and have parents that are overprotective. They also tend to be physically weaker than their peers. Other physical characteristics like weight, dress, or wearing eyeglasses are not considered to be significant factors related to victimization (Banks, 1997). In terms of physical development, late developing boys are more likely to be harassed where early developing girls are more likely to be harassed (Dess, 2001).

Victims not only demonstrate similar physical characteristics, but also similar behavioral patterns. Victims tend to react negatively to conflicts or losing when playing games. During times of conflict, victims seek comfort from adults. Many victims possess behaviors and mannerisms that mark them as “vulnerable”. Some vulnerable behaviors that victims possess are crying, walking hastily with head down, hunched shoulders, not making contact with strangers, and slipping

through a group of people quietly to avoid conversation or eye contact. Victims may display these behaviors because they are trying to become invisible (Lajoie, McLellan, & Seddon, 1997).

Victim behavior has many forms and can be classified into different types. The *classic victim* is a victim who is not responsible for being bullied. A new student would be an example of a victim who is not responsible for being bullied. A *provocative victim* is a victim that provokes and antagonizes, but complains when peers retaliate. A *passive victim* is a fearful victim that feels hopeless and has a problem gaining peer support. A *colluding victim* is a victim who wants people to see him or her as an actual “victim” to gain acceptance and popularity. An example of a colluding victim is the class clown. A victim that complains about his or her peers when nothing has actually happened to him or her is called a *false victim*. A *bully or victim* takes on the behavior of a bully or a victim depending on the situation and the circumstances. These definitions of the different types of victims can be used in identifying victims. Victims can be identified not only by their social behavior, but also by their academic behavior (Suckling & Temple, 2002).

Effects of Bullying on School age Children

Academic and Social Achievement

Victims suffer many effects from being bullied and two of those effects may be academically and socially. According to Roberts and Coursol (as cited in Beale & Scott, 2001) bullies of victims suffered from one or more of the following: habitual absenteeism, diminish in academic performance, loneliness, increased apprehension, withdrawal from peers, and suicide. Olweus and Limber

(as cited in Peterson & Skiba, 2001) have found that victims of bullies reported feeling vengeful, hostile, and self-pity after a bullying incident. If victims do not receive help on how to work through and handle these feelings appropriately, such reactions to bullying can evolve into depression, physical illness, and even suicide. A British Columbia study of fifteen teenage suicides in 1997 and 1998 (as cited in Beltrame, Macqueen, & Demont, 2001) found five out of the fifteen suicide victims had been victims of bullying.

Self-reported Behavioral and Emotional Adjustment

Bullying not only effects victims socially and academically, but behaviorally and emotionally as well. A one-year longitudinal study was done on 471 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students from a middle school in a small southern city to evaluate whether peer victimization added to the prediction of maladjustment over and above prior behavioral and emotional difficulties. Peer victimization was assessed by group-administered peer nominations. Children were provided with a list of all the children in their school and asked to choose three peers who “get picked on or called names a lot” to assess victimization. Scores were summed and standardized for each item within each nominating group. The Youth Self-Report is a self-report measure based on the Child Behavior Checklist designed to assess behavioral or emotional problems in children and adolescents. Each classroom was administered the peer nomination measure and the Youth Self-Report measure at the beginning of the study and one year later at the end of the study (Khatri, Kupersmidt, Patterson, 2000).

Results by Gender

Results of this study indicate that victimization by peers predicted externalizing rather than internalizing difficulties. Concurrent peer problems appeared to be more likely associated with self-reported problems than more distal peer problems. Since victimization by peers predicted externalizing difficulties, it was not a surprise that victimization among females was found to be predictive of self-reported delinquency. These results indicate that any involvement in any aggressive interchange (being victimized or bullying others) may put girls at risk for delinquency (Khatri, et al., 2000).

Females appeared to be more affected by peer victimization than males due to the fact that they reported more feelings of unpopularity. A reason for this finding could be that female victims might perceive the experience of victimization differently than male victims. Females are more victimized by social isolation and males by more direct aggression. Victimized males may feel less unpopular than victimized females because they are involved in higher levels of social interaction, regardless of how negative the interactions may be (Khatri et al., 2000). The effects of bullying vary from females to males. Bullying has been shown to have a critical impact on the emotional well being of adolescent girls, but not the emotional well being of adolescent boys. The reason for this finding might be due to the adolescent boys' response to bullying or to the small number of boys reporting symptoms of depression ("Bullied Students Are," 2001).

Depression

Victimization of peers was not related to self-reported depression.

Researchers have questioned the direct link of the relationship between victimization and depression. They are unsure if depression leads to victimization by peers or if victimization by peers leads to depression (Khatri et al., 2000). Other researchers have found that depressed children are at an increased risk for being teased by others and depressed children were found to be teased less once their depressive symptoms have lessened (Khatri et al., 2000). Findings from a study done by Olweus and Alsaker (as cited in Khatri et al., 2000) suggest that victimization may be a risk factor for later depression. The study found that previous victims of bullying had depressive tendencies later in life (Khatri et al., 2000). In a study of 2,600 Australian students, ages 13 to 14, 50% reported being bullied, and two-thirds of those who reported being bullied had been bullied more than once. Victims of bullies were more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety than students who were not victims of bullies ("Bullied Students Are," 2001). Results from these studies indicate that victimization may be preceded by maladjustment and that exhibiting depressive symptoms serves as a risk factor for victimization, and victimization further increases the degree of depression.

Comprehensive Approach in Helping Victims of Bullies

Counselor's Role in Bullying Prevention and Intervention Programs

Along with specific strategies to help victims, many different people in a victim's life can also help the victim. School counselors play an important part in

helping victims of bullies. They are the ones who are most likely to receive referrals from teachers and administrators for students who are being bullied and the bullies themselves. Since school counselors are the ones who actively deal with both the bullies and the victims, they have an opportunity to become actively involved in the development and implementation of a school-wide bullying prevention and intervention program (Beale & Scott, 2001).

Bullies in Books

This intervention is recommended for primary and intermediate age students. The children read a book that features bullies and then participate in a class discussion over the book. Children are able to talk about bullying experiences in a safe way and those who may feel uncomfortable discussing their own experiences with bullying can talk about someone in the story. The next step in this intervention includes the children role-playing the situation in the book by having them try out several different responses to bullies. Children can also draw a new ending to the story demonstrating how they would handle the bullying situation (Kreidler, 1996).

Fend for Yourself

This intervention should be used with primary and intermediate age students. Children are given make-believe bully situations and then encouraged to brainstorm on how to solve the bullying situation. It should be emphasized that everyone, even the bully, deserves to be treated with respect and all responses need to be non-violent. Each child shares their solution on how they would handle the bullying situation. The entire class creates a list of solutions and strategies on how to handle bullies and then the list is posted in the front of the

room. Students are then divided into groups of three and role-play another bullying situation where one student is the bully, another student is the victim, and the last student is the bystander (Kreidler, 1996).

Help for the Child Who is Picked On

This intervention can be used with both primary and intermediate age students. Four steps are included in this plan to help victims of bullying. The first step is to have a plan for reporting bullies. A majority of bullying goes unreported because bullies intimidate their victims. Children should be encouraged to report bullying incidents. School staff should emphasize that reporting bullying incidents is not tattling but helps keep the school and victims safe. The second step is to talk privately with the victim. School staff should emphasize that it is not the child's fault, listen to the child's feelings, and explain to the child that the members of the school staff are there to help him or her. Rehearsing responses with the victim allows him or her to practice how to handle bullying situations. Teachers can help the victim develop friendships by pairing them up with more socially skilled students for cooperative projects. The third step is to help children resist bullies. School staff should explain to the victim how bullies are rewarded when their victims give them an "emotional payoff." Even though it is hard, victims should not respond the way that the bullies want them too. Victims should be taught to take slow breaths, keep a passive face, and to stand up for themselves. Step four is to teach victims assertiveness skills. Victims should be taught to stand up straight, look the bully in the eye, and to say "stop bothering me" or "don't do that because I don't like it." Then children should be taught to walk away (Kreidler, 1996).

“Bullybusters”

“Bullybusters” is a school-wide anti-bullying program where drama students perform a skit on how to identify and deal with bullies. It started out at Midlothian Middle School in Virginia. Students observing the skit were able to indirectly experience many of the negative consequences of bullying in an impersonal, non-threatening way. The goal of this program was to present a believable and familiar situation with which middle school students could identify. The drama did not resolve all the conflicts and students were asked to explore and evaluate all possible alternative solutions and actions with their peers. After the drama, the principal discussed the zero tolerance policy on bullying. Teachers were given a packet with information about the various types of bullies, the short and long-term effects of being a bully or a victim, what it means to be a by-stander, and specific strategies for dealing with bullies. Classroom discussion allowed the students to express their opinion, fears, and feelings about bullying. Newsletters were sent to parents about the anti-bullying program. This program was well received by teachers, students, school administrators, and the community. There was a 20% reduction in the number of bullying incidents reported at the middle school during the program’s first year of existence (Beale & Scott, 2001).

Bully-proofing Your School

A group of concerned parents formed a group called the Parent Council whose mission was to explore techniques for combating bullying in the schools. The Parent Council chose a curriculum called “Bully-proofing Your School” to be implemented into their school district (Berkey, Keyes, & Longhurst, 2001).

Staff members were provided with training and information about the bully-proofing program as well as how to create a caring school environment. Students were taught cognitive strategies for identifying bullying behavior and how to respond more effectively to bullies. Students learned the **Help Assert Humor Avoid Self-talk Own it (HA HA SO)** method used to respond to peer aggression. Students also learned **Creative Problem Solving, Adult Help, Relate and Join, and Empathy (CARE)** which is a method that addresses the problems of victims of bullies. Role-plays and group discussions were used throughout the year to help children learn the curriculum and apply their new knowledge both inside and outside the classroom.

The bully-proofing program was most effective at the elementary level and had positive effects on discipline and behavior. At the middle school level, *the program developed more slowly because the curriculum needed modification there.* At the secondary level, the bullying program was not effective. Students did not assume positive leadership roles and teachers did not think the concept of bullying applied at this level. The teachers saw the solution to this problem as establishing and enforcing clear behavioral limits for the students (Berkey et al., 2001).

Five-track Method

A method called the “Five-track Method” has been implemented within the Netherlands School Systems since 1995 in relation to bully prevention. The “Five-track Method” describes five steps that can be taken to prevent bullying and to help a child that is being bullied. The first step is to help the child who is being bullied through guidance or social skills training. The second step is to help the

bully in the form of social skills training or a course in coping with aggression. The third step is to help the rest of the children who have witnessed the bullying. The fourth step is to help the teachers by providing background information about bullying, such as the warning signs, causes, consequences, and specific ways of handling the problem. The fifth step is to help parents in the form of background information and guidance. By completing these steps, school personnel can effectively address the bullying issue and help all the parties involved in the bullying situation (Limper, 2000).

Teach Thinking Skills

Children as early as age four can productively learn how to solve normal, everyday problems with others. Teachers, parents, and other adults can teach young children problem solving skills by asking questions like: "What is the problem?" "What happened when you hit your friend?"; "How did you feel when that happened?"; "How do you think your friend felt?"; "Can you think of a different way to tell your friend what you want?" This type of intervention is called problem solving dialoging. The child is an active participant because he or she is involved in the process of thinking about what he or she does. Other techniques like negative punishment have the child as a passive recipient and the adult does the thinking for the child. We have just discussed some bully prevention and intervention programs that the school counselor can implement in the school with the help of school staff and we now we are going to talk about specific strategies teachers can use in the classroom to handle bullying (Shure, 2000).

Teachers

Teachers, just like school counselors, can help victims of bullying. There are a variety of techniques teachers can use in the classroom to help prevent children from becoming victims of bullying and to help children who are already being bullied. Elementary teachers can use role-playing to help their students practice appropriate responses to being bullied like ignoring the student who is teasing you, walking away, and telling the student how you feel. If these responses to the bullying do not work, students should tell the teacher. The teacher can then discuss the situation with the class and share with the class how they, the teacher, would feel and what they would do. Hypothetical cases can also be used in class discussions to help demonstrate appropriate ways to handle teasing and bullying. A class list of appropriate responses to bullying can be generated from class discussions and then posted so it can be referred to. Teachers can self-disclose to their classrooms about experiences he or she had with bullying when they were younger. After sharing a personal story, the teacher should emphasize that it is cruel and unacceptable to bully and tease other students. Teachers should encourage victims to stand up for themselves and congratulate victims when they are brave and do stand up for themselves ("How Do You Help," 1999).

Teacher training is an important part in the prevention of bullying. Teacher training begins with giving teachers a definition of bullying because some teachers are unaware of what bullying is. The extent of the bullying that occurs in the school is also important for the teacher to know so he or she can prevent, reduce, and counter bullying behavior. Teachers need to know and

understand the signs of bullying so they are able to identify it in the classroom and school environment. Knowledge of the serious effects of bullying is important to eliminate any myths that teachers themselves might have about bullying and help them eliminate myths that others might have about bullying. Having knowledge about the causes of bullying behavior is important because some teachers blame victims for their inability to sort out their own problems. Teachers need to have knowledge of different strategies dealing with incidents of bullying. Teachers should be trained on how to develop a policy to encounter bullying. Some key elements in a policy made to deal with bullying behavior are: raising an awareness that bullying is not an acceptable behavior, developing a program of support for those affected by bullying behavior and those involved in bullying, and to develop procedures for noting, reporting, investigating, and handling with incidents of bullying (O'Moore, 2000).

There must be a heavy emphasis in teacher training on how to prevent low self-esteem and how to enhance high-self esteem. Teachers need to become more sensitive to a child's need for acceptance and the significant role that they play in preventing feelings of not being accepted. School is a competitive environment where students are reminded of their strengths and limitations on a daily basis (O'Moore, 2000). A suggestion for teachers to help victims of bullying is to select the victims as "teacher helpers". Students who help the teacher will gain self-esteem. Victims of bullying can also be appointed to pick the teams when the class has team competitions. Other students want to be on teams with specific students and they realize that they can only be with those specific students if the student, the victim, picks them ("How Do You Help," 1999).

Administrators

The administrators' role in the prevention and intervention of bullying and helping victims is just as important as the counselor and teacher's role.

Administrators need to address the issue of bullying when it occurs in their schools and address the issues that foster incidents of bullying to prevent recurrences. Victims of bullies expect school personnel to step in and take corrective action when bullying occurs. When school personnel do not intervene, some students may consider taking action on their own and administrators need to prevent this from happening. Administrators must recognize that many of the things that bullies do to victims are crimes like assault and battery, harassment, making threats, and criminal mischief. When appropriate, administrators should consider the option of pressing charges. The most important thing that administrators can do to prevent bullying is to recognize that bullying is not a normal development occurrence and it is their job to take appropriate action to minimize bullying incidents in their school. By minimizing bullying incidents, the administrator is minimizing the possibility of their school being the next site of another school shooting (Dunn, 2001).

Parents

Parents in conjunction with school staff can also help victims of bullying. There are a variety of things that the parents of bully victims can do to help their children. Parents should encourage their child to develop more friends because bullies like to isolate their victims both socially and physically. They can help by assisting the child in discovering their bullies strengths and weaknesses because this will give the child more direction on how to respond to the bully. Teaching

the child assertiveness skills is another important thing parents can do because bullies do not expect their victims to stand up for themselves. Sometimes it may be necessary to help the child find ways to completely avoid the bully (Neighbours, 1997).

Parents also need to take into consideration respecting their child's wishes. Victims of bullies sometimes do not want their parents to talk to the teacher about the bullying. As a parent, talk to the teacher but ask that your child not be identified. The teacher might be able to help gain better control over the situation. Like in other bully prevention programs, parents can role-play different bullying situations with their child. Parents should offer the child different approaches to handling the situation and let the child pick the approach that works best for him or her. Some examples of different ways to handle bullies are ignoring the bully or showing a non-emotional response. One last important thing for parents to be aware of is the warning signs of being a victim. Warning signs that a child might be bullied include faking an illness, crying repeatedly, withdrawing, acting aggressively, and self-destructive behavior. Parents can watch for these warning signs in their child to help confirm how things are going at school (VanTine, 2001).

How Bullying Programs Can Improve to Help the Victim

There are a variety of bully prevention and intervention programs available to schools who have a bullying problem or want to prevent one. The problem is that most of the programs available focus on changing the bully's behavior and comforting the victim after the incident. There are other ways that we can help victims of bullying like changing the focus when dealing with bullying behavior,

using certain strategies when dealing with victims, and implementing victim interventions. What needs to change in terms of bully prevention and intervention programs is the focus on how bullying is handled. Instead of just focusing on trying to figure out why the bully is bullying other students and trying to change the bully's behavior, programs should focus on helping the victim learn how to handle being bullied and how to stop it. Bully prevention and intervention programs need to help bullies as well, but victims should not be overlooked in the process.

Dealing with Bullying Incidents

In terms of changing focus, when dealing with a bullying incident, school staff needs to not only focus on the behaviors of the bully, which is an important step, but to also be an advocate to the victim and provide support for the victim. The victim should have access to a bully-free environment at all times. A safe room for quiet activities that is supervised by school staff can be used as a bully-free environment for victims. Dependable peers, teacher aids, and senior volunteers can also be used as supporters for the victim and can spend time with the victim. When talking with the victim, school staff should avoid focusing on the victim's weaknesses. When dealing with withdrawn and isolated victims, school staff should try to get the victim involved in special confidence building programs and other peer related activities that involve groups of students ("Stop Bullying-Guidelines for Schools," 1999).

When dealing with a bullying incident, school staff should stop the incident immediately. School staff should then talk to the bully and the victim separately. The parents of both victims and the bullies should be notified of the

bullying situation. Victims and their parents should be reassured that all possible steps are being taken to prevent another bullying incident. The school staff should not only try to re-educate bullies on their behavior, but should also help victims get involved in group situations where he or she can develop his or her social skills and make friends. By making friends and developing social skills, victims can boost their self-confidence. Examples of different group situations are a peer support group, new student orientation group, a co-operative learning group in class, or a special activity group. Monitoring the bully's behavior after the bullying incident is important, but the school should also monitor the safety of the victim on a school-wide basis (Sudermann, Jaffe, & Schiek, 1996).

When dealing with a bully incident, it is important to support the student that reported the bullying. Since the victim has taken a risk in reporting the bully incident to a staff member, it is important that the staff member listens carefully, is sensitive, and reassuring. The first step is to make sure the meeting with the victim allows privacy. If constantly interrupted, victims may lose their nerve and become unwilling to say anything. By sitting close to victims, leaning forward, and watching them intently, the victim will know that their story will be heard. After the main part of the story has been told, victims should be assured that their story was understood by having the staff member paraphrase and ask questions for clarification. After the staff member determines if the incident was a bullying situation, victims should be assured that they did the right thing by telling the staff member about the incident and that it was safe for them to tell their story. Before telling victims what the school will do about the situation, victims should be asked what they would like the school to do. This gives the victim a sense of

control over what will happen next. By helping victims problem solve and develop strategies to prevent bullying, victims can begin to feel safe again. After deciding on some preventative strategies, staff members should check-in with victims within the next couple of days to see how the strategies on how to prevent bullying worked, to make sure victims feels safe, and to see if the situation is getting any better (Lajoie et al., 1997).

Strategies When Dealing with Victims

While changing the focus to help victims when dealing with a bullying incident, school staff should also use some general strategies when dealing with victims. School staff should have an open door policy letting students know that their door is always open and that they can seek support at all times in a caring, nonjudgmental atmosphere. Victims should be encouraged to ask for help before the bullying situation puts them in direct danger. School staff should respond to reports of minor bullying incidents and use the small bullying situations as learning experiences for larger ones. Letting the student know that the teacher cares is important, but the student should be taught to determine the seriousness of the situation and create productive solutions. Students receiving support from school staff for minor bullying situations are more likely to seek support for major occurrences. School staff should take the bullying report seriously. It is hard for victims to ask for help and they fear that no one will believe them. Staff members should reassure the victim and avoid making the victim feel incompetent. If a member of the school staff discounts a victim's concerns, he or she, in a sense, is re-victimizing the student. Listening to the victim, giving reassurance that the victim is understood, and giving reassurance that the school will help work on the

problem creates a supportive environment for the victim. After dealing with the bully, staff members should offer special help to the victim. This special help should focus on what happened, whether or not the situation could have been avoided, and what steps could have lessened the seriousness of the incident. Helping victims brainstorm strategies for preventing bullying incidents and helping them devise a plan for doing things differently in the future can be empowering. After intervening in a bullying situation, school staff should provide follow-up support for the victims. By checking in with victims on a daily basis, school staff can monitor the situation and make sure the victim is no longer being victimized (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000).

Interventions for Victims

Expressive Therapy and Support Groups

Not only can school staff help victims by changing their focus on how to handle bullying incidents, but they can also implement specific victim interventions to change victims' behavior just like they implement specific interventions to change bullies' behavior. Since some victims feel guilty for being victimized, they should have help when trying to answer the question of "Why did he or she do that?" By involving victims in expressive education and therapy, they are given the opportunity to write, draw, and talk about their experiences. A victim support group would give victims a chance to normalize their feelings and gain support from others with similar histories. The most effective support for victims is when school staff does what they can to protect victims from future bullying incidents (Davis, 1999).

Peer Suggestions for Victims

Since victims suffer the effects of bullying, it is helpful for them to have strategies to deal with bullying. Here are some suggestions from real-life children and adolescents on how to handle bullying situations. The first bullying situation is if someone is tripping someone at school. If a victim of bullying gets tripped at school the victim could: (a) ask the bully to stop and if they do not stop, the victim should tell a member of the school staff; (b) not argue with the other person; (c) refer the problem to a peer mediator if the school has a peer mediation program. Peer mediation programs provide opportunities for both parties involved to resolve the incident by talking maturely about their feelings and taking part in solving the problem. Sometimes children get threatened at school. An example of being threatened would be if someone demanded a victim's jacket. If threatened with a weapon, the victim should give the student the jacket and tell a member of the school staff as soon as he or she can. If a victim is just threatened, they should use their own good judgement. Victims can verbally object and then report it to the school staff. It is important to stay calm in tough situations (Kowalski, 1999). My own thought about this strategy is that victims should use caution when confronting bullies, especially bullies with weapons. The victim should take into consideration the environment the confrontation is taking place and their own safety. If victims feel unsafe, they should leave the scene as soon as possible.

Bully Situations

Sometimes it is helpful for victims to hear true stories about other victims and how they handled bullies. By listening to a story, victims can personalize

their feelings with the feelings of the victim in the story. Here are two, true stories about how children handled bully situations in the classroom. A fifth grade boy used a problem solving approach to think about lots of possible reasons why one of his classmates, a bully, instilled fear into everyone and did not have any friends. The boy thought perhaps the bully lacked self-confidence or was having trouble at home. By being open to finding out why the bully was acting the way he was acting, it led the boy to feel differently about the bully. The boy decided to be nice to the bully and the bully, surprised, responded by being nice to the boy and his classmates (Shure, 2000).

In the second true story, a boy tries a unique strategy for handling the bullies that were teasing him. The boy's mother always told him to walk away, ignore the teasing, or to tell a teacher. The boy decided to think of different things he could say or do to the children that were teasing him. He decided to stop the bullies in their tracks. The other children called him "Bacon" because he was overweight. The boy decided to reply to the teasing by saying, "Yeah and I sizzle." The child who had called him the name began to laugh and other children heard him. Nobody every called the boy "Bacon" again and now, four years later, the boy has lots of friends and is doing well in school. Instead of getting upset and giving the bullies the reaction that they wanted, the boy made a joke out of the situation (Shure, 2000).

Victim's Manual on How to Handle a Bully

Along with using stories to help personalize a victim's situation, a manual has been developed to help victims throughout a bullying incident. The Victim's Manual on how to handle a bully contains eight lessons that provide information

on prevention and intervention efforts victims can take in order prevent themselves from becoming or stop themselves from being bullied and teased.

The *first lesson* helps victims answer the question, “Why am I being teased?” The real reason bullies tease certain students is because those students get upset. Bullies gain pleasure by teasing students and then watching them get upset so they continue to tease the same students who get upset (Kalman, 2002). Bullies find satisfaction when victims react the way the bullies want. The more emotional and intense victims’ reactions are, the more pleasure bullies feel. If victims can reduce the level of their reactions, they become less desirable targets (Hazler, 1996).

The *second lesson* explains the importance of changing one’s attitude. Most victims’ attitudes on being teased are “Oh, no! They are making fun of me. I need to make them stop.” This attitude is what bullies want victims to have and that is why they continue to tease. Victims need to change their attitude to “If they want to tease me, it is perfectly okay.” They should not tell their bullies to stop, call them names back, or get mad at them. Being mad is a lousy feeling and it will make the bully feel good. Victims can say to the bully “If you enjoy making fun of me, you can do it all day long,” this will quickly stop the bully’s teasing (Kalman, 2002). Victims should try not to react to the bullying by becoming angry or upset. Bullies are looking for victims that will give a reaction of anger or become upset. If victims stay calm, bullies will lose interest in bullying. Victims can play it safe when being bullied by ignoring remarks made by bullies and walking away (Lajoie et al., 1997).

The *third lesson* describes “three warnings” victims should follow when

handling bullies. The first warning is that the teasing will get worse before it gets better. The teasing should only get worse for a couple of days and then it will get better. With having a new attitude about the teasing and not getting upset, the bully will get confused. Bullies might insult victims more powerfully and use more insults. Since victims are not giving bullies the reaction they want, eventually they will get tired of feeling stupid and will stop. Warning number two is that a victim must follow these instructions 100% of the time. If victims get teased and only 90% act like they do not care and 10% get upset when teased, bullies will know that teasing really does bother the victims and they will continue to do it. Warning number three is that the teasing will not stop 100%. By using these strategies, the teasing situation will dramatically decrease, but it is impossible to never get teased again. Everyone in life gets teased at sometime or another (Kalman, 2002).

The *fourth lesson* teaches victims how to handle rumors. The best thing to do if victims hear a rumor about themselves is to talk to the person who started the rumor. Make the person defend him or herself by asking; "Do you believe it?" If the person says "no", there is nothing left to say about the rumor. If the person says "yes", the victim can reply with "You can believe it, if you like." The major point is to make the person who started the rumor defend themselves so victims do not have to defend themselves because that is what the person who started the rumor wanted. An exception to this strategy is that if someone victims really care about asks about the rumor. If victims really want this person to know the truth, they should tell them (Kalman, 2002). If rumors are being spread about victims, victims should ignore the rumors. Victims that do not take the rumors

seriously and laugh at the rumors are refusing to take the bait from bullies. By refusing to take the bait, bullies do not receive a power rush. Controlled confrontation is another way victims can handle rumors. Victims can talk to whoever is spreading the rumor and ask him or her "Is there a problem with me? If you are saying these things about me, I would like to know why because I do not have a problem with you." Controlled confrontation allows victims to clear up any misunderstandings that might exist between themselves and the bully in a non-threatening way (Kowalski, 1999).

The *fifth lesson* shows victims how to handle physical bullying. There is a warning in this lesson. The warning is that the strategies to use for physical bullying should only be used when the bully is someone who is more or less emotionally stable. There is a small minority of children out there who are extremely disturbed and dangerous and if victims are being bullied by one of these children, they need to avoid them or find people to protect them. If bullies push victims in the hall, the best thing for victims to do, if they are not hurt, is to pretend that it did not happen. By pretending that nothing happened, victims do not give bullies the satisfaction of an emotional reaction. If bullies hurt victims, victims should calmly tell the bully how hurt they are. If bullies continue to push victims, victims will then need to tell a member of the school staff. If bullies ask for a victim's possessions, the victim should ignore the bully and not look scared. If bullies take something of the victim's, the victim should calmly ask for it back. If it is not given back, the victim should notify a member of the school staff. Victims should never give bullies any of their possessions. Bullies will keep coming back to victims for more things, if victims give in to the bullies (Kalman,

2002). If bullies are physically threatening victims, victims should walk or run to a safe place. Victims should then tell a staff member about the bullying and the areas where they feel unsafe. Schools can then closely monitor those areas where victims feel unsafe (Lajoie et al., 1997).

The *sixth lesson* explains the importance of having a sense of humor. This is one of the most important lessons and when victims understand it, their life will incredibly improve. The reason that some children get teased is because they do not have a sense of humor about themselves. They get mad when they get teased and that is why they continue to get teased. If victims get teased, they should laugh along with the other children thus not giving the bully the reaction that is expected. Without this reaction of getting angry, bullies will eventually stop the teasing (Kalman, 2002).

The *seventh lesson* tells victims to lose their fear. Bullies enjoy feeling power over their victims. A victim's fear will push them to the bottom of the social scale and people will not respect them. Victims need to stop being afraid of people. By not being scared of people, victims become more happy, successful, and powerful. Victims need to also stop being afraid of what other people think. The fewer victims care about what other people think, the more powerful they will become (Kalman, 2002).

The *eighth lesson* explains the benefits of having lots of friends and is the last lesson in the manual. Victims of bullying are at the bottom of the social scale, but as victims use these eight strategies and stop becoming the victim, they will make more friends. Victims should remember not to try to convince other children to be their friends. Victims need to be independent, be their own person,

and let everyone else know that nobody has power over them. Children will begin to respect the victim and the victim will make friends. Bullies do not bully victims who have lots of friends because friends will defend the victim when the bully is teasing the victim. Bullies pick victims who are socially isolated, so to stop being teased, victims should make more friends (Kalman, 2002). In order for students to become victims of bullying, they need to be isolated in some way. This isolation could take the form of physical, emotional, or social. Victims cannot be bullied over time if other students who offer support and friendships surround them. By making current friendships stronger and making new friendships, victims can reduce the isolation component of bullying (Hazler, 1996).

Being Assertive and Unpredictable

When using the strategies that the manual suggested, victims should become physically and verbally assertive, but not aggressive. Bullies pick victims that are passive because bullies like to manipulate their victims. If victims learn to use assertiveness skills, then victims will convey confidence that they have certain rights that they are not willing to give up. People who stand up to bullies may need to give up certain rights when the need arises, but those rights are not given up repeatedly. Victims can show their confidence by standing up straight and making eye contact with the bully. They can do something unexpected. Bullies want to know that they can threaten and bully a victim with predictable results. This predictability is necessary for a bully to continue bullying. Victims that create and use less predictable reactions, make repeated bullying less likely. Victims should practice strategies on how to handle bullying (Hazler, 1996).

Social Skills Training

As mentioned earlier, many victims lack social skills needed for peer interaction. In order for victims to gain peer support and make friends, they need to learn effective social skills. For victims, social skill instruction in the following areas can be especially helpful: self-presentation skills (eye contact, posture, and facial expressions) conflict resolution skills, assertiveness skills, and interpersonal skills. Social skills can be taught in a variety of places and in a variety of different ways. As long as a classroom provides a safe, supportive atmosphere, a teacher can teach social skills to everyone in his or her classroom. Victims know who they are and students in the class probably know who the victims are in the class. By having the whole-class learn social skills, the concept of having everyone who is involved be responsible for addressing the problem is emphasized. When the whole class is used as a skill-building, solution-seeking, group, victims can be provided with large amounts of emotional support and validation from their peers. Social skills can also be taught in small groups that can be run by the school counselor. Group lessons can focus on teaching the group the social skills and then the group can practice the social skills that they learned through role-play (Newman et al., 2000).

Support for Victims

Now that the victim has some strategies on how to handle bullying situations, he or she needs to practice what they say and do. Parents, counselors, and teachers can help the victim role-play what he or she will do if another bullying situation arises. The last strategy that victims should now is that he they should seek support when necessary. Victims need to know that they are not

alone. Depending on the bullying situation, adults may need to be notified of the incident. Seeking an adult to intervene on behalf of a victim is appropriate in two situations: when there is a real possibility of significant physical or emotional harm and when the situation continues without progress (Hazler, 1996).

Conclusion

This manuscript has discussed bullying from the victim's point of view. By defining bullying, becoming aware of the characteristics of both bullies and victims, and recognizing the academic, social, behavioral, and emotional effects bullying has on victims, school personnel can begin to understand how bullying affects both victims and the bullies. By having an understanding of the dynamics and effects of bullying, school personnel can then begin to develop and research strategies to help the victims of bullying. A comprehensive approach is needed to combat bullying within the school. Teachers, administrators, parents, and counselors all have important jobs in helping victims of bullying. The school counselor plays an integral part in the development and implementation of a bullying prevention and intervention program. Teachers need to be trained on how to appropriately deal with incidents of bullying and be taught different strategies to prevent bullying in the classroom. Administrators need to be trained on how to handle bullying incidents and to follow through with appropriate consequences for the bullies. Parents can help their children at home learn how to deal with bullying and should be aware of the warning signs of bullying in their children.

Many different suggestions have been offered to help the victims of bullying. Victims can be taught assertiveness skills that will help them stand up

for themselves in bullying incidents and that will also help prevent future bullying situations. By helping victims brainstorm a variety of different ways to handle bullies and then role-playing potential bully situations, victims can practice their new strategies on how to handle bullies. There are many things that victims themselves can learn to do to handle bullying situations like: not reacting emotionally to the bully, ignoring the bully, and making new friends. These suggestions can be added to any bully prevention and intervention program to provide assistance to the victims of bullying. Bully prevention and intervention programs in general can help victims more effectively if they change their focus on dealing with bullying incidents, use certain strategies when dealing with victims, and provide victim interventions.

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