

Bullying - what is it, and what works to prevent it?  
An overview of approaches that have been effective in preventing bullying in New  
Zealand Schools

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## Executive Summary

Many New Zealand school based approaches to bullying have had highly successful results. However, to create more long term positive change, a wider community approach that reinforces the messaging from schools is required. Children learn about respectful relationships from their own families, and from the environments in which they live. Communities that support families and are places where children feel safe have a profound influence on their lives.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, relational, social and is becoming increasingly common through the use of technology and social media. A wide range of research has been carried out to determine why some children and young people engage in bullying. The main consensus throughout research and literature is that bullying is a social-ecological phenomenon and there are often many underlying variables in a child's internal and external world that may predispose them to engage in bullying behaviour.

This literature scan provides information for community providers about success factors that relate to developing a community wide bullying approach. It is also recommended that providers take into account the following points when developing preventative bullying approaches and strategies:

- The role of the bystander must be incorporated into any approach
- The entire community must be behind an approach to bullying. There must be clear anti-bullying messages, strong leadership and commitment to making positive changes.
- There must be consistency in an approach to bullying. Approaches need to be reinforced in both a child's home and school environment.
- It is important to draw upon research and trialled approaches to bullying in order to look at what has been successful in the prevention of bullying.

## **Introduction**

Bullying among children and young people is a significant problem in New Zealand. A study conducted in 2008 by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, found that bullying incidents in New Zealand schools were more than 50 percent higher than the international average (Martin, Mullis & Foy, cited in Cushman & Clelland, 2011). In a 2008 national survey of 9 to 13 year olds, 72 percent reported either experiencing or witnessing bullying at school (Carroll-Lind, Chapman & Raskauskas, 2008, cited in Cushman & Clelland, 2011).

This literature scan briefly outlines what is currently known about bullying; what some of the long and short term effects of bullying are and briefly summarises current school-based approaches to bullying. The aim of this literature scan is to introduce some of the main principles that underpin school-based approaches, in order to inform community providers. It will also provide recommendations to encourage community providers to develop complementary initiatives that will assist with the reduction and prevention of bullying in New Zealand.

## **Methodology**

The brief for this literature scan was to look at what has been done in New Zealand to prevent bullying. Strategies undertaken by the Ministry of Education around bullying prevention and intervention are also included; in order to look at how community providers might draw on those same principles when developing or implementing bullying approaches.

The search strategy involved a search of New Zealand Government websites; from here, information was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and the Families Commission. A secondary search was conducted through the Ministry of Social Development's Knowledge and Information Service. From this search, a range of information was found on both bullying prevention and intervention approaches and strategies.

This review aims to inform community providers in New Zealand about what works in relation to minimising and preventing bullying, therefore research and information with New Zealand examples of what works were used in favour of

examples from abroad. However this document provides a list of recommended literature for those interested in looking at international research and information.

### **What we know about bullying**

Bullying is most commonly defined throughout the literature as behaviour that is harmful and deliberate, is repeated over time and is often the result of a power imbalance between a victim and an aggressor (Carroll-Lind, 2009). There are four common types of bullying behaviour: (1) physical bullying - actions such as hitting and kicking; (2) verbal bullying - constant name calling, teasing, mocking and making remarks based on the victim's race, gender or sexuality; (3) relational or social bullying - including manipulating, spreading rumours and excluding the victim; and (4) cyber bullying - including threats, negative comments, harassment and intimidation using social networking websites and mobile phones (Boyd & Barwick, 2011). Cyber bullying has become more serious as technology has advanced and those who have access to technology are now at risk of being bullied (or bullying others) at all times of the day and night.

Research conducted on why some children and young people engage in bullying has drawn on biological, sociological/social-cultural, behavioural and social learning theories and developmental models for explanations. All of these theories provide an insight into why some children and young people are predisposed to bullying behaviour. However the general consensus throughout much of the recent literature is that bullying is a social-ecological phenomenon, that is, bullying occurs when there are many underlying variables related to each part of a child or young person's internal and external environment.

Drawing from research, Murachver (2011) identifies several variables that are associated with bullying. These variables are outlined below and are useful when looking at a socio-ecological model to explain why some children and young people engage in bullying behaviour.

1. Family variables - children are more likely to bully when they are victims of maltreatment by parents and subjected to aggressive discipline. Further,

children who belong to families of low socio-economic status are more likely to experience bullying and as a result may go on to bully others;

2. Children's variables - children with poor academic skills are more likely to bully and often believe that certain problems can be dealt with by using aggression;
3. School variables - lack of supervision, lack of clear anti-bullying policies and a negative school climate increases the likelihood of bullying;
4. Societal variables - when there is a clear difference between the economic status of children and young people both at school and in the community, the incidence of bullying will be higher. This is reinforced when there is a community acceptance of inequality (Murachver, 2011).

### **Impacts of bullying on victims, aggressors and bystanders**

There are significant long and short term effects on children and young people who experience, administer and witness bullying behaviour. Impacts for victims of bullying include physical, cognitive and social harm, poor academic achievement and school attendance, as well as lack of social connectedness and sense of belonging (Carroll-Lind, 2009). Impacts for aggressors include leaving school early, poor academic achievement, low self-esteem, rejection by peers, as well as continued dominating behaviour throughout the life course (Carroll-Lind, 2009). Those who engage in bullying behaviour as children and young people are not only at risk of becoming aggressive adults, but are also approximately four times more likely to engage in criminal behaviour later in life (Olweus, 2007, cited in Carroll-Lind, 2009).

The majority of bullying incidences have witnesses (usually peers of the same age) who choose not to intervene or report it (Adair, 1999). In a study of New Zealand co-educational secondary schools, 42 percent of students who were surveyed about bullying reported that they had witnessed a bullying incident and did nothing (Adair et al, 1998, cited in Adair et al, 1999).

Reasons as to why these bystanders choose not to intervene or report a bullying incident can be varied. However these are often related to: dislike of the victim; believing the victim deserves the bullying; fear of becoming a target and the

desire to fit into a certain peer group (Adair et al., 2000 & Carroll-Lind & Kearney, 2004, cited in Carroll-Lind, 2009). Bystanders play an important role in the occurrence of bullying as they provide aggressors with attention (Murachver, 2011). By deciding not to take action, bystanders normalise and accept the behaviour, therefore it is vital that any approach to minimise or stop bullying, places importance upon those who witness bullying.

While bystanders are not directly involved in bullying, they can often experience negative effects of witnessing the behaviour. Bystanders are at risk of becoming silent accomplices and will often follow the lead of the bully (Buhs & Ladd, 2001, cited in Carroll-Lind, 2009). Other effects for bystanders include feeling unsafe at school, absence from school and lack of interest in educational achievement (Buhs & Ladd, 2001, cited in Carroll-Lind, 2009).

### **What are schools doing to prevent bullying from occurring?**

To date, there have been many approaches and strategies designed to prevent bullying from occurring or re-occurring in schools. A report prepared by the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor - *Improving the Transition: reducing social and psychological morbidity during adolescence* (2011) has outlined bullying as both a national and international concern. The report groups bullying interventions into five categories - curriculum based; social and behavioural skills groups; mentoring; social work and multi-disciplinary interventions. Of these five intervention strategies, multi-disciplinary, whole school approaches to bullying have proved to be the most successful to date, with an estimated reduction in bullying of approximately 20 percent (Murachver, 2011).

The intent of a whole-school approach to bullying is to enable teachers, parents, students and the wider community to share the role and responsibility of changing school culture and discouraging bullying by incorporating anti-bullying policies, effective procedures for responding to bullying, and preventative programmes in the curriculum (Carroll-Lind, 2009). Whole-school approaches often involve a range of training, information and resources that are made available to the entire school

community to reduce bullying and encourage all parties to become responsible for each other's well-being (Murachver, 2011).

Many schools in New Zealand have also adopted approaches such as restorative initiatives, whereby the focus is on restoring relationships between victims and aggressors instead of using punitive measures (Cushman & Clelland, 2011); approaches that encourage pro-social behaviour; and health promoting approaches whereby there is a school wide commitment to enhancing the physical and emotional well-being of students and staff (Cushman & Clelland, 2011). Improvement of student well-being is seen throughout the literature as a common success factor for approaches that aim to reduce bullying (Gaffney, Higgins, McCormack & Taylor, 2004).

There are a wide range of programmes available to schools to support and encourage the reduction and prevention of bullying. Schools are also able to come up with and implement their own strategies. Well known programmes that have been effectively used in New Zealand schools include: Eliminating violence - managing anger; Non-violent Crisis Intervention; Keeping Ourselves Safe; and Kia Kaha - all of which are underpinned by a whole school approach and commitment to enhancing the school environment (Education Review Office, 2007).

The Ministry of Education has clearly outlined that bullying behaviours are complex and approaches will not be successful if they focus only on those directly involved. The Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) Action Plan, developed by the Ministry of Education and education sector groups, is not solely focussed on bullying. However, it does offer initiatives and programmes for teachers, parents and schools in New Zealand to change problem behaviours and promote pro-social behaviour in children and young people.

The PB4L Action Plan is built on the foundation that behaviour is not fixed and therefore difficult behaviour can be changed when focus is placed on changing a child's environment and encouraging positive behaviour (Ministry of Education, 2011). Under PB4L, sit initiatives and programmes that aim to change problem

behaviour and promote positive behaviour from an early age, some of these programmes and initiatives include; The School-Wide framework; The Incredible Years Teachers Programme; The Incredible Years Parent Programme; and the Wellbeing at School initiative.

#### *The School-Wide Framework*

PB4L School-wide is an approach that supports schools to create a culture whereby children and young people learn positive behaviour and thrive in their learning environment. The focus of this approach is to teach children clear expectations for behaviour, to develop children's social skills, to reinforce appropriate behaviour and be consistent in addressing inappropriate behaviour, as well as to use data-based assessment and problem solving to deal with any concerns (Ministry of Education, 2011). The School-Wide approach is customised and can meet the cultural needs of any school. An important aspect of this approach is that it is driven by a leadership team who are committed to its implementation. They also need to be prepared to undertake training provided by the Ministry of Education to ensure that the approach is effective (Ministry of Education, 2011).

#### *The Incredible Years - Teacher Programme*

The Incredible Years Teacher programme is targeted at educators who work with children between the ages of three and eight. The programme is interactive and offers opportunities for educators to practice strategies and look at interactions from a child's perspective. Participation in this programme is useful for educators as they are able to meet with colleagues from other schools, share and discuss their teaching practices and experiences, as well as learn new ways to manage behaviour effectively, build positive relationships with students, encourage good behaviour and discourage inappropriate behaviour (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The Incredible Years programme also provides educators with tools to help them to understand possible underlying causes for difficult behaviour, as well as offers strategies for teaching children about social skills, empathy and consequences for behaviour that is undesirable (Ministry of Education, 2011).

### *The Incredible Years - Parent Programme*

The Incredible Years Parent Programme runs for 14 to 18 sessions and is targeted at parents from all backgrounds, with children between three and eight years old who have behaviour difficulties that may disrupt their home and or school life (Ministry of Education, 2011). The programme helps parents change problem behaviour in their children and create a more enjoyable family life. Parents are able to meet each week to discuss any issues and share and develop approaches to use when their children are acting out (Ministry of Education, 2011). The programme is underpinned by the philosophy that parents are able to learn from and support each other by coming together and developing effective approaches to change problem behaviour.

### *Wellbeing @ School*

Wellbeing @ school: Safe and caring schools is a project that falls under PB4L and came about after concerns were expressed about school bullying and other anti-social behaviours at school. It takes the form of a website (*Wellbeing@school*) and was developed by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) to support school communities become positive learning environments (Boyd & Barwick, 2011). The website provides schools with the resources and tools necessary to deter behaviours such as bullying and enhance pro-social behaviour (Boyd & Barwick, 2011). By using the website, schools are able to complete a survey in which they will learn about the emotional and social climate of their school, as well as what the student perspective is of their school environment. From there the school is able to use relevant tools provided by the website, which enable them to promote positive behaviour amongst students, build on the student's skills, strategies and resilience and ultimately minimise the incidence of bullying (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2013).

### **Principles of effective community led bullying prevention approaches and strategies**

By drawing upon the main principles of existing bullying approaches and programmes in schools, community providers will be better equipped to develop bullying approaches that are effective. Several principles or 'success factors' have

become clear from the literature in relation to developing effective, community led bullying prevention approaches. When looking at what works in relation to the prevention and intervention of bullying behaviour, the following points should be taken into consideration:

- Bullying should be viewed as a community wide problem, rather than an individual problem. Bullying approaches must be designed to intervene early, promote positive behaviour and must target the entire community in order to be effective.
- Whole school approaches work best - community led approaches must work with an entire school community, all of whom must be committed to building a positive school climate.
- The community should provide a culture of safe telling. The development of resources that enable children and young people to report bullying is important in both schools and in the community.
- There must be leadership. Bullying approaches must be lead effectively by principals and community leaders who are committed to promoting change.
- Training must be provided for staff and parents so they are better able to recognise the signs of bullying and respond quickly.
- Strong anti-bullying messages must be clear in both schools and communities and promotion of non-bullying must be clear and
- Parents and wider whānau must be involved and educated. Approaches to bullying must also include the perspectives and ideas of children and young people; they should also take into account external factors or the wider social-ecology that can cause anti-social behaviour.

## **Discussion**

Throughout the literature, it has been established that the entire school community has a role to play in preventing bullying. While this is true, it does not mean that it is the sole responsibility of schools to provide solutions to bullying behaviour. Schools are embedded within each community and are heavily influenced by social interactions that take place outside of school. Thus it is important to include the community in bullying interventions in order to reinforce

the expectations and attitudes that surround anti-bullying messages (Adair, 1999). It is important that awareness is created throughout the entire community and children and young people feel safe in reporting bullying behaviour. Further, adults (whether they are teachers, parents and family or community members) must be equipped with the skills and resources required to effectively respond to bullying incidences. Community providers must also take into account the disparities between families and each home environment, as what will work for some families, may not work for others and some children will be predisposed to bullying because of their adverse home environment (Pearce & Thompson, 1998).

Bullying in New Zealand is a problem that must be addressed and dealt with as its incidence is far too high. Bullying has many negative impacts for not only victims and aggressors, but also bystanders, pointing to a need for all children and young people to become involved in preventing it. This literature scan has only briefly touched on some of the many bullying prevention approaches and programmes that are available in New Zealand. When looking through the literature, it quickly becomes clear that there is a lack of focus on community involvement in the prevention of bullying.

While in school approaches to combat bullying are important, the attitude that society holds towards bullying behaviour, sets a standard for what is believed to be acceptable aggression. The literature is consistent in reiterating that there is little chance of reducing and preventing bullying from occurring if the whole community is not committed to dealing with it and declaring that bullying exists and is unacceptable (Pearce & Thompson, 1998). Often, children and young people who engage in bullying behaviour experience social and economic problems in both the home and the wider community. It is recommended that preventative approaches against bullying should be started at home with parents preparing and supporting children to fit into the social world.

## Recommendations

By drawing on the common themes and ideas that have been provided throughout the literature, it is recommended that community providers take into account the following points when designing and implementing effective community led prevention strategies:

- It is important to draw on research and trialled approaches to bullying, in order to look at what has been effective. It is recommended that any bullying approach incorporates the entire community, has clear anti-bullying policies and messages, provides clear leadership as well as takes into account the many variables that exist in a child or young person's internal and external world.
- The entire community must be behind an approach to bullying. This does not only include a school community. How are community providers going to ensure that the entire community takes responsibility for reducing the incidence of bullying?
- Behaviour and social learning theories outline that behaviour is learnt and can also be 'unlearnt'. It is recommended that any approach to tackle the problem of bullying, must commence in the home and be reinforced in a child or young person's school environment.
- Bystanders play a crucial role in the incidence of bullying and must be included in any approach. How will bystanders be incorporated and targeted in community led approaches?
- Finally, it is recommended that community providers view Appendix A of this document, this provides approaches to bullying that have been successful both at a national and international level.

## References

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## Appendix A

New Zealand Literature			
Author(s)	Name and Date of publication	Summary of literature	Link to literature if available
New Zealand Police	Keeping Ourselves Safe (KOS) Youth Education Programme (2012)	A positive personal safety programme that aims to provide children and young people with the skills to cope with situations that might involve abuse. It will help them keep themselves safe in their interactions with other people.	Link to website: <a href="http://www.police.govt.nz/keeping-ourselves-safe-kos">http://www.police.govt.nz/keeping-ourselves-safe-kos</a>
Nonviolent Crisis Intervention	Nonviolent Crisis Intervention. Training in Australia and New Zealand (2012)	<i>Nonviolent Crisis Intervention</i> training is the most widely used course in the world for effective management of disruptive and assaultive behaviour.	Link to website: <a href="http://www.crisisprevention.com/Specialties/Nonviolent-Crisis-Intervention/International-Training/Australia-New-Zealand">http://www.crisisprevention.com/Specialties/Nonviolent-Crisis-Intervention/International-Training/Australia-New-Zealand</a>
Raskauskas, Juliana	Evaluation of the Kia Kaha Anti-Bullying Programme for Students in Years 5-8 (2007)	Findings include: Do schools that use the <i>Kia Kaha</i> programme report less bullying? Does <i>Kia Kaha</i> positively affect school climate? Is the <i>Kia Kaha</i> programme being implemented according to the guidelines? What was the role of Police Education Officer's in <i>Kia Kaha</i> schools? What are the strengths of and challenges to <i>Kia Kaha</i> being implemented in schools?	<a href="#">Link to document</a>
Schoolnews 2012	Cool Schools - a positive choice (2012)	Looks at the Cool Schools anti-bullying and conflict management programmes from the Peace Foundation.	<a href="#">Link to document</a>

Author(s)	Name and Date of publication	Summary of literature	Link to literature if available
Woulfe, Catherine	Bully for you (17 Aug 2008)	Looks at 'cyber bullying', bullying via the Internet or mobile phone. Gives statistics and looks briefly at the programmes of NetSafe, a government-funded education group. Relates the circumstances of two teens (Daniel Gillies and Alex Teka) who committed suicide after being bullied, and looks briefly at abusive online remarks noted by Teka's sister, Aana Teka. Looks briefly at hacking by bullies. Gives advice for safety online.	<a href="#">Link to Article</a>  More about Netsafe and available programmes: <a href="#">Link to document</a>
Gaffney, Michael (University of Otago, Children's Issues Centre, Dunedin)	Improving school culture : what we learnt from three primary schools (2004)	Summarises the common factors in the approaches of three primary schools to promoting a more positive school culture. Describes the programmes and their community support, the outcomes for students, and the current challenges and goals at each school.	<a href="#">Link to document</a>
Maharaj, Amritha Sobrun (Massey University (Albany)); Ryba, Ken (Massey University (Albany), Educational Psychology Training Programme); Tie, Warwick (Massey University (Albany), School of Sociology)	Bullying as school violence: prevention and elimination (2000)	Suggests rethinking the origins and meaning of bullying, and outlines some steps that can be taken to prevent or eliminate these intimidatory practices within school and community. Proposes that bullying can be best understood in terms of the impact that colonialist and liberalist discourses have on the construction of social inquiry into such topics. Makes recommendations on the development of theoretical frameworks that conceptualise bullying as a collective social action.	No link available Bulletin / New Zealand Psychological Society, Sep 2000; n.98:p.42-48

International literature			
Author(s)	Name and Date of publication	Summary of literature	Link to literature if available
Michael Carr-Gregg and Ramesh Manocha.	Bullying : effects, prevalence and strategies for detection (2011)	Treatment of childhood bullying. It discusses issues including early detection, assessment of severity, counselling and support, screening for psychological distress, disclosure to parents, and advice for parents. The article also notes further resources and describes bullying intervention strategies commonly used in schools.	<a href="#">Link to document</a>
Gwen Cooke.	'Sowing the Seeds of Hope' - community crime prevention (2011)	'Sowing the Seeds of Hope' is a violence-prevention community education program for isolated and rural communities in North Western Victoria. It was developed in response to community concerns about domestic and school violence, in a time of on-going drought and insecurity, and was funded for 3 years under the National Community Crime Prevention Program. This paper describes the work of the program, its activities and achievements, and the lessons learned.	<a href="#">Link to document</a>
Gabrielle Le Bon and Jennifer Boddy.	Working with vulnerable primary school aged children and their families: a review of the Australian literature on key principles, issues, and community level approaches (2010)	This review highlights the issues facing Australian primary school aged children and their families, and it examines approaches for working with those from diverse backgrounds who have varying health needs. Research further suggests that practitioners should engage in a holistic approach to children's health and welfare and offer support across multiple domains of development, giving attention to both cultural and contextual factors.	<a href="#">Link to document</a>

Author(s)	Name and Date of publication	Summary of literature	Link to literature if available
Juli Coffin, Ann Larson and Donna Cross	Bullying in an Aboriginal context. (2010)	This paper demonstrates that for Aboriginal children and youth in one region of Western Australia, bullying occurs frequently and is perpetuated by family and community violence, parental responses to bullying and institutional racism. Addressing bullying requires actions to reduce violence, foster positive cultural identity and reduce socio-economic disadvantage.	<a href="#">Link to Article</a>
Compiled for the Anti-Bullying Alliance by Neil Tippett and Prof. Peter K Smith, the Unit for School and Family Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London.	Anti-Bullying Alliance. 2011	This report reviews research focusing on bullying in five areas of the community, and on the basis of this evidence highlights the strategies which can best be used to prevent and respond to such behaviour.	<a href="#">Link to document</a>
Olweus, Dan	Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)	Olweus is a comprehensive, school-wide program designed and evaluated for use in elementary, middle, junior high or high schools. The program's goals are to reduce and prevent bullying problems among school children and to improve peer relations at school. The program has been found to reduce bullying among children, improve the social climate of classrooms, and reduce related antisocial behaviours, such as vandalism and truancy.	Link to website: <a href="http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/index.page">http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/index.page</a>