The Trauma Associated with Bullying Involvement

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Relationships matter!!
Percentage of students who reported having a high relationship with their parents, by their grades and gender

- **Grade 6**: Male 42.8%, Female 39.9%
- **Grade 7**: Male 33.8%, Female 32.8%
- **Grade 8**: Male 28.1%, Female 24.7%
- **Grade 9**: Male 19.9%, Female 19.5%
- **Grade 10**: Male 19.3%, Female 18.1%

Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence
La Promotion des Relations et l’Elimination de la Violence
Emotional Problems and Relationship With Parents

Data from the Canadian Health Behaviour Survey of School Aged Children.
Percentage of students who reported having a high relationship with their teachers, by their grades and gender

- **Grade 6**: Male 44.3%, Female 51.7%
- **Grade 7**: Male 31.7%, Female 34.2%
- **Grade 8**: Male 26.7%, Female 24.9%
- **Grade 9**: Male 19.3%, Female 19.0%
- **Grade 10**: Male 17.5%, Female 18.1%
- **Total**: Male 27.7%, Female 29.2%

**Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence**

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Emotional Wellbeing and Teacher Relationships

Data from the Canadian Health Behaviour Survey of School Aged Children.

Teacher Relationship

- Low
- Medium
- High

Boys
- Low: 29%
- Medium: 42%
- High: 58%

Girls
- Low: 18%
- Medium: 29%
- High: 46%
The Central Role of Relationships

• Outcomes:

• Parent relationships mattered for 23/24 health outcomes.
• Teacher relationships were related to 8/24 outcomes.
• School relationships mattered for 13/24 outcomes.
• Peer relationships mattered for 14/24 outcomes.
• Neighbourhood relationships mattered for 12/24 outcomes.

• Trends over time

Bullying as a Traumatic Experience

• Traumatic experience that occurs in peer interactions.

• Impact of bullying is often under estimated and minimized.
Trauma is experienced by all

- A large proportion of those who bully have been victimized and have experienced trauma within the family or the community

- Bullying is a shared interpersonal experience that may produce a shared experience of trauma through a shared social rejection interaction
Shared Trauma Perspective

Bullying Incident

- Fear
- Physiological Arousal
- Maladaptive Cognitions
Stress and Brain Development

• The brain adapts to the experiences that a child has:
  – If the child has positive experiences, brain adapts positively for learning, memory, and regulation.
  – If the child has stressful experiences, brain adapts negatively, with too much or little response to stress.
  – As the brain develops, the gene expression adapts as well, leading to further positive or negative brain development.
  – Experiences leave a chemical “signature” on genes, which can be temporary or permanent
  – Affect how easily the genes are switched on or off.
Bullying and Physiological Arousal

- Bullying
- Physiological Arousal
- Situational Emotional Dsyregulation

- Victimization
- Physiological Arousal
- Situational Emotional Dsyregulation

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Bullying and Emotional Dysregulation in Adolescents

- Bullying
- Rejection Cognitions
- Situational Emotional Dysregulation

- Victimization
- Rejection Cognitions
- Shame
- Situational and Dispositional Dysregulation
Brain Activity of Victimized Youth Experiencing Social Exclusion

- Peer victimized group showed increased neural response in:
  - left amygdala (involved in fear and arousal processing)
  - left parahippocampal gyrus (involved in emotional memory)
  - left inferior frontal operculum (involved in emotional experience)
  - right fusiform gyrus (involved in processing of faces)

- Extent of the altered neural response is proportional to the degree of bullying they experienced.
Victimization and PTSD Symptoms

PTSD

Boys
Girls

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Sticks and stone but words....

- Duration and number of places related to internalizing, externalizing problems, and relationships issues.
- People can relive and re-experience social pain more easily than physical pain.
- Emotions more intense and painful.
- Physical pain is often short lived but not social.
Bullying as a Traumatic Experience

• Witnessing bullying associated with:
  o Somatic complaints
  o Depression
  o Anxiety
  o Substance use

Jones & Barlow, 1990
Rivers et al., 2009
Zinzow et al., 2009
Bullying and the Peer Group

• Bullying occurs in a group context
• Peers present for 85% of bullying incidences
• 19-25% defend → many positive associations
  o Reduced victimization
  o Higher self-esteem, peer acceptance, and popularity for defended youth

Hawkins et al., 2001
Salmivalli et al; 2010 2011
Sainio et al., 2011
Bystander Actions

• May *escalate victimization* or mitigate its effects  
  (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015)

• Can *calm strong emotions or amplify friend’s anger*

• Can *discourage retaliation & reconcile* those involved  
  (Johnson, Waasdorp, Bednam, & Bradshaw, 2013)

• Bystanders can *retali ate on behalf* of their friends through proxy revenge  
  (Frey, Pearson, & Cohen, 2015)
Role of Peers in Bullying

- Most universal bullying prevention programs attempt to change bystander behavior (Bradshaw, 2015)

- A meta-analysis of 11 bullying prevention programs with a specific focus on bystander behavior found that they increased bystander intervention (Polanin, Espelage, Pigott, 2012)
Proportion of Youth who Intervene

- **Males Interveners**
- **Females Interveners**

Grade 4-6: Males > Females
Grade 7-8: Males > Females
Grade 9-10: Males > Females
Grade 11-12: Males > Females
Interveners: Why They Intervened

- The person needed help
- I wanted to help
- I wanted to make a difference
- Stopping bullying is everyone's responsibility
- No one deserves to be bullied
- It was not fair

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Psychosocial Difficulties and Defending

![Graph showing internalizing, academic, and relationship problems for males and females.](image)

- **Internalizing Problems**:
  - Males: 2.6
  - Females: 3.0

- **Academic Problems**:
  - Male: 1.4
  - Female: 1.8

- **Relationships**:
  - Male: 1.0
  - Female: 1.2

*Significant differences indicated by asterisks.*

**Note:** The graph illustrates the mean scores for different categories, with error bars showing variability.
Effects of Intervening Relate to Pervasiveness

**Psychosomatic Problems**

- High dose: Defenders (3.0), Witness (2.5)
- Low dose: Defenders (2.0), Witness (1.5)

**Relationships Problems**

- High dose: Defenders (2.5), Witness (2.0)
- Low dose: Defenders (1.5), Witness (1.0)

*Significant differences (*) between high and low dose conditions.
Where Bystanders Observe Bullying
Brain Scans of Defenders

- Defending behaviour is associated with brain activation in areas associated with emotional empathy and perspective taking.
- Displayed more activity in the supramarginal gyrus (SMG) and in the middle frontal gyrus (MFG).
- Emotional empathy is related to the mirror neuron system and facilitates the motor representation of other people’s emotions accompanied by affective reactions to the emotion.
Interventions need to address the trauma experienced by all involved in bullying
What does not work in addressing the trauma of bullying!

1. Zero tolerance punitive practices
2. Avoiding social media
3. Addressing bullying with celebrity not expertise.
4. One time interventions
5. Individual solutions – all need support
6. Ignoring adults’ bullying and relationships
Practise Implications

1. Recognize the signs of trauma
   - Concern over safety
   - Overwhelmed by fear or sadness
   - Difficulties learning or concentrating
   - Avoiding people or places
   - Feeling self-conscious
   - Shame and guilt
Be Trauma Responsive

- They aren’t trying to push buttons
  - Be affirming and accommodating
- They worry about what will happen next
  - Provide structure and predictability
- It is how they feel that matters
  - Not one event, accumulation
- Need to feel good about something
  - Opportunities to set and achieve goals
Be Trauma Responsive

- Direct connection trauma and learning
  - Focus on safety and the task
- Self regulation is challenging for students with trauma
  - Break tasks down and take regular breaks
- Ask them what they need
- It is about warmth, authenticity, and compassion
It is more than programs, it is about the moment-to-moment interactions and the relationships
What is a Nurturing Classroom Environment?

A nurturing environment is one in which the teacher:

• Teaches and reinforces prosocial behaviour, self regulation, and skills for adulthood.
• Monitors and limits opportunities for negative behaviour
• Minimizes toxic and stressful events (e.g., bullying).
• Provides students with a sense of being cared for, valued, and appreciated for unique characteristics.
Teachers are Leaders in the Social System of the Classroom

Teachers shape relationships in the classroom by:

• Modeling the relationship styles they expect
• Managing interaction patterns and activities through social architecture
• Scaffolding self regulation and effective social strategies
• Promoting the productive engagement
• Helping students with relationship difficulties to develop social capacities that enhance how they are perceived
• Promote different dimensions of status (e.g., creativity, caring and interpersonal skills, humour, etc.)
At the end of the day... it is all about

Creating environments and relationships that support optimal development of children and youth!