



Defining & Identifying Bullying

A clear path through the maze

This month we are proud to present the second in our series of articles about preventing bullying behaviours in the early childhood education sector by the Director of [Break Through Bullying](#) Melissa Graham.

Talking about bullying can be difficult. It is a subject that raises emotions, stirs personal stories and invites opinions from people about what can be done to overcome this problem. It is a topic that needs sensitivity and a rational, informed approach. Talking about bullying is the way that we can come to terms with the issues and work as a community to make positive changes. It helps if we are all talking the same language.

Melissa Graham is the Director of [Break Through Bullying](#) creating products for schools and organisations that help to promote positive anti-bullying behaviours.

Melissa is dedicated to empowering individuals to stand up for themselves and others against violence and bullying to create harmony in our communities. She has a Bachelor of Education and has twenty years teaching and educational experience.

Defining bullying and the terms that surround it can be crucial for your organisation and for the education of the staff, parents and children who are members of your community. Clear definitions stated in Positive Behaviour or Guidance policy documents can assist all educators of young children to understand what bullying is and how to identify it, before tackling the issue of how to address the bullying behaviours and assist the children involved.

Also, knowing the difference between bullying and incidents of inappropriate behaviour in our educational settings helps us as carers to intervene confidently and effectively deal with challenging behaviour situations.

The definition of bullying most commonly used comes from Dr Dan Olweus:

A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending him or herself.

This definition has four distinct characteristics to it. First, the repetitious nature of bullying, it is **not** a onetime incident of inappropriate behaviour. Second, it is a negative experience for the child being bullied. Third, bullying can be carried out by an individual or a group, and fourth, there is an imbalance of power. This imbalance of power is a very strong indicator of bullying and one that educators need to be aware of. Carers have a unique opportunity to witness examples of this imbalance of power when they are supervising and observing children during focused teaching and learning sessions and during play times.

Given this definition, bullying is a complex issue and requires educators to analyse the daily behaviour patterns of children who may be displaying bullying behaviours. These behaviours, typically amongst young children, can be **physical** including hitting, punching and kicking, **verbal** including teasing and name calling or **exclusion** of peers from activities or groups.

The repetition of these behaviours can be tracked if a record keeping system is in place and all staff are aware of the significance of tracking the patterns of repetitious behaviour that determine whether or not bullying is in fact occurring.

It is from this information that appropriate actions and logical

consequences can be decided upon and put in place to assist those involved. This means both the child who is displaying the bullying behaviours and the child who is experiencing the bullying. It is equally important that both children receive the support and assistance from staff to learn the life-long skills of communication, relationship formation and conflict resolution.

It is important that there is a commitment from all staff to the promotion of these positive behaviours and the development of skills by providing opportunities for children to learn and practice acceptable behaviours. Skills such as recognising emotions, social skills, using words to express feelings, sharing equipment in the classroom and in the playground are the foundations of creating a positive environment of co-operation during social interactions.

These skills are assisting children to form friendships and peer relationships and indirectly educating them to recognise that bullying is not acceptable. More formal teaching and learning about bullying in the child care setting can be useful for children to begin to explore feelings of sympathy for children who are bullied, empathy towards others and to start to understand why bullying behaviours are not acceptable.

The invaluable skill of providing help or assistance to others who need support to stand up for themselves can be taught to our children as a proactive approach against bullying. A bystander, someone who is witnessing bullying behaviour, can play a very important role in diffusing a bullying situation if he or she is taught safe intervention skills.

Educating children about bullying can be done most effectively when there is a readiness on the part of children to share their thoughts about bullying with others in their class or group.

Talking about bullying in an educational setting can effect change, although regardless of age, the crucial factor here is the relationship that the child has with his or her teacher. Getting children to talk about bullying at an early age is essential to developing their understanding of the inappropriate nature of bullying and increasing their awareness of the support networks available for them to access.

If a child has someone to confide in, her or she will be more likely to openly discuss his or her concerns. Supportive, well-informed adults who are ready to listen and **keep on listening** are vital for all children to have in their world and particularly to a child who may not outwardly appear to need assistance, he or she knows that someone cares and is concerned about his or her welfare.

Erin Tourish, Director of Tadpoles Early Learning Centre, Brisbane Airport, expressed the view that parents with children in child care have general concerns about behaviours that may cause harm or injury to other children or self-harm to the child displaying the inappropriate behaviour. At her Centre, Erin explains that if any behaviour concerns are noted and investigated further, "we work in partnership with our families developing strategies to implement both within the service and within the home environment."

It is through this holistic, compassionate approach that children, families, educators and communities assist in making changes that can lead to more positive outcomes for all concerned.

By developing an anti-bullying policy, your centre can make a stand against bullying and bullying behaviours, by providing a clear definition of what bullying is and procedures that will be followed to identify bullying and ways that children involved in bullying situations will be given assistance and guidance. This provides all members of your community with the knowledge and understanding that is required to talk about bullying without fear or ignorance. An anti-bullying policy can outline the ways in which staff will foster open-communication and build trust within the

child's group and with parents to demonstrate healthy relationships where people can rely on one another for understanding and support without judgement.

Bullying is everyone's concern and it is by talking about it, defining it clearly and identifying it correctly with evidence, that our children have a better chance to see for themselves that bullying is a counterproductive way to develop positive relationships and build harmonious communities. We cannot expect that the children in our care can attempt to change their inappropriate or bullying behaviours without assistance from educators who are committed to demonstrating, modeling and explicitly teaching alternative appropriate behaviours.

Even then, we cannot assume that our teaching about bullying has been effective unless we follow-up and monitor situations that are of concern, while encouraging all children to continue to develop positive connections with others.

Early detection and early intervention strategies are keys to unlocking bullying. Together, as teachers of our young children, we are the people who can be proud to talk about bullying openly and confidently, safe in the knowledge that the organisations we work for and the children we are dedicated to are respectively giving and receiving the best quality care when it comes to concerns about bullying.

Break Through Bullying products can be displayed in Child Care centres, OSHC facilities, Prep classes, Primary and Secondary schools and colleges. Products can be used in teaching and learning situations in these settings. Other support is also available for these facilities to ensure safe environments for children.

Have you successfully dealt with bullying in your child care service?

Go to CareforKids.com.au/Social to share your experiences with your colleagues in the industry.

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