The FIPA Global Educational Series

# THE RESPECT PROJECT

## BOOKLET 2: HOW SCHOOLS STOP BULLYING

**BOOKLET 2**

# How Schools Stop Bullying

*A Guide for Principals, Teachers and Guidance Counsellors*

*From the series:*

*Stop Bullying in Caribbean Schools*

A Guide for Parents, Educators, Students and the General Community

**Angela Ramsay, PhD**

# A Declaration on Teacher Education

**Bullying prevention must become a core component of teacher education across the Caribbean.**

Every teacher who stands before a Caribbean classroom today will, at some point in their career, encounter bullying — in one or more of its many forms. They will witness it between students. They may experience it themselves, directed at them by students or parents. They will be called upon to intervene, to counsel, to report, and to model the kind of respectful, assertive communication that disarms aggression.

Yet the vast majority of Caribbean teachers enter the profession without any formal preparation for this reality. Bullying prevention, conflict resolution, cognitive behaviour management, restorative justice, and the recognition of trauma in children are rarely given dedicated space in pre-service teacher training programmes. This is a gap we can no longer afford.

Ministries of Education, teachers' colleges, universities, and professional teachers' associations across the Caribbean are therefore urged to take the following steps:

1. Include bullying prevention and conflict resolution as compulsory modules in all pre-service teacher education programmes, at both primary and secondary levels.
2. Require in-service training in bullying prevention for all practising teachers, with refresher components that reflect emerging challenges — including cyberbullying and the management of trauma-affected students.
3. Equip trainee teachers with practical skills: positive discipline techniques, cognitive behaviour management strategies, how to conduct difficult conversations with students and parents, and how to recognise and respond appropriately to signs of abuse or acute distress.
4. Ensure that all teacher education programmes address culturally responsive approaches — recognising that the Caribbean context, with its specific social dynamics, plural societies, and community pressures, requires tailored strategies that go beyond imported models.
5. Assess these competencies formally, treating them with the same seriousness as subject-specific pedagogical training.

*A teacher who knows their subject but does not know how to manage a classroom shaped by fear, aggression, or social exclusion is not fully equipped to teach. Bullying prevention is not supplementary to good teaching — it is the condition that makes good teaching possible. The time to embed it in teacher education is now.*

These booklets are extracted and adapted from the book *Stop Bullying in Caribbean Schools* (2013), 



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# NOT FOR SALE

# Introduction: The Evidence That Schools Can Change

> *A school that commits to reducing bullying will reduce bullying. The evidence for this is clear, consistent, and encouraging.*

This booklet is a practical guide for the school professionals who are best placed to make that change happen: principals, teachers, and guidance counsellors. It draws on research from across the world and on the direct experience of Caribbean educators who have seen, in their own schools, what works.

Booklet 1 of this series established what bullying is, why it happens, and what damage it causes. This booklet picks up from that foundation and asks a different question: given all we know, what should schools actually do? The answer is not complicated, but it does require commitment, consistency, and the willingness of every member of the school community to play their part.

We begin with the research — because the research is genuinely good news.

## What the Research Tells Us

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (OBPP), developed and evaluated over nearly two decades, is the most extensively studied bullying prevention initiative in the world. Its first major evaluation surveyed 2,500 students, aged 11 to 14, across 42 Norwegian schools. The result: a reduction in bullying of over 50%. Subsequent evaluations in the United States produced similarly significant decreases. The success of this work inspired governments and researchers across Europe, North America, and Japan to develop and test their own programmes, many of which have yielded comparable results.

A report from the United States Department of Justice found that fewer than 15% of students reported being bullied or assaulted in 2008, compared with 22% in 2003 — a dramatic improvement achieved through sustained, school-wide programmes. The lesson from decades of research is consistent: bullying prevention works when it is approached seriously, implemented with fidelity, and sustained over time.

One further insight from the research is worth holding onto throughout this booklet: effective bullying prevention programmes do not only reduce aggression. They reduce the stress and anxiety of both perpetrators and targets. They make schools calmer, happier, and more productive learning environments. They benefit everyone.

## The Limitation of Short-Term Programmes

A brief anti-bullying campaign — an assembly here, a poster competition there — can raise awareness, but it rarely produces lasting change. Think of it like a diet: it may work for a few months, but without a genuine change in lifestyle, old habits return. What schools need is not a programme but a culture shift. Bullying prevention must become embedded in how the school operates, how staff communicate with each other and with students, and what behaviour is consistently rewarded and consistently challenged.

The chapters that follow address each group of school professionals in turn. They are practical, direct, and designed to be used — not simply read.

# Chapter 1: How Principals Help

> *A principal who commits to bullying prevention does not only make the school safer. They make it easier to teach, easier to learn, and better in every measurable way.*

Caribbean principals care deeply about their schools. They carry enormous responsibilities — managing staff, meeting academic targets, engaging parents, maintaining facilities — often with fewer resources than their counterparts in wealthier regions. Against that backdrop, asking them to lead a bullying prevention programme can feel like yet another burden added to an already full plate.

But consider the alternative. When bullying is unchecked, discipline problems multiply. Staff morale erodes. Good students disengage. The school's reputation suffers. The time principals spend dealing with the aftermath of bullying incidents — mediating between parents, responding to complaints, managing exclusions — is time taken away from every other priority. Research confirms what experienced principals already know intuitively: schools that invest in bullying prevention see a substantial reduction in behavioural problems overall. The investment pays for itself.

## Why Individual Interventions Are Not Enough

Many principals address bullying through individual interventions: calling a perpetrator into the office, speaking to a disruptive class, contacting a parent. These responses are necessary, but they are not sufficient. A student who bullies does so because the school culture — shaped by the behaviour and attitudes of the peer group — allows it. Unless that culture changes, individual interventions address symptoms without touching the cause.

The most effective approach is the whole-school programme: a coordinated, sustained effort that involves every member of the school community. This is not simply a policy on paper — it is a living set of shared values, consistently applied and regularly reviewed.

## The Whole-School Approach

A whole-school bullying prevention programme includes every person who works in the school: principals, vice principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, administrative staff, bursars, canteen operators, nurses, and ancillary workers. This breadth matters. Bullying does not only happen in

classrooms. It happens in corridors, canteens, playgrounds, and changing rooms — spaces that are often monitored by non-teaching staff. A programme that leaves those staff members uninformed and unprepared has significant blind spots.

The programme also addresses how school personnel communicate with each other. Conflict and tension among staff — unresolved disagreements, cliques, favouritism — seep into the school culture and set an example, whether adults intend it or not. A whole-school programme treats this honestly.

## The Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (BPIP)

The foundation of the whole-school approach is a written Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy — a BPIP. This document does not need to be lengthy, but it must be clear, specific, and taken seriously. It should include:

6. A strong, positive statement of the school's commitment to a safe, respectful learning environment — and its commitment to addressing harassment in all its forms.
7. A clear definition of bullying, with examples. Without shared definitions, staff and students cannot agree on what they are preventing.
8. An explicit statement that every member of the school community — students, teachers, and other staff — has the right to be free from harassment.
9. A clear statement of bystanders' responsibility: witnessing bullying without acting is not a neutral position.
10. Guidance on how incidents should be reported — by students, by parents, and by staff — and assurance that those who report will be protected from retaliation.
11. A description of how the school will respond to incidents, from the mildest forms of bullying through to serious or repeated aggression.
12. A plan for monitoring the policy's effectiveness, including how often it will be reviewed and who is responsible.

One important decision is whether the BPIP stands as a separate document or is integrated within the school's broader Disciplinary Policy. Both approaches are defensible. A separate policy signals that bullying is taken seriously as a distinct issue; an integrated policy keeps the school's behavioural framework coherent. Whatever is chosen, the two documents should reference each other clearly.

A note on consequences: for milder forms of bullying, students can and should be involved in determining appropriate responses. This gives them ownership of the school's standards and increases the likelihood that they will enforce them.

## Involving Students in the Solution

The most strategic principals involve student leaders in planning and implementing their bullying prevention programmes. This is not simply good practice — it is good sense. Students know what is happening on the school compound far better than any adult does. Their insights into what interventions will be accepted by the peer group, and what will be dismissed, are invaluable. Research by Garbarino and colleagues has confirmed that teenagers have genuinely useful solutions to the problem of school violence, when adults are willing to ask and listen.

## Responding to Serious Incidents

The BPIP should set out clearly how the school will respond to serious or repeated bullying. Principals must be familiar with the legal and regulatory frameworks that govern student discipline in their jurisdiction, and should not hesitate to consult the Ministry or Department of Education when uncertain about procedure. The range of responses available includes warnings, behavioural plans, activity and venue restrictions, suspensions, and — in the most serious cases — exclusion.

Training is essential. At least some members of staff should be trained in advanced communication skills, mediation, and restorative justice practices. Restorative approaches — which focus on repairing harm rather than simply punishing the perpetrator — have a strong evidence base and are particularly effective for less serious incidents where the relationship between the students involved can be salvaged.

## When Resources Are Limited

Caribbean schools often operate with significant resource constraints. Many do not have dedicated guidance counsellors. Some struggle to resource even basic classroom materials. It would be dishonest to pretend that a full whole-school programme is equally accessible to every school.

But limited resources are not a reason to do nothing. Even without a comprehensive programme, a principal can take meaningful steps. The following six actions alone can make a measurable difference:

13. Make clear, in regular addresses to the school, that aggression in any form is unacceptable — and mean it consistently.
14. Invite specialists in conflict management to address students, and ask teachers to extend the conversation into the classroom. Many such specialists will offer their time without charge to schools facing financial difficulties.
15. Incorporate anti-aggression activities into classroom work (see Chapter 2 of this booklet for practical ideas).
16. Ask students to alert school personnel immediately when they witness or experience any form of physical harassment.
17. Explain to bystanders — clearly and repeatedly — that they have a collective responsibility to intervene when it is safe to do so.
18. Hold at least one dedicated meeting or retreat with school staff on the subject of bullying prevention.

## A Caribbean Principal Speaks

Sometimes the most important work of bullying prevention happens not in the classroom but in the staffroom. One Caribbean principal, who successfully raised the academic standards of her secondary school while substantially reducing student violence, described how she addressed a colleague who was quietly undermining every positive initiative:

> *"I started to really observe her. I realised that every positive suggestion that anyone made was knocked down. She would only look at the negatives. I realised this lady was poisoning the school — she nitpicked about anything she could find while complimenting herself as much as she could. At meetings I would start with what she was going to say before she even said it, and she would learn to let the rest of us try and do something for the school. Gradually, she started to help a little, because I had to find some good things to say about her before talking to her about her attitudes. You have to be very strategic, or even one person can influence others to push down all your ideas."*
>
> **— A Caribbean secondary school principal**

This account illustrates something important: bullying prevention requires leadership that is observant, strategic, and patient. The principal sets the tone for the entire school — not only through formal policy, but through every interaction that others observe.

## The Staff Retreat: Getting Started Together

One of the most common questions from principals is not 'what should we do?' but 'how do we begin?' The answer, in most cases, is a well-facilitated staff retreat or half-day meeting dedicated specifically to bullying prevention.

### Before the Retreat

Give participants adequate advance notice. Ask each person to submit a brief written statement (no more than 50 words) setting out their personal philosophy on bullying prevention, along with their honest assessment of the main obstacles to progress in the school, what support they would need from colleagues, and at least five specific actions they themselves could take. The principal and other leaders then decide whether these submissions should be named or anonymous.

### Choosing the Right Facilitator

The principal should not chair the retreat. Assign this role to a trained facilitator — a teacher, a parent, or an external professional — so that the principal is free to observe the group dynamics, listen carefully, and participate as a member of the team rather than its authority figure. This approach tends to generate more honest and productive discussion.

### During the Retreat

A skilled facilitator begins by establishing ground rules that everyone agrees to: honesty, respect, the right to disagree, and the commitment to listen before responding. They then present the areas of agreement and disagreement that have emerged from the pre-retreat submissions.

Agreements are typically numerous and form a strong foundation. Common ones include:

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| We should actively protect the school's reputation through high standards of conduct — by staff as much as by students. |
| The prevention of bullying behaviour is a priority. |
| School personnel should not use verbal abuse — towards students, or in front of students. |
| The reasons behind rules must be explained, not merely imposed. |
| Students should have some role in determining consequences for breaches of the bullying prevention policy. |
| Providing structure and consistent expectations for students is essential. |

### Resolving Disagreements Productively

The greatest value of a well-run retreat is not the agreements it produces — it is the disagreements it surfaces. Disagreements that have simmered unspoken for years, silently blocking every collective initiative, can finally be named and worked through. Common areas of disagreement include how much time teachers should spend communicating with parents, whether high-performing athletes should be subject to the same disciplinary rules as other students, and how playground supervision should be organised.

The facilitator's role is not to resolve these disagreements by decree, but to help the group move from competing positions to shared decisions. In one school, the question of athlete discipline was resolved by the group agreeing that a dedicated annual meeting would be held with all athletes to discuss the disciplinary policy — giving them a clear understanding of what was expected and why, while preserving their valued contribution to the school. The teacher who had initially opposed equal treatment was not browbeaten into agreement; he was heard, his concerns were acknowledged, and the group arrived at a solution that addressed them.

This process matters because people do not implement policies they do not believe in. A teacher who quietly disagrees with a bullying prevention policy can easily nod in a meeting and then ignore the policy in the classroom. Genuine agreement — arrived at through honest, respectful dialogue — is far more durable.

### After the Retreat: Acting Quickly

One of the most important things a principal can do after a retreat is move fast. The collective energy generated by a productive meeting dissipates quickly. A short action sheet — Who, What, and By When — should be circulated within days of the retreat, well before the formal minutes are ready. Educators who receive a report two months after a meeting have typically lost all interest in its contents.

| Who | What | By When |
|---|---|---|
| Mrs. Smith and Mr. Williams | Meet with the prefect body to gather student perspectives on bullying — what is happening, where, and what they think would help. | Within two weeks of the retreat |
| All class teachers | Introduce the BPIP to their classes and invite student input on consequences for mild breaches. | By end of the following month |
| Guidance counsellor | Distribute a brief questionnaire to identify current levels of student-reported aggression. | Within one month |

## Quality Circles: Sustaining the Momentum

Every well-intentioned school initiative faces the same risk: policy decay. The enthusiasm of the retreat fades. New staff arrive who were not part of the process. Students move through year groups and the message becomes diluted. A Quality Circle (QC) is a simple, proven mechanism for preventing this.

A Quality Circle is a small team — typically four to ten people — who meet for an hour, once or twice a week, to identify and address problems in the school environment. For bullying prevention, a QC should include representatives from teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and, crucially, student leaders. Students, as noted throughout this booklet, see things that adults do not.

The QC uses a five-step problem-solving process:

19. Define the problem clearly. What is happening? Where? How often? Who is most affected?
20. Generate possible solutions without immediately evaluating them — all ideas are welcomed at this stage.
21. Assess each solution: what are its likely benefits? What are its limitations? What resources would it require?
22. Select the best solution and plan how to manage its potential downsides.
23. Plan the next steps and decide who is responsible for each.

The QC also plays a vital maintenance role. It ensures that new staff and new students are properly inducted into the school's bullying prevention culture. It reviews the programme at least annually, incorporating fresh content so that returning participants are not simply hearing the same information again. It recognises and celebrates the contributions of those who have worked to make the school safer.

Teachers can also run 'QC classes' once a week or once a month, engaging students from age seven upwards. These sessions teach valuable problem-solving and critical-thinking skills that extend far beyond bullying prevention.

| |
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| ✓ The whole-school approach is the most effective route to sustained bullying prevention. |
| ✓ A written Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (BPIP) is the foundation of the whole-school approach. |
| ✓ Student leaders should be involved in planning and implementing the programme — they know the school compound better than adults do. |
| ✓ A well-facilitated staff retreat is the best way to begin a bullying prevention programme. |
| ✓ Act quickly after the retreat: distribute an action sheet within days, not weeks. |
| ✓ Quality Circles sustain momentum and prevent policy decay. |
| ✓ Schools with limited resources should do what they can, not nothing at all. Even six targeted actions can make a measurable difference. |

# Chapter 2: How Teachers Help

> *Teachers change lives — often without ever knowing it. The good teacher never fully understands the impact they have had on the individuals, and on the society, that they helped to shape.*

The Caribbean has produced exceptional teachers — people who have achieved remarkable results with minimal resources, whose influence has shaped careers, restored confidence, and redirected lives. Most of them have never been adequately recognised for what they have done. This booklet cannot offer that recognition, but it can acknowledge a truth that the research confirms: a great teacher does not only teach a subject. They teach students how to be in the world.

Two international examples deserve mention here. Jaime Escalante, a Bolivian-born educator working in a violence-prone high school in Los Angeles, helped students who had been written off — from backgrounds marked by poverty and gang culture — to pass advanced placement calculus examinations. His method? High expectations, delivered with warmth and rigour. He found, almost incidentally, that challenging students to do genuinely hard work reduced the violence in his classroom. Marva Collins, working with African American students in Chicago who had been labelled learning-disabled and written off by the system, produced extraordinary academic results through the same combination: uncompromising expectations, deep care for each student as an individual, and positive discipline.

Caribbean teachers work in similarly demanding contexts. The principles that drove Escalante and Collins are not exotic or expensive. They are available to every teacher who chooses to use them.

## Teachers Are Also at Risk

It is important to acknowledge something that is often not said directly: teachers in the Caribbean are sometimes the targets of bullying — from students, and occasionally from parents. Some teachers are assertive and address this directly. Others have told me that they live with genuine fear of physical harm from aggressive students or their parents.

This is not a Caribbean anomaly. In New Zealand, nearly a third of teachers experience some form of student bullying. In Luxembourg, approximately 24% report verbal abuse from students. The experience creates stress, erodes morale, and compromises the learning environment for every student in the room.

Here is what the research also tells us: teachers who participate in bullying prevention programmes feel significantly more confident in managing student aggression, develop more supportive attitudes toward targets, and feel better equipped to work with parents. In other words, being part of the solution makes teachers feel safer themselves. This is one more reason for every teacher to engage seriously with this chapter.

## Making the Case to the Principal

Not every principal will arrive at a bullying prevention programme independently. Sometimes it is a teacher — or a small group of teachers — who sees what needs to happen and takes the initiative to make it happen.

If your principal is not currently focused on bullying prevention, the most effective approach is not to present them with a thick research report. Instead, identify the two or three findings most likely to resonate with their particular priorities: that prevention reduces the principal's own workload in dealing with disciplinary incidents; that it enhances the school's reputation; that it produces measurable improvements in academic focus. Frame bullying prevention not as an add-on but as an investment in everything the principal already cares about.

## What Teachers Can Do in the Classroom

The classroom is where most teachers have the greatest direct influence, and it is where many of the most effective bullying prevention strategies can be deployed. The following are among the most consistently effective approaches:

- Model respectful communication at all times — even when being firm or assertive. Students learn how to treat others by observing how the adults around them behave. A teacher who speaks to students with dignity, even in moments of challenge, teaches dignity.
- Set high expectations for behaviour as well as for academic performance. Teachers who convey — genuinely, not just formally — that they expect every student to treat every other student with respect create classrooms where that expectation becomes self-fulfilling.
- Involve students in establishing classroom rules. Each year, students should agree on (or modify from the previous year's group) the rules that govern their classroom community. When students help to create the rules, they are far more likely to enforce them — and to challenge peers who breach them.

- Incorporate conflict management topics into the curriculum wherever possible. Social and emotional learning does not require a separate timetable slot; it can be woven into discussions in English, social studies, history, and other subjects.
- Pose thought-provoking questions that invite students to examine their own assumptions about fairness, power, and responsibility.
- Share concerns promptly with colleagues and with the principal. A teacher who witnesses or suspects bullying should not carry that information alone. Early information-sharing enables early intervention.

## Teaching Thinking Skills

One of the most powerful — and most underused — tools in the anti-bullying arsenal is the explicit teaching of thinking skills. Edward de Bono, whose research on thinking and creativity is globally recognised, argued that schools already teach thinking as part of other subjects is a weak claim. Some analytical thinking is taught, but the kind of thinking that is exploratory, creative, perceptual, and action-oriented is rarely taught explicitly.

Why does this matter for bullying prevention? Because bullying thrives where students have not been equipped to think critically about their own behaviour, to consider the perspective of others, or to imagine the consequences of their actions. Research by de Bono and colleagues found that teaching thinking as a discrete subject improved performance across all other subjects by between 30 and 100%, and dramatically raised the self-esteem of students who had struggled in conventional academic subjects — discovering, for the first time, that they were capable thinkers.

Students who are actively engaged in their own intellectual development have less energy for — and less interest in — gratuitous aggression.

## Positive Discipline

The most effective discipline approach for addressing bullying behaviour is positive discipline: a framework that preserves the dignity of both teacher and student, keeps the student's long-term wellbeing at the centre, and uses creative, approved correctional strategies rather than humiliation or force.

A critical caution: positive discipline should never be introduced abruptly, without preparation. In at least one Caribbean nation where corporal punishment was abolished by law, teachers who had no alternative strategies reported that some students — interpreting the change as a sign of

weakness — became more disruptive, not less. Policy change without teacher preparation produces precisely this outcome. The two must go hand in hand.

The key elements of positive discipline in the context of bullying prevention are:

### Be in Control of Yourself First

A teacher who shouts, threatens, or loses their temper in response to a confrontational student has handed that student a victory. The student knows it, and their peers know it too. The more effective response — consistently modelled by experienced practitioners — is to lower the voice rather than raise it, to become calmer as the student becomes more agitated. This is not a passive response; it is a demonstration of authority that requires genuine self-discipline.

If you feel you are about to lose your temper, it is better to ask the student, calmly and firmly, to wait outside the classroom until you are ready to speak with them privately. If you are dealing with a student who is known to be violent, or if you have reason to believe a student is carrying a weapon, contact the principal's office immediately and arrange for appropriate support.

### Get the Class on Your Side

Discipline is consistently easier when the teacher has the backing of the class. Students who have helped to create the classroom rules feel a sense of ownership over them, and many will naturally call out peers who breach them. This peer accountability is far more powerful than teacher authority alone.

When a new behavioural problem arises — something the class rules do not yet cover — invite the class to develop a guideline together. This keeps the framework living and responsive, and gives students ongoing agency in shaping their classroom community.

### Speak to Students Privately

When a bullying incident involves both a perpetrator and a target, the first step is always separate private conversations — not a meeting with both students together. A private conversation allows each student to speak honestly without an audience, and allows the teacher to prepare each student for the next stage.

A word of caution: in any subsequent joint meeting, a particularly shrewd or articulate perpetrator may be able to manipulate a less confident target. If a teacher suspects this is likely, it is wise to have a note-taking third party present, or to involve the guidance counsellor.

### Use a Behaviour Management Plan

For ongoing bullying behaviour, a structured plan should be developed between the teacher and the student, with parental involvement for more serious cases. The plan uses a simple self-

assessment framework — rating interactions and effort as very good, good, fair, or poor — and sets realistic, incremental goals. A student whose behaviour is currently poor will not become excellent overnight; the plan should reflect and celebrate small, genuine improvements.

**PRACTICAL TOOL: THE DAILY SELF-MANAGEMENT CARD**

| Factor | Rating (1–4) | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| Constructive interactions with others — no bullying incidents | | |
| Level of effort shown in classwork | | |
| Homework completed and submitted | | |
| Constructive behaviour during unstructured time (break, lunch) | | |

After any bullying incident that has been resolved, the teacher should check in privately with all students involved, one to two days later, to identify what triggered the behaviour. Understanding the trigger is as important as addressing the behaviour itself.

## Classroom Exercises for Students

Teachers are the best judges of which exercises will resonate with their particular students. The following are offered as starting points — all of them should be adapted to fit the specific cultural context and age group of the class.

### The Peace House (Ages 7–10)

After the teacher has introduced basic conflict management concepts, the class builds a 'Peace House' from a cardboard box. The house has two rooms: one containing written conflict management steps, and a larger 'lessons learned' room where the class records what they have discovered from managing real conflicts as they arise. The roof lifts off so the contents are always visible and accessible.

The conflict management steps inside the house might include: What are the ground rules for dealing with this conflict? Let us hear both sides of the story. Let us think from the other person's perspective. What are our options for building peace? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option? What can we do to prevent this happening again?

The Peace House is not a one-off activity — it is a living resource that the class returns to regularly.

### Bystanders: Are We Brighter Than Zebras? (Ages 9–14)

This discussion exercise uses a simple but powerful observation: when a lion attacks a zebra, the other zebras flee. If they all turned together on the lion, no lion could threaten them. Students are invited to consider: are we, as bystanders, doing the same thing as the zebras? What would change if we acted together?

The exercise helps students understand that bystanders are not passive observers — they are active participants in the bullying dynamic, and they hold more power than they typically realise. When bystanders act together, most perpetrators stop within ten seconds.

### Discussion and Essay Topics (Secondary and Tertiary Level)

The following topics invite students to engage analytically with the issue of bullying in their own communities:

- What causes students to bully each other? Are those causes the same across different Caribbean nations?
- What would our school look like if bullying were genuinely unacceptable — and effectively prevented?
- What is the difference between teasing and bullying? Where is the line, and who gets to draw it?
- How can bystanders help — and what stops them?
- Do we have a right to be different from each other? If so, what are the implications for how we treat those who are different?
- What would happen to Caribbean societies if bullying were substantially reduced in every school?

### Sociodrama

Sociodrama is a group learning activity in which students explore a social issue through improvised drama. For bullying prevention, it encourages students to express feelings about conflict and aggression, to inhabit the perspectives of different people in a bullying situation — target, perpetrator, bystander — and to arrive at new values through the experience of embodying those roles.

The British Psychodrama Association has described sociodrama as effective with both low and high-functioning populations, with applications that are effectively limitless. In a school setting, teachers guide students in selecting their own themes — intervening only if students choose inappropriate ones — and establish clear ground rules about language and behaviour during

performances. Students who are uncomfortable with certain terms, even in role play, should be offered alternative ways to express the same thing.

Students who have received basic training in mediation skills tend to produce richer dramatic material and arrive at more nuanced solutions. Principals can invite organisations in their community that offer mediation or peacemaking training to work with students.

**School Yard! — An Unfinished Story (Senior Secondary)**

The following story — set in a Caribbean secondary school — is intended as the starting point for a creative writing and conflict resolution exercise. Students read the story and then write at least four additional sections to complete it, incorporating their own research into conflict management strategies. When completed, stories are shared with the class.

> **School Yard! ©**
>
> *The October rains let up just before lunch, giving students a brief reprieve. The schoolyard fills with noise and movement — walking, eating, laughing, arguing — energy released from morning classrooms. Tanya, who Brian thinks is the prettiest girl in Grade 10, bumps into him accidentally. He doesn't notice.*
>
> *What Brian notices is Peter — standing in the middle of the yard as though he owns it, his usual group clustered around him.*
>
> *"Showing off again, boy?" Peter says, with a pretence of amusement.*
>
> *Brian lifts his phone higher than necessary and keeps eating. He knows exactly what Peter would love to do. He also knows exactly how to stay safe — keeping within sight of the prefects, moving when they move. The extra exercise, he tells himself, is good for him...*
>
> *[Students continue the story from here, incorporating conflict management strategies into their narrative.]*

| |
|---|
| ✓ Good teachers promote a culture of respect not only to protect students, but to protect themselves. |
| ✓ High expectations — for behaviour and for academic performance — transform classrooms. |
| ✓ Teaching critical thinking skills reduces the energy students invest in aggression. |
| ✓ Positive discipline, introduced with proper teacher preparation, is more effective than punitive approaches. |

✓ Involving students in making classroom rules gives them ownership and increases voluntary compliance.

✓ The best classroom exercises are culturally responsive — adapted by the teacher to fit the specific context of their students.

# Chapter 3: How Guidance Counsellors Help

> *Guidance counsellors are the second mothers and fathers of thousands of Caribbean children. Their ability to reach students that no one else can reach makes them indispensable to any serious bullying prevention effort.*

Professional guidance counsellors bring a unique combination of training, trust, and time to the school environment. They are expert listeners. They know the school community — students, families, and staff — in a depth that few others do. And they occupy a role that most students experience as separate from the formal authority structure of the school, which makes it possible to have conversations that would not happen anywhere else.

In the context of bullying prevention, the guidance counsellor plays three interconnected roles: working directly with individual students (both perpetrators and targets), delivering assertiveness and social skills training to groups, and supporting the school's capacity to measure and understand the extent of bullying on the campus. Each role is addressed in this chapter.

## Proactive, Not Reactive

A guidance counsellor who waits for students to come to them will miss the majority of bullying situations. Most students — particularly perpetrators — do not seek help. Perpetrators often do not see themselves as having a problem. Targets frequently feel that telling someone will make things worse, or that adults are unable to help. The counsellor who is effective in this area is therefore proactive: they actively seek out students who may be perpetrators, targets, or at risk of becoming either.

How does a counsellor identify these students? By spending time in the school beyond the counselling room — observing in corridors, in the canteen, on the playground. By building relationships with class teachers who notice changes in student behaviour. By paying attention to the social dynamics that form and reform throughout the school year. And by taking seriously any information that comes from concerned parents or from other students.

## Assertiveness Training

Assertiveness is one of the most important skills a student can develop — and one of the most effective tools in bullying prevention. Assertiveness is not aggression: it is the ability to communicate in ways that convey self-respect while also showing respect for others. Research

involving nearly 1,900 Canadian children and young people found that students were genuinely motivated to learn assertiveness skills when they understood their connection to stopping bullying. A separate study by Camodeca and Goossens found that a large proportion of adolescents considered assertiveness training the single most helpful bullying prevention strategy.

Assertiveness training works best when delivered to groups — particularly to classes that appear particularly disruptive or anxious — rather than only to individuals. This may seem like a substantial commitment of time, but it tends to reduce the counsellor's individual caseload considerably, because many of the interpersonal conflicts that generate referrals can be prevented when students have better communication tools.

A structured assertiveness training programme typically runs across five to ten forty-minute sessions, and includes the following elements:

24. A calming exercise to open each session and help students settle into a reflective frame of mind.
25. Students, with the counsellor's facilitation, identify the communication challenges they most want to address — speaking up in a difficult situation, declining pressure from peers, responding to verbal abuse without escalating.
26. The counsellor demonstrates improved responses to those challenges. Solutions are role-played, first by the counsellor and then by students, with feedback.
27. Close attention is paid to non-verbal communication — body language, tone of voice, eye contact — alongside the words used.
28. Students practise the assertive behaviours, beginning with the least challenging scenarios and gradually working toward more difficult ones.
29. Progress is evaluated together, and adjustments are made where needed.

Even something as simple as saying 'good morning' can be said assertively or timidly. The point of assertiveness training is not to prepare students for dramatic confrontations, but to help them inhabit a more confident, self-respecting way of being in the world — in every interaction, every day.

## Peer Counselling

Many guidance counsellors have found that a peer counselling service amplifies their work significantly. Peer counsellors — students trained to listen, to explain the school's guidelines on

bullying, and to encourage their peers to seek adult support — can reach students who would never approach a teacher or counsellor directly.

However, the limitations of peer counselling must be honestly acknowledged. Most perpetrators will not seek out peer counsellors — they do not see themselves as needing help. And targets dealing with serious or sustained harassment need more support than peer counsellors are equipped to provide. The role of the peer counsellor is therefore supplementary: to listen, to validate, to explain, and to encourage — not to replace professional support.

Before becoming peer counsellors, students need specific preparation:

- Training in active listening — paraphrasing, being comfortable with silence, resisting the urge to give immediate advice.
- A clear understanding of the boundaries of their role — what they can handle and when they must refer to an adult.
- Training in confidentiality — what they can keep private, and what they cannot (particularly in relation to disclosures of sexual assault, self-harm, or serious danger).
- Guidance on record-keeping — maintaining simple logs that allow the guidance counsellor to monitor how the service is being used.

**The Four Golden Rules**

Most of the research on bullying prevention can be distilled into four simple rules. These should be shared with peer counsellors — and with students generally:

30. Do not bully.
31. When you see bullying, help the target — either by intervening directly (if it is safe) or by getting an adult.
32. Include others — actively invite students to be part of activities and groups.
33. If you experience bullying, tell a trusted adult at school or at home.

## Measuring Bullying at Your School

Before a school can address bullying effectively, it needs to understand the extent, nature, and locations of bullying on its campus. This is the research function of the guidance counsellor — and it is one of the most powerful contributions they can make to the whole-school programme.

Why conduct formal research? Because data changes minds. A principal who hears from a counsellor that 'there seems to be quite a bit of bullying' is less likely to act than one who is presented with evidence that 40% of students in Year 9 have witnessed physical aggression in

the past month, and that the canteen and the corridor outside the science block are identified as the most dangerous spaces. Data creates urgency. It also provides a baseline against which the success of interventions can be measured.

### Ethical Principles

Research involving children requires careful ethical management. Students are more likely to share honest information when they understand the purpose of the research, when their responses are kept confidential, and when they feel that nothing they say will be used against them personally. Privacy must be protected: students should not be able to see each other's responses on questionnaires, or overhear each other's interview responses. Parents should also be informed of their children's participation.

### Designing Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be purchased from reputable organisations (and should be adapted for Caribbean cultural contexts) or developed in-house with student input. When developing your own, the following principles apply:

- Begin with questions that are easy and unthreatening — general questions about school life before moving to bullying-specific ones.
- Keep the number of questions small.
- Each question should address one concept only.
- Language should be simple, direct, and short.
- Avoid emotionally loaded or leading questions.
- Allow for a range of answers — not just yes/no responses.

One question to avoid, despite its apparent simplicity, is the direct question: 'Are you bullied at school?' This question is unreliable. Students define bullying differently. The word itself can feel stigmatising, and students may deny experiences they would describe in different terms. More productive questions focus on specific behaviours and situations.

### Interviews: Going Deeper

Questionnaires tell you what is happening. Interviews help you understand why. A well-conducted interview — with a skilled, non-judgmental interviewer who listens more than they speak — can yield insights that no questionnaire can capture.

The following interview questions have proved useful in a range of Caribbean secondary school settings. Some will need to be simplified for younger students.

**GENERAL QUESTIONS**

34. How would you describe life at this school, on a scale of zero to ten, where ten is excellent and zero is very poor? Why that number?
35. How do teachers treat students? Can you give me examples — both good and not so good?
36. How do students treat each other? Give me an example of students handling a conflict well.

**BULLYING-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**

37. What does bullying look like at this school? Can you describe what you have seen?
38. How does bullying affect the students here? How widespread do you think it is?
39. Have teachers or other staff taken action to reduce bullying? What has happened?
40. Do you think some students are chosen more often than others? Why might that be?

**PERSONAL QUESTIONS (FOR ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEWS)**

41. I was once in a situation where I felt treated unfairly by someone with more power. Has something like that ever happened to you?
42. Have you ever felt the need to make someone else feel bad? What was happening for you at that time?
43. What do you think would help most, if you were in that situation?

Skilled interviewers create an atmosphere in which students can speak honestly without fear. They neither over-react to surprising disclosures nor project emotions onto the student. A relaxed, curious, genuinely interested interviewer will always obtain richer information than a tense or hurried one.

| |
|---|
| ✓ Guidance counsellors should be proactive — seeking out perpetrators, targets, and at-risk students, not waiting for referrals. |
| ✓ Assertiveness training, delivered to groups, is one of the most effective interventions available — and it reduces the counsellor's individual caseload. |
| ✓ Peer counselling supplements the counsellor's work but does not replace it — peer counsellors need proper training and clear boundaries. |
| ✓ Formal research on the prevalence and nature of bullying creates the evidence base for effective action. |

✓ Questionnaires and interviews both have a role: questionnaires measure, interviews explain.

✓ Involving students in the research process — including senior students in questionnaire design — increases engagement and improves data quality.

# Summary: What Schools Can Do — An Overview

| Who | Action | When |
|---|---|---|
| Principal | Develop and implement a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (BPIP) covering the whole school. | Immediate priority |
| Principal | Facilitate a staff retreat to build shared understanding and commitment. | First term of implementation |
| Principal | Establish Quality Circles to sustain the programme. | Ongoing |
| Principal | Involve student leaders in planning and monitoring. | Ongoing |
| Teacher | Model respectful communication and high expectations consistently. | Daily |
| Teacher | Involve students in co-creating classroom rules. | At the start of each academic year |
| Teacher | Use positive discipline — with proper preparation — instead of punitive approaches. | Consistent application |
| Teacher | Teach thinking skills explicitly, integrated across subjects where possible. | Ongoing |
| Teacher | Deliver age-appropriate exercises using culturally responsive materials. | Regular, planned |
| Guidance Counsellor | Actively seek out perpetrators, targets, and at-risk students. | Ongoing |
| Guidance Counsellor | Deliver group assertiveness training to disruptive or anxious classes. | Each semester |
| Guidance Counsellor | Train and supervise peer counsellors. | At the start of each year |
| Guidance Counsellor | Conduct research on the prevalence and nature of bullying — and share results with principal and staff. | At least annually |
| All staff | Understand and consistently apply the BPIP. | From day one |
| All staff | Supervise common spaces — canteens, corridors, playgrounds. | Daily |

## A Final Word: What Is at Stake

Every school in the Caribbean has, within its walls right now, children who are afraid to go to the canteen, students who are dreading Monday morning, young people whose ability to learn — and to become who they are capable of becoming — is being systematically eroded by the behaviour of others.

Every school also has, within its walls right now, the people who can change that: principals who understand what leadership requires, teachers who know their students deeply, guidance counsellors who can reach students no one else can reach, and students themselves who know what is happening and who — if supported and equipped — can become the most powerful agents of change in the school community.

The gap between those two realities is not filled by a single programme or a single policy. It is filled by daily commitment — by every adult in the school choosing, again and again, to take bullying seriously. Not as an inconvenience to be managed, but as a matter of fundamental justice.

> *Bullying is a wrong we can set right. Booklet 3 — written for parents and students — completes the picture.*

*— End of Booklet 2 —*