



'Like father, like son' - Parental education and Augmented Reality to prevent bullying among children

PR2: Learning Material

Developed by



UVa

Unit 4: Intervention in Bullying Incidents

4.1. “Initiating a discussion on sensitive topics”

Learning Objectives

- Understanding the significance of good communication between parents and children to tackle bullying behaviours and their consequences
- Getting familiar with ways of initiating conversations with children and adolescents about sensitive topics, such as bullying

Parental support

The bullying phenomenon has attracted significant attention over the years. Bullying incidents, debates about its causes and consequences and opinions about its different types and forms have been focal topics in the literature (**Sawyer, et al., 2011**). Even though there might be disagreements on some aspects of bullying such as factors that contribute to rising of the phenomenon, there is a general consensus on the crucial role that family relationships and parental support play in responses to bullying behaviours (**Evans, et al., 2017**). Good family relationships are built on good communication between parents and children. However, it should be acknowledged that starting a conversation with a child on sensitive topics, such as bullying, can be a really difficult task for any parent. This sub-unit aims to support parents in this endeavour by highlighting the factors that a parent should have in mind before having a conversation of such nature with their children and by suggesting ways on how a parent can initiate a discussion about bullying.

Family relations

Family relations play a central role in the development of children and adolescents. Studies have shown that children with healthy family relations and parental support tend to achieve better results in several aspects of their lives and mitigate the negative effects of bullying behaviour (**Lovegrove, et al., 2013**). Within this context, the literature acknowledges that parental support is an important – and sometimes necessary – element for victimized children and adolescents so they can cope successfully with bullying (**Evans, et al., 2017**).

Children and adolescents have the tendency to remain silent on bullying-related incidents (**Dowling & Carey, 2013**). This is the case for both victims, bully-victims and bystanders. The reasons, why

children might remain silent about bullying behaviours, are fear of stigmatization, worries that adults may not take them seriously by showing a lack of empathy (Stives, et al., 2018), lack of confidence in adults' ability to help and fear that telling might lead to more harm than solutions to the problem (Dowling & Carey, 2013). This silence may sometimes lead to misconceptions on behalf of parents regarding the volume and nature of bullying behaviours surrounding their children. Previous studies conducted with the participation of parents and children highlighted that parents estimate the frequency of bullying at their child's school to a lower extent compared to their children (Demaray, et al., 2013). These discrepant viewpoints of bullying behaviours, besides children's silence, could also be the result of different understandings and definitions regarding bullying (Demaray, et al., 2013). It is imperative for both children and adults to realize that bullying should not be confused with teasing or other similar acts since bullying implies uneven power dynamics (Sawyer, et al., 2011), harms someone in a visible or not-visible manner and creates an unequal relationship between victim-bully (LiveWithoutBullying.com, n.d.). Both issues – silence and differentiated understanding – have the matter of communication at their core. Healthy parent-child communication can empower meaningful responses to tackle bullying and may eventually lead to more successful interventions to mitigate or even stop such harmful occurrences. However, healthy communication needs constant effort. It is not something built overnight, as children and adolescents need to feel comfort, being respected and show trust towards adults, as part of a safe environment. Positive communication may assist parents in identifying potential worrying signs of bullying behaviours in their children, earlier compared to cases where communication was limited, and also prove helpful in overcoming any social stigmatization associated with sensitive subjects (Cingel, et al., 2021), and also let the youth be aware that their family members are dependable to help them and to provide adaptive ways to cope with bullying (Larrañaga, et al., 2018).

In addition to children's need for a safe environment, this type of safe space is crucial for parents as well. Parents themselves may experience discomfort and showcase signs of worry and fear about their children's health and safety. However, parents need to keep a calm stance without impulses and show their children that they can handle difficult situations (American Psychological Association, 2021). To achieve that, a safe environment is necessary. A safe space for both children and parents is also a prerequisite to facilitate a discussion on sensitive topics that would be impossible otherwise.

Ways to initiate a sensitive discussion

Before the discussion

- Before starting a conversation with their children about bullying, parents are advised to plan their thoughts ahead. This means that it could be wise to think about what they want to say since some beforehand planning can make the discussion easier and give confidence to the parents to lead the conversation.
- Parents are advised to initiate a discussion of such nature in a quiet time for them and their child. A moment like this could perhaps be after dinner or while preparing lunch for the next day. The place is also a crucial element since the conversation should take place somewhere with no further distractions, e.g. home. In any case, the crucial element of time and place is that your children are the sole centre of your attention while you are having this discussion (**American Psychological Association, 2021**).

The discussion

- One possible way to initiate such a discussion with the child could be to use a phrase like “let’s sit down to talk about it because I want to hear your thoughts” (**LiveWithoutBullying.com, n.d.**). Another way to start this conversation is to use some kind of excuse to introduce the topic in your dialogue e.g. a post from social media, an article or a film referring to bullying could give the opportunity parents to initiate the discussion (**Cingel, et al., 2021**).
- Discuss their knowledge and/or opinions on the subject. Parents sometimes have the tendency to underestimate the knowledge and opinions that adolescents and children have on serious and complicated topics. By asking them what they know about bullying, parents can establish a common knowledge base for both parents and children, by also showing the children/adolescents that their opinions have value and are respected.
- Express emotions about the topic. Parents should not be afraid to share their feelings with their children. This way, children can acknowledge them but they can also realize that despite their parents’ upset, they can pull themselves together and overcome difficulties (**American Psychological Association, 2021**).
- Be truthful. It is recommended for parents lay out the facts at a level understandable by their children, without underestimating their children’s worries and without proceeding to promises that are difficult to keep. If parents feel uncertain about something, it is possible to answer that they do not know, while reassuring the child/adolescent that you will not ignore it (**LiveWithoutBullying.com, n.d.**).

Throughout this sensitive discussion, parents should at all times adopt a calm stance as this could be a reassuring factor for the child. Additionally, it is imperative for parents to:

- listen carefully to what children and adolescents have to say,
- avoid a judgmental tone, threats and labels

Suggested resources

- Live Without Bullying: <https://livewithoutbullying.com/en/home-en/>
- The Bully Project: <https://www.thebullyproject.com/>
- StopBullying.gov: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/how-to-talk-about-bullying>

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4.2. “Tips and Advice to support a child who is a victim of bullying”

Learning Objectives

- Recognizing the different coping strategies adopted by victims of bullying
- Learning ways to support a child-victim of bullying

Bullying Symptoms & Coping Strategies

Victimization from bullying can lead to negative consequences for children’s mental health¹. Such negative outcomes can be categorized into 3 types of symptoms (Dowling & Carey, 2013; Evans, et al., 2017):

- Internalizing symptoms (e.g. school avoidance, a decline in school performance, anxiety, withdrawal, depression, self-harming behaviour etc)
- Externalizing symptoms (e.g. anger and reactive aggression)
- Symptoms of PTSD (e.g. hypervigilance, sleep disorders etc)

Even though bullying is not always the sole cause of these behaviours, it can serve as a catalyst facilitating the negative impact.

Children and adolescents who fall victims to bullying, tend to adopt several coping strategies to deal with this challenge. These include (Evans, et al., 2017):

- Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies
 - Internalizing & PTSD Symptoms (e.g. ignoring the bullying or the aggression, pretending that bullying does not bother them, distancing from thinking about the situation)
 - Seeking help (as means of emotional support and comfort)
- Problem-Focused Coping Strategies
- Seeking help (as means of finding solutions)
- Verbal and physical aggression (for self-protection, expressing revenge and punishment to the bully, or as means of evoking empathy)
- Standing up for themselves (as means of preventing potential bullies)

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Parents need to take into consideration how their children respond to bullying incidents so they can better understand their emotional state and needs and thus, find the most suitable ways to support them. The parental role can be an essential element in efforts to tackle bullying either during the **prevention** stage or the **intervention** phase.

Prevention

- Establishing healthy family bonds and communication: The quality of relationships with their parents is a crucial factor related to different forms of bullying (Larrañaga, et al., 2018). Parents should make the everyday effort to nurture a positive family environment by communicating with their children, and discussing and hearing about each other's social lives. If children feel the comfort of talking to their parents about their peers before a bullying event occurs, the chances are higher that they will feel comfortable getting their parents involved after (Lovegrove, et al., 2013). Through these positive family bonds, it would be easier for parents to teach emotional and interpersonal skills to their children, such as emotion-rich language, enhanced emotional intelligence and better navigation of peer groups.
- Expressing parental warmth: Parents are encouraged to show high degrees of warmth, love and closeness towards the child while setting, simultaneously, clear limits. It has been argued that parental warmth is closely related to lower levels of cyberbullying victimization (Elsaesser, et al., 2017). Additionally, providing positive feedback, expressing how proud they are of their children and rewarding them can be significant factors in building essential relationships and enhancing children's self-esteem (LiveWithoutBullying.com, n.d.).
- Adopting anti-bullying and anti-victimization habits: Parents can coach children at an early age on what they can do to build good peer relations (e.g. empathy, kindness) and what they cannot (e.g. hitting, teasing etc). They can also teach children how to react themselves in case they experience bullying e.g. by learning to say "no" or "stop" firmly or telling an adult (Lovegrove, et al., 2013).
- Cultivate relationships within the school context: Strong partnerships and engagement between parents and school staff have been highlighted among the most crucial indicators of successful bullying prevention and intervention programs. (Dowling & Carey, 2013). More immediate responses on behalf of the school authorities and teachers regarding bullying can prevent future bullying events from happening, and also enhance students' confidence in reaching out to an adult for support (Larrañaga, et al., 2018).

Intervention

- Looking for signs: Parents are encouraged to keep an eye out for potential signs of bullying (e.g. attempts to avoid school, bruises, torn cloth, withdrawal, changes in eating habits, sleep disturbances etc). Since children do not always disclose to an adult their feelings and their experiences with bullying, parents should pay close attention to potential signs (Lovegrove, et al., 2013).
- Keeping a calm stance: Once parents become aware of their children's victimization, they should manage their own feelings first, as the lack of composure and emotional reactions in such cases may lead to negative outcomes. Instead, parents are advised to engage in a meaningful discussion with their children, through active listening, by giving them enough time and space to express themselves and also by posing questions in a calm manner (Lovegrove, et al., 2013).
- Avoiding labelling & blaming: Talking about trauma can be healing and protective for the mental health of the victim. A verbal response from parents can be an effective intervention strategy only if the victimized youth felt supported. For that to happen, blame and label avoidance towards the victim is a necessary precondition (Bjereld, et al., 2021). Instead, victims need to be reassured that it is not their fault for what they are going through.
- Deciding the next steps together: At the end of the discussion with their children, parents are advised to reach mutually acceptable and understandable next steps with their children. It would be wise to take into account and listen to the children's feelings and opinions on the matter. Such an approach showcases to children that their opinions are respected, but also that they have parental support at all times. It has been argued that among victimized children, those who report higher levels of parental support (i.e. feeling that parents listened, understood them, offered advice and solutions) indicate lower depression rates (Conners-Burrow, et al., 2009).
- Working together with the school: Collaborating with school authorities and staff can prove to be meaningful in the intervention stage of bullying behaviour as well. Parents can take an active role in working with the school in the design of plans and affirmative actions to tackle bullying behaviours.
- Promoting pro-social behaviours: Positive interactions have the potential of creating healthy relationships (Sawyer, et al., 2011). Additionally, supporting children in planning for the future can

enhance youth resilience towards bullying and thus serve as a catalyst for mental health well-being (Lovegrove, et al., 2013).

Throughout the intervention phase, parents are advised to avoid strategies and advice to their children such as:

- “Fighting back”: Previous research on bullying intervention strategies has argued that this has proven to be a poor strategy to stop bullying behaviours (Evans, et al., 2017). In a matter of fact, advising children to fight back may lead to further victimization, escalation of bullying incidents and/or expulsion from school (Lovegrove, et al., 2013).
- Confronting directly the bully or their parents: Parents are discouraged from getting to direct confrontation with a child-bully or its parents and, instead, are encouraged to build fruitful relationships with the school and contact the school authorities (Larrañaga, et al., 2018).
- Ignoring: Children need to feel safe and respected. This is why they need reassurance that their parents take their experiences seriously and that they can help them at all times. By advising children to ignore bullying behaviours as something “casual” or as something “that will go away over time”, they normalize the problem and, thus, make it harder to solve (Sawyer, et al., 2011).

Suggested resources

- The “School Bullying Management – Effective Skills for Educators” online course: <https://education-hub.kmop.org/course/school-bullying-management-effective-skills-for-educators/>
- Bullying Resource Center: [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families Youth/Resource Centers/AACAP/Families and Youth/Resource Centers/Bullying Resource Center/Home.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_Youth/Resource_Centers/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Bullying_Resource_Center/Home.aspx)
- PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center: <https://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

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4.3 “Tips and advice on how to deal with Bullies (for parents)”

Learning Objectives

- Know the characteristics of children who bully
- Identify the reasons why a child bullies
- Apply family actions to eradicate negative behaviours
- Define new practices to improve behaviour

4.3 Intervention on Bullying Incidents

Introduction

Parents have a great responsibility in educating their children to prevent them from committing acts of bullying, since the behaviour of their children affects the well-being of other people.

For that reason, preventing bullying is a priority for many families. Many parents wonder how to approach bullying when it is committed by their children. The first response is to understand that children's behaviour is not personal, but the result of a hostile social environment. This means that parents must work to change their children's environment, so that they feel good about themselves and others.

Parents should look for opportunities to talk to their children about bullying and the importance of speaking with respect and consideration for others. This is something that can be reinforced at home with clear boundaries and consequences for any unacceptable behaviour. In addition, parents should foster their children's self-esteem so that they feel safe and be able to handle difficult social situations without resorting to abuse from others. If children feel insecure, parents need to help them develop skills to deal with complicated social situations.

Finally, it is important for parents to teach their children to seek help if they become involved in a bullying situation. Children should know that they can turn to a trusted adult for help and support. This will help them understand that bullying is not acceptable and that there are other ways to deal with difficult situations. Parents play an important role in educating their children to prevent bullying.

Characteristics of the Bully Child

According to Ruiz Pastor (2019), there is no single profile of aggressor, just as there is no single profile of victim. To help the bully, we need to know why they behave like this. We may think that it is their character or their personality and that nothing can be done, but it is not so. These behaviours and attitudes are preceded by a previous fact, a performance that was lived, and an uncomfortable situation that has caused this behaviour. In this way, some common traits among children who bully include:

- They tend to be aggressive and irritable.
- Lack of self-control and impulsivity.
- Lack of empathy.
- Few conflict resolution skills and social skills.
- They find it difficult to take responsibility for their actions and tend to always justify them and blame others.
- Model of interaction with others based on dominance and submission.
- Self-esteem 'apparently swollen'. They may seem to have high self-esteem when in fact it is quite the opposite.
- Worried about what others might think of them.

Causes of Children Bullying

It is difficult for parents to identify problematic behaviours outside the family environment. It is difficult for parents not to notice the behaviours of their children. However, there are many signs that should make parents suspect that their children have adopted aggressive and/or violent behaviour. Examples of such signs can be the way they treat the household pet, or their younger siblings, when they invite someone home and behave in an intolerant or rude manner, or when they continually refer to someone in a derogatory and mocking way... These are signs that mark their bullying behaviour.

The success to successful behavioural change is the identification of possible causes for aggressive and/or violent behaviours. Jönsson & Muhonen (2022) describe some factors that may be prone to the occurrence of these behaviours:

1. Family violence: It is very common for abusive children to come from a violent family dynamic. If they grow up in an environment of violence and/or verbal, physical or psychological abuse, there is a high probability that they will learn to follow these patterns. And their escape route from that realisation is to reproduce them.
2. Parents being the bad example: If children see that their parents express themselves disparagingly of others, are insensitive to others, have fun putting names and laughing at the failures of others, surely that model will lead them to their own relationships.
3. Lack of limits: Children who are used to always having what they want, to crossing boundaries without any consequences, to yelling, insulting and hitting without anything happening, it is very possible that they use those behaviours in other spaces.
4. Exposure to violent content: Exposure to video games that are increasingly aggressive and violent, to movies or television programs, without supervision, can be generators of aggression in children and young people.
5. Negative influence: Sometimes certain relations and friendships can negatively influence the behaviours of children and young people who begin to imitate aggressive behaviours.
6. Lack of social skills: There are those who have difficulty linking and connecting with others because they do not have the necessary social skills and failing to feel truly integrated they adopt aggressive patterns with the weakest often in search of what they believe will be “acceptance” of the group.

What to do if your child bullies?

It is important that family and school work together in a coordinated manner to help the bully cease their bullying behaviour. Families are a critical part of their recovery and behaviour change.

The “What to do if your child is a bully” guide from Optum (2021) identifies some of the signs that could make you suspect that your child is harassing other children in ways such as exhibiting aggressiveness, getting into trouble and blaming others for their mistakes

Intervention with the bullying child is a delicate job involving many agents and a specialised and thorough intervention. The prevention of bullying is the responsibility of everyone, family, school and society as a whole. And, in the same way, it is necessary for multidisciplinary teams to act in this process.

In the guide we find the following steps to act accordingly:

1. Detect it and accept that there is a problem. The first step is to detect and recognise it, which, although painful, is imminent in order to take action and help them.
2. Find the cause of their behaviour. We must try to define since when this situation is occurring with our child, see if there is any specific event that could have triggered their aggression, review the aspects mentioned above and if we discover what may be the cause, take immediate action, especially if they are within the family dynamic.
3. Take school complaints seriously. If the School lets us know that there is a situation with our child, it is essential to take it seriously and make a joint action plan that includes the repair of the fault, constant supervision and apologies to whoever has been assaulted.
4. Talk about it and define consequences. Once it has become clear that our child is having a behaviour of this type we must discuss it with them, seize the scope of what happened, find together how to correct the failure and define the consequences that they will have to face at home.
5. Consult a specialist. In some cases, it is best to ask for support from a specialist to detect what triggers this behaviour, what changes should be made at the family level, such as being more consistent with limits, etc.; and to help them through an intervention, to change those aggressive patterns, manage them anger, develop social skills, etc.

Educating in Social Values

All parents strive to educate their children in positive and healthy values that make them good citizens critical and active that contribute to the creation of a better society. But there are attitudes that are permeating children and by which they finally develop not so healthy habits.

Parents play a very important role, they must be open, listen and have a positive attitude when talking about other classmates. This will be the first step for the children themselves to report cases of bullying in a friend or even if they live the harassment in their own skin. In addition, they can also give clues about their positioning and their attitude towards those attitudes.

According to the child psychologist Santamaría (2019) the profile of a boy or girl who harasses has characteristics that often coincide, and in the same thing happens with the candidate to be harassed. That is why, it is important to take care of certain values from home, that help avoid harassment. It makes the following selection of values that work at home to change inappropriate behaviours:

- Responsibility. This value can be worked through small tasks entrusted to the children appropriate to their age. It is also important that they see adults, their referents and parents, fulfilling their obligations and being accountable for their own actions.
- Tolerance. It refers to the understanding and acceptance of being able to see in others a different way of thinking, being and acting, and admitting it as valid. How I, as an adult, speak and treat others, how I accept their differences, is the model we are going to offer to children. To encourage it, children will be talked about what it means to be tolerant. And stories, for example, can be a good way to do that.
- Respect. It consists in treating others as we like to be treated, something apparently simple but sometimes forgotten. Not only to people, but also to animals, to social norms, to the environment in general.
- Humbleness. It is important to teach children to know and recognize their own abilities as well as each other's weaknesses. This will help them get to know each other better. It is necessary that they feel secure in their strengths, but also that they see that everyone is different and is superior to nothing or anyone.

- Solidarity. Sharing time, space and energy with other people with the aim of living in harmony, collaborating and helping, benefits in love for others. Since children are young, they can participate with their children in charitable acts, volunteering, solidarity activities...
- Sincerity. The value of sincerity is also key. It is necessary to be sincere, to be noble and frank. This is a complicated issue, that sometimes with that of the 'pious lie' we play with the truth, and we take for granted some lies.
- Honesty. Being honest means respecting yourself and others. It is important to inculcate children to follow their own judgment and not to be influenced by other relationships or attitudes that they think may harm them.

The main idea is that, as role models of children, they will repeat all the actions they see adults do, so educating them and reducing children's negative behaviours begins with us.

Suggested resources

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- Protect Yourself Rules – BULLYING
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mrE5zgEvt4&ab_channel=FightChildAbuse
- SONG: THE BULLY (SIA)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FR0TKp9Zzls&ab_channel=Sia-Topic
- SONG: THE BULLY (SODY)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSEHI51XF9Y&ab_channel=SodyVEVO
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