

Effective Ways to Prevent Bullying Situations

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Abstract: *The children’s aggressive behavior in kindergartens or schools has become a subject of reflection in contemporary society for specialists in social sciences, education and even for the whole society. The increasingly frequent occurrences of aggression in schools have determined a generalized interest in this social phenomenon, requiring appropriate solutions for its reduction, prevention, and the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders in education. Of course, multiple causes may underlie this phenomenon, for instance, psychological, social, cultural, economic, but the increased efforts for improvement should not be ignored. Finding solutions to avoid the consequences affecting the socio-emotional development of the child, and the progress of teaching and learning becomes urgent. It must be borne in mind that school needs to be an attractive and friendly place which provides safety, not a frightening, hostile space.*

Keywords: aggression, imbalance, emotional pain, adult’s attitude, trust and security.

Introduction

The physical, verbal or emotional aggressiveness in the educational environment has always been present overtly or covertly, but because of the media, the various social networks, one can say that it has become a phenomenon called bullying that may occur at different ages and have different forms (direct, online, electronic, etc.). In this regard, studies on bullying were made in schools in various European countries, highlighting the increasing number of those involved. Children are included or are witnesses in such cases, those involved are physically, verbally or emotionally abused, through blackmail, threats, harassment, they become the target of rumors, and ultimately they may be excluded from the group. The impact of these attacks is primarily emotional, which can increase the chances of developing delinquent, anti-social behavior.

”Boys might be the most vulnerable if being pure victims, while girls if being bully-victims. More attention should be paid to cyber bullying, as victims of extensive cyber bullying had the lowest level of mental well-being.”¹.

The anti-bullying policies have set various action plans to support and protect, and to train the stakeholders in education to intervene when necessary. But the most effective action is prevention and the training to avoid the occurrence of inappropriate behavior among children and adolescents.

Why does bullying occur?

¹ L. Mark, A. Varnik, M. Sisask, "Who Suffers Most From Being Involved in Bullying-Bully, Victim, or Bully-Victim?," *Journal of School Health*, IXC (2019), no. 2, p. 136-144.

We wonder why bullying occurs and sometimes at an early age. The causes can be varied, but here we will focus on a few of them, those that can be considered the result of the various unidentified actions that happen unconsciously.

Frustration is the result of inhibitions, prohibitions or some inconvenience, some dissatisfaction and is accompanied by emotional tension whose intensity varies according to the intensity of the disturbing stimulus. The child may thus show aggressive reactions, reactions of anger, manifested through verbal, physical violence towards another person, depending on how low the level of frustration tolerance is. Frustration is considered one of the main causes of violence. It can occur with those involved as victims or observers, are marked by bullying situations involving the others or which they witness. Bullying as intentional aggressive, behavior, also has negative, harmful consequences for the person concerned, who becomes a victim.

Emotional problems affect children's lives in different ways: some can be overcome easily by learning to recognize and control emotions and more negative ones which cause an imbalance that they fail to manage, can trigger different types of inadequate behavior, up to aggression, low self-esteem, anger, relationship problems, etc. If one knows very well the children one works with, if one finds the appropriate methods to identify the problems, these issues can be detected early and one can intervene.

The phenomenon of school bullying

School plays an important role in shaping children's personality, along with the family. In addition to cognitive development, school activities have in view the child's mental health and emotional development, the child being taught how to manage negative feelings and experiences. However, aggressive behavior can be found in schools from an early age.

As Signe Whitson admits in "8 Keys to End Bullying": "I have been moved to tears on too many occasions while listening to parents share their feelings of outrage and helplessness over their kids' experiences with bullying in school."²

More and more frequent situations were registered in which children tried to cope with bullying, in which they refused to go to school or they went to school with negative emotional charge and restraint due to frequent and persistent teasing or labeling from colleagues. I saw desperate parents, who appealed to the school board for help. Such was the case of a boy who was called out of the classroom by a colleague from a higher class and forced to do absurd tasks in front of his peers, for example, to measure the

² S. Whitson, *8 Keys to End Bullying*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

schoolyard with an eraser. This is just an example, there were a lot of such tasks that he had to do.

Bullying management in schools is difficult, which is why training teachers in this regard is increasingly necessary.

One can frequently come across the idea of *friendly school*, *open-door school*, etc. but the reality is often different. Parents transfer their children from one school to another seeking the peace they need for healthy and harmonious development, but this is not a solution.

Methods for identifying and preventing school bullying

”It is argued that efforts to reduce school bullying should address both its individualistic and structural determinants.”³

First, we believe that it is absolutely necessary to have legislation drawn up at national level in Romania, covering school bullying, that can be adapted according to the needs of educational institutions, and, of course, that has to be respected. The existence of rules to prevent this phenomenon, made familiar at the beginning of each school year to both children and parents, and to all those involved in children's education. Thus, the primary role should lie with the classroom teacher and the school psychologist. The ability to identify and prevent the occurrence of bullying by all those involved in child education is also necessary.

Chen, Wang, Sung distinguish that ”teachers were more likely to identify physical bullying incidents than relational ones”. Their suggestion is that ”teachers should participate in training to help them identify bullying incidents, particularly when these involve relational bullying”.⁴

In this regard, training courses should be mandatory. Within identification methods, an important part is played by projective tests, marionette / puppet role play, storytelling for children, etc.

Some projective tests (Tree test, Family test, House test, Duss's Fables, etc.) could be used by teachers in the classroom, under the guidance of the certified school psychologist, periodically or whenever needed, as it is a playful, more relaxing method for children. Through projection, the child involuntarily transfers needs, emotions that he feels without being aware. When he draws a tree, the child projects himself in the drawing, and some drawing features are significant for certain personality traits (e.g., the placing on the sheet of paper, sizes, irregularities, shadows, bumps, etc.). Through the family drawing, the child conveys his own feelings, information and explanations he cannot verbalize, and one can identify the

³ E. Temko, “Missing Structure: A Critical Content Analysis of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program”, in *Children & Society*, XXXIII (2019), no. 1, p. 1-12.

⁴ L. M. Chen, L. C. Wang, Y.H Sung, “Teachers' Recognition of School Bullying According to Background Variables and Type of Bullying”, in *Journal of Educational Cultural and Psychological Studies*, XVIII (2018), p. 147-163.

types of relationships within the family, valuation or devaluation trends, internal conflicts, etc. In a house drawing, the child projects his own way of life, providing valuable information about his emotional world, aspects of his temperament, the way he relates to the external environment, his relationship with it, etc.

The simple stories of the Duss stories method reveal the emotional problems of every child in each stage of development.

These methods can be applied in counseling classes by teachers to all the children in the class, following the instructions and the legislation in effect. In this way, one can identify a lot of information about children, about the problems they face, enabling awareness and timely intervention.

It is known that the game is an important activity in early school years. The marionettes / puppets are flexible instruments within the game, they are a means to stimulate the child's projective mechanisms, and at the same time develop their creativity, develop and educate empathy, etc. When using marionettes / puppets as projective material, the child will be able to identify and externalize his feelings, contents and internal conflicts.

They can also be identified by the teachers who carry out this activity, having noticed that the child is likely to face some problems. Another benefit of this method is that the child will get involved and will start doing role play. Through that playing instrument - marionette / puppet -, he will be able to explore different kinds of emotions, social statuses, experiencing and learning to manage the obstacles he faces, and, at the same time, relate. Thus, the child who has aggressive tendencies, has the intention to hurt the others, will be able to realize it, be aware of the negative emotions faced by the victim, being able to develop positive relationships. Thus ways.

The use of stories in therapy helps children to move away from their painful theme and enables a symbolic approach. Stories can convey self-acceptance to the child, they can provide ways of expressing emotions. They can be used successfully with children with behavioral and emotional disorders. They can get personal development, emotional healing and pain relief, allowing the processing of traumatic events in a natural and comfortable way. They can help solve interpersonal problems and promote mental health in children with low self-esteem, provide patterns and a vocabulary with which to express their feelings.

Valdes-Cuervo, Alcantar-Nieblas, Martinez-Ferrer et al. and Martinez, Murgui, Garcia et al. emphasize that parental discipline, family climate, and parental support are directly and indirectly related to empathy, shame, and the adoption of defender role in bullying. These studies suggest that positive

parenting is important in moral emotions stimulation and the defenders' role.⁵

The development of social and emotional skills in children takes on a growing importance, requiring skills of emotional intelligence which is claimed to develop through education increasingly more in recent years. School skills refer to the student's ability to perform school tasks satisfactorily and produce a desirable school conduct in terms of accepted standards in the education system, focusing on conduct rather than knowledge.

The development of networking, communication and social skills contributes to the structuring of prosocial behavior that will allow the student to adapt to complex situations of everyday life.

Emotional competence is crucial in a child's ability to interact and engage with the others. It is about children's capacity to respond emotionally, apply their knowledge about emotions spontaneously and strategically to negotiate interpersonal exchanges and to regulate their emotional experience.

Conclusions

Physical, verbal or emotional aggressive behavior becomes bullying behavior only if it persists over time and requires specific measures to be halted, measures that change the relationships among children and group dynamics. The intervention must be carried out directly in the context of development, in this case, in schools, in order to be eliminated. The complexity of this phenomenon calls for the involvement of all the stakeholders responsible for raising and educating children, from various contexts of their life, as bullying is not always visible, most often it is concealed in spaces where adults are not present.

The intervention to prevent the bullying phenomenon will enable the protection of children against all types of aggression, violence, ensuring the school and community safety for our children.

⁵ A. A. Valdés-Cuervo, C. Alcántar-Nieblas, B. Martínez-Ferrer, L. Parra-Pérez, "Relations between restorative parental discipline, family climate, parental support, empathy, shame, and defenders in bullying", in *Children and Youth Services Review*, VC (2018), p. 152-159. I. Martínez, S. Murgui, O. F. García, F. García, „Parenting in the digital era: Protective and risk parenting styles for traditional bullying and cyberbullying victimization”, in *Computers in Human Behavior*, XC (2019), p. 84-92.

"Effective Ways to Prevent Bullying Situations," *Astra Salvensis*, VII (2019), no. 14,
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