

Submission  
No 29

## **INQUIRY INTO BULLYING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

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## **NSW Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee No 2**

### **Some brief comments**

1. The nature, level and impact of bullying among school age children and young people under the age of 18, including apprentices and trainees

Children are still being bullied, teased, excluded, experiencing rumors and physical bullying. Although cyber bullying has increased I do not see any more than normal bullying cases in my consulting office. I felt that cyber bullying is another part of a school bullying tactic.

Thus students are still affected by bullying, although it seems to be improving. ie less referrals. Perhaps they are more prepared to talk about it with their teachers and parents.

I am not aware of evidence-based research which demonstrates that victims of school bullying are similar to apprentices and trainees. I believe that school bullying is different to workplace bullying. Although the bullying behaviors are very similar, the impact can be more serious for workplace bullying, apart from the impact of cyber bullying.

2. Factors contributing to bullying

The major factors contributing to school bullying are

- A local community which condones bullying eg sporting clubs, bus drivers, sports people, politicians, reality TV, or does nothing and is not involved in spreading the anti-bullying message eg sports identities, police.
- A general and professional lack of understanding about the impact of cyber bullying on young people and the harm it can do. We do not have enough

research indicating the extent and types of injury a cyber bullying victim can experience. Unfortunately, many parents are ignorant of the harm it can do.

- A culture of acceptance of school bullying by staff and an ignorance of what to do. Despite many excellent programs, many teachers still blame the bully in front of everyone else, which exacerbates the problem.
- Workplace bullying among teachers- the role model of bullying by staff to one another and from parents to staff and vice versa is very high. There is more bullying in the staffroom than classroom! The best research is by Duncan and O'Reilly. ( 2007)
- In addition, there is virtually no acknowledgement of teacher bullying by the education departments. They are treated extremely badly by the medico legal system. Other teachers know that this is happening and feel fear to speak out. I have one teacher who has been bullied in NSW and receive letters from others.
- Parenting issues, eg overprotective parents, parents who condone abuse, role model inconsistent discipline, parent show are too busy to teach their children emotional and social resilience. Parent who do not become involved in what their children are doing at school and online.
- Parents are less able to provide a learning environment at home where by children learn how to deal with difficult children and how to be caring, friendly children. They bully, they lack empathy and they are bullied. They lack social and emotional resilience.
- Unfortunately schools offer programs that often only exist in a bully-free environment, they are NOT life survival skills that will give them the resilience to cope anywhere. Children soon realize the uselessness of such programs.
- Many schools teach children skills that are impossible to use, eg" walk away", "tell them how you feel", "do nothing". Imagine doing this to a bully boss at work. Nor will it work at school. This makes the child feel even more powerless as adults give faulty advice. Then they feel hopeless, nothing can be done.
- Prevention and early intervention approaches to address bullying, including 'cyber-bullying'

This requires a whole school, local community approach with local authorities involved, teachers, parents and students. It means that students require role models of collaboration and restorative practices and **not** role models of adversarial practices. Parents and teachers must be also treated with respect and any concerns they have need to be dealt with respectfully.

There should not be a separation in the treatment of school student bullying from the bullying that teachers or parents experience at school or from medico-legal authorities.

Students need to learn how to block bullies anywhere, at home school or later on at work. They need to learn how to develop healthy social relationships. This is very easy as quick to do. There are many good examples of classroom programs, eg Donna Cross programs, Helen McGrath programs, 'Stop think and do'.

Teacher bullying needs to be addressed as well as parent bullying. This represents a whole school change and is NOT being done in many schools.

Parent training sessions would be very useful to assist parents bringing up children in today's online society.

The evidence-base for effective anti-bullying approaches

- I will not make a detailed comment except to say that there are some excellent programs. I do not know why are not as successful as we would hope, perhaps because they are not implemented thoroughly, the parents and community are not fully involved or the skills they give students are not sufficient to protect them from a bully. Kids lose faith and know instinctively, what works and what doesn't.
- I do not understand how many expensive, highly researched programs are not effective. Other psychologists and myself are available to speak about school bullying. I cannot make a comment for others, however, recently I have very few invitations to speak about dealing with school bullying. I think the idea has gone out of fashion. When schools do want me to come, they have very little funding for my fees and airfares etc. Perhaps there is insufficient funding to train teachers to relay the anti-bullying message continuously.

- The number of students who have suicided as a consequence of cyber bullying is very high. Clearly school and parents need to do further research to assist students more.

*Case example- I saw a boy aged about eleven two weeks ago with his mother, he had been bullied for over a year. I obtained a history and genogram. Then I role-played with him, asking him to tease me. I showed him how I block the tease. Two weeks later the teasing has stopped, and he is playing with the bully!*

My model is simple and quick to learn. My model was proven as part of Dr Pam Carroll's clinical PhD thesis, 2007. My book has sold over 30, 000 copies and is in five languages. I can help children who are being bullied block it and develop a social life. I believe that schools and parents need to teach children life survival skills that they can use anywhere, not just in a protected school environment. Otherwise they will be unprepared for later life.

Any other relevant matter

I am practicing psychologist, speaker and author. I worked as a school based counselor for 17 years. Then I went into private practice. I am very interested in teaching children and adults how to survive, how to protect themselves from mean, nasty people anywhere.

I believe that youngsters need to develop social and emotional resilience, to become part of a number of social tribes. That is how everyone survives best, by belonging to support networks. It means learning how to deal with all members of the tribe, the good, the bad and the ignorant. These are skills that are being slowly lost with the breakdown of the family, the lack of family meals around a table and cyber "babysitting" practices. It is also being affected by older, over protective mothers who give their children the impression that the world is always a safe place. Their children are encouraged to be sensitive. They alienate other children and are open to attack. These children can't

listen to their gut feelings and react appropriately. They show their anger and fear to a bully, which the bully sees as a threat and attacks. I say to these children, " if you show your fear or anger, you make a bully happy."

It is very difficult to condense a book on dealing with workplace bullying, (currently being completed) into a few sentences. However, as there is far more bullying in the staffroom than the classroom, the role model and toxic culture must influence students and their parents. Any investigation needs to assess the impact of workplace bullying on teachers. Schools require a collaborative, approach to dealing with any conflict.

I hear and see many teachers who have been bullied, excluded, humiliated, stalked or had their life threatened by other staff. The abusive manner in which these injured professional employees are treated by their principal, their colleagues, (who are scared to act as witnesses) their insurer and the whole medico-legal, workcover system is outrageous. In fact, workforce NSW are aware and I took part in a day's symposium about workplace bullying in education in NSW a few years ago.

In conclusion, I would like to see more assistance for parents, better social survival skills for children that they can use anywhere later on and help for teachers.

If you want more information please contact me,

yours

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Manuscript dealing with bullying – in contract stage