The FIPA Global Educational Series

THE RESPECT PROJECT

GLOBAL BOOKLET 1:

UNDERSTANDING BULLYING AND HOW SCHOOLS RESPOND

STOP BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

A Global Edition

PART 1

Understanding Bullying and How Schools Respond

A Guide for Educators, Policymakers, Researchers
and the General Community

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How to Use This Publication

This publication is Part 1 of a two-part global resource on bullying prevention in schools. It combines what were originally two separate booklets into a single, coherent guide for the professionals and community members best placed to understand and address school bullying at a systemic level.

Part 1 — this publication — is addressed to anyone who needs to understand bullying and to the school professionals responsible for preventing it: principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, policymakers, researchers, and concerned community members.

Part 2 is addressed to parents, guardians, and students directly. It is written in a different register, including a section addressed personally to students aged twelve and older.

Readers are encouraged to begin here, with Part 1, before moving to Part 2. Together, the two publications form a complete guide to bullying prevention that can be applied in any school system, in any country.

Structure of Part 1

Part 1 is divided into two sections:

- Section A — Understanding Bullying: What bullying is, who it affects, why it happens, and what the research tells us about its prevalence and impact worldwide.
- Section B — How Schools Respond: Practical strategies, policies, and programmes for school professionals — principals, teachers, and guidance counsellors.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are used consistently throughout both parts of this publication:

Term	Meaning
Parent	A biological or adoptive parent, or a legal guardian.
Perpetrator	A student who bullies other students.
Principal	The head of an educational institution. Vice Principals and Deputy Heads are included in this term.
School	A primary, secondary, or tertiary educational institution.
Student	A person attending a primary, secondary, or tertiary educational institution.
Target	A student who is bullied by another student. The term 'victim' is deliberately avoided, because of its connotation of permanent weakness or helplessness. Targets can, and do, recover.
Teacher	Educators at all levels in the primary, secondary, and tertiary educational system.
Bystander	A student who witnesses bullying but is not directly involved as either perpetrator or target.

SECTION A

Understanding Bullying

Preface

I work with adults to resolve conflicts and to strengthen the quality of their thinking. Over the past several years, I have focused in particular on teaching thinking skills to adults—especially critical thinking, survival thinking, and strategic thinking. These are not simply academic skills; they are essential for navigating everyday life, making sound decisions, and responding thoughtfully under pressure.

My work spans both local and international contexts across areas such as organizational development, human resources, and applied psychology. I have worked and conducted research across seven continents, experiences that have deepened my understanding of how people think and respond to challenges in different environments. A new book on thinking skills, based on over ten years of research, will be released this year.

Many of my private-sector clients come to me not only with professional concerns, but with the bullying situations affecting their children. Some bring their children along, so that I may coach them on how to respond when they are targeted, or guide them toward better ways of managing their own behaviour at home and at school.

Over time, it became clear to me that a practical resource on bullying in Caribbean schools was long overdue. As you will read, students who bully others are themselves at risk—of substance abuse and, over time, more serious forms of violence. Those who are targeted may carry the emotional impact of these experiences for years—sometimes for life. And those who stand by and do nothing may gradually develop a pattern of passivity that follows them into adulthood and community life.

Bullying is not new. It has existed for as long as schools have. However, the rise of digital technology and social media has introduced a powerful new dimension. A student can now be targeted continuously—in the classroom, on their phone, and in their bedroom—without the perpetrator ever being physically present. This booklet addresses that reality directly.

This series of booklets is intended as a practical resource for anyone concerned about the safety and wellbeing of young people in the Caribbean—parents, teachers, principals, students, guidance counsellors, and community members. This first booklet begins with a simple but important question: what exactly is bullying—and why does it matter so much?

Introduction: What Is Bullying?

Bullying is a wrong we can set right.

Bullying is the repeated verbal, physical, or emotional harassment of any person over a sustained period — days, weeks, months, or even years. Students around the world describe it in many ways: being 'picked on', 'troubled', or having someone 'get on their case.' Whatever words are used, the experience is the same: unwanted, undeserved, and harmful.

It is important to distinguish bullying from the ordinary conflicts and disagreements that are a normal part of growing up. Children argue. They fall out with friends. They say unkind things they later regret. These experiences, while sometimes painful, are a natural part of social development. Bullying is different in three important ways:

- It is repeated. A single act of unkindness, however hurtful, is not bullying. Bullying involves a pattern of behaviour that persists over time.
- It is intentional. Perpetrators set out to cause harm, humiliation, or distress.
- It involves an imbalance of power. Targets are typically unable to defend themselves — because they are physically weaker, outnumbered, or at a social disadvantage.

Most bullying is unprovoked. Perpetrators tend to choose conflicts they are certain to win, and they are often relentless in their approach. This is not a fair fight — and it is never the target's fault.

What Bullying Is Not

Adults and students sometimes apply the word 'bullying' loosely, which can obscure the seriousness of genuine cases. Bullying is not:

- Constructive conflict — the healthy kind of disagreement that generates new ideas and allows people to challenge one another respectfully.
- Normal childhood play — even when play gets rough or competitive. Bullying has a specific edge of cruelty, and it is relentless.
- A reflection of the whole child. Perpetrators and targets alike have strengths, capabilities, and redeeming qualities that go far beyond their roles in a bullying dynamic.
- An unsolvable problem. This is perhaps the most important point of all: bullying can be substantially reduced in schools when the right approaches are taken.

Forms of Bullying

Direct Bullying

Direct bullying involves overt acts that are visible to others. It includes:

- Physical harm — hitting, kicking, pushing, or any action intended to inflict pain or humiliation. Even acts that cause little physical pain, such as placing a student in a rubbish bin, constitute bullying when the intent is to demean.
- Property damage — deliberately destroying or stealing a target's belongings.
- Verbal abuse — using words with the intent to emotionally wound. This includes name-calling, threats, and persistent mockery.

Indirect Bullying

Indirect bullying is less visible and therefore harder to detect — but it is no less damaging. Some students fail to recognise it as bullying at all, reasoning that if they have not physically touched anyone or damaged property, they cannot be held responsible. This reasoning is wrong. Indirect bullying includes:

- Social exclusion — deliberately shunning a student or organising others to exclude them from groups and activities.
- Reputation damage — spreading malicious rumours or gossip, whether true or false, with the intent to harm.
- Graffiti and written harassment — posting demeaning messages in physical spaces.

Specialised Forms of Bullying

Several forms of bullying deserve special attention because of their particular prevalence or impact.

You're-Different Bullying

This form targets students on the basis of characteristics that set them apart — their ethnicity, religion, physical appearance, disability, economic background, or any other perceived difference. It is especially common in diverse societies, where difference within schools can be a source of tension if not actively managed.

Sexual Bullying

Sexual bullying includes unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature, coercion into sexual acts, and the distribution or display of sexual images without consent. This form of bullying is not limited to physical spaces — it has migrated increasingly into digital environments, where images can be shared widely and instantly, compounding the harm to the target.

Financial Bullying

Financial bullying targets students on the basis of their economic circumstances — humiliating those who have less, or in some cases, targeting those who are perceived to have more. In schools with wide economic disparities among students, this is a particularly relevant form of harassment.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place through digital technology — mobile phones, social media platforms, messaging applications, online games, and any other internet-based space. Today, it is one of the most urgent challenges facing schools, families, and communities across the world.

What makes cyberbullying distinctively harmful is the set of features that distinguish it from traditional bullying:

- It follows the target home. Traditional bullying typically ends when school ends. Cyberbullying does not. A student can be harassed at any hour, in any place — including what should be the safety of their own bedroom.
- It reaches a wide audience instantly. A humiliating image, a threatening message, or a malicious post can be shared with dozens, hundreds, or thousands of people within minutes.
- It is difficult to escape. A target cannot simply walk away. Online content can persist long after it is posted, and removing it is not always possible.
- The perpetrator may remain anonymous. The ability to hide behind a screen or a fake account emboldens some perpetrators who would not bully face to face.
- The roles of perpetrator and target can reverse rapidly. In online environments, students can shift from being attacked to attacking in a very short space of time.

Common Forms of Cyberbullying

- Harassment via messaging apps — sustained, aggressive, or threatening messages sent through WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and similar platforms.
- Public humiliation on social media — posts, videos, or images designed to shame or embarrass a target in front of their peer group.
- Non-consensual sharing of intimate images — the distribution of sexual or private images without consent. This carries serious psychological consequences, as well as legal implications in many jurisdictions.
- Exclusion from online groups — deliberately removing or blocking a student from group chats or online communities.
- Impersonation — creating fake profiles in a student's name and using them to post damaging content.
- Online pile-ons — encouraging others to flood a target's social media accounts with hostile or mocking comments.

What Schools and Parents Can Do About Cyberbullying

Part 2 of this series addresses cyberbullying in detail, but three foundational principles are worth establishing here:

- Digital spaces are not consequence-free zones. Schools must make clear — in their policies, in assemblies, and in the classroom — that the same standards of behaviour that apply in person apply online.
- Parents must be digitally aware. A parent who does not know what platforms their child uses cannot offer meaningful protection. Open conversations about online activity — without punishment or judgment — are essential.
- Students need to know what to do. Targets of cyberbullying often feel there is nothing they can do. There is. They can screenshot and document what is happening, block the perpetrator, report the content to the platform, and — most importantly — tell a trusted adult.

Difficult Questions Adults Ask

Is Aggressive Body Language a Form of Bullying?

A deliberate stare, a threatening posture, an intimidating presence — these can be just as effective as physical contact in making a target feel afraid, humiliated, or powerless. A useful exercise is to ask the adult to transpose the scenario: how would you feel if a colleague or supervisor directed sustained, aggressive body language at you in the workplace, day after day? Almost every adult who considers this honestly agrees that such behaviour would constitute harassment. The same principle applies to students.

The difficulty is that body language is subjective. What one person reads as a threatening stare, another may interpret as concentration or worry. This does not mean we should dismiss such concerns — it means we should investigate carefully and take the student's experience seriously.

Is Spreading Truthful Information Still Bullying?

Consider a student whose parent has been incarcerated for a serious crime. If other students spread this information deliberately to humiliate and ostracise the child, is that bullying? Yes. The fact that information is true does not give anyone the right to weaponise it against a person who bears no responsibility for it.

Does Anyone 'Deserve' to Be Bullied?

The answer is unambiguous: no one deserves to be bullied. Every person — regardless of their ethnicity, physical characteristics, economic circumstances, or level of talent — has the right to study, work, and live without harassment. This is not simply a moral position; it is the foundation of a functioning, equitable society.

Do Boys and Girls Bully Differently?

Research consistently shows that boys and girls tend to bully in different ways, though the boundaries have become less fixed over time. Boys are more likely to engage in direct, physical forms of bullying. Girls have historically been associated with what researchers call 'Relational Aggression' (RA): an indirect form of bullying that operates through relationships — starting and spreading rumours, deliberate social exclusion, and the manipulation of friendships to isolate a target.

However, this picture is shifting in many countries. Several teachers have reported a notable increase in physical bullying among girls in recent years — particularly group-based aggression, where girls form tight-knit alliances and engage in collective acts of violence. Cyberbullying has added another dimension, providing both boys and girls with tools for relational aggression that are faster, broader in reach, and harder to monitor than anything available to previous generations.

Why Does Anyone Bully?

Understanding why students bully is essential to preventing it. The reasons vary and depend on factors including the student's age, family background, school environment, and peer culture.

The Search for Status and Power

Among teenagers, one of the most common drivers of bullying is the desire to maintain or improve social standing. Research has shown that adolescents use bullying to assert dominance within peer hierarchies — to secure their position among the 'cool kids' and to signal strength to those around them. In this context, the target is less a person than a means to an end.

Emotions That Are Not Being Managed

Many perpetrators bully because they do not know how else to handle difficult emotions — anger, envy, contempt, and humiliation among them. Envy is a particularly common trigger: the target often represents something the perpetrator desires but feels they cannot have.

The Influence of the Home

Children who witness or experience violence at home are at significantly higher risk of becoming perpetrators — or targets — at school. The cycle of abuse is well-documented. This does not excuse bullying behaviour, but it does contextualise it. There are also many protective factors — a strong relationship with at least one caring adult, positive mentors in the community, a supportive school environment — that can interrupt the cycle.

The Influence of the Peer Group

Peers exert enormous influence over adolescent behaviour. A student who would not bully alone may participate enthusiastically in a group. Bystanders who laugh or cheer reinforce the perpetrator's behaviour. The school culture, established largely by students themselves, powerfully shapes what is considered acceptable or admirable.

Exposure to Violence in the Community

Research indicates that children who regularly witness violence in their communities are more likely to normalise aggression. The Constitutional Rights Foundation has found that levels of violence in schools tend to mirror those in the surrounding society. This pattern has been confirmed by teachers across many different countries and contexts.

How Common Is Bullying?

The Global Picture

Bullying is a worldwide phenomenon, but its prevalence varies significantly across countries. A survey of British adolescents found that between 21 and 27 per cent were regularly targeted. In Canada, the estimated rate is approximately 20 per cent. In the United States, bullying was the most commonly reported disciplinary problem in more than one in five primary schools and nearly half of middle schools during a single academic year.

A large cross-national study covering 25 countries found that on average, more than one quarter of students were engaged in school-based aggression — approximately 11% as targets, 10% as perpetrators, and 6% as both. Research across 40 countries in Europe, North America, and Israel found that bullying rates among boys ranged from under 9% in some nations to over 45% in others, suggesting that context and culture have a significant effect on prevalence. Nations that manage conflict well in schools can teach the rest of us a great deal.

A Note on Small Numbers and Large Impact

It is important to remember that the number of students who actively bully is relatively small. Yet research consistently shows that a small number of people can cause a disproportionate amount of harm. A significant proportion of young people in high-crime areas live with regular fear of becoming a victim of violent crime. This is precisely why early intervention in schools matters so much. Addressing bullying behaviour in a twelve-year-old is not a minor exercise — it is an investment in the safety of an entire community.

The Effects of Bullying

Bullying harms the brain. It accelerates the biological ageing of a child. And its effects — without intervention — can last a lifetime.

One of the most persistent misconceptions about childhood bullying is that children 'get over it.' Hundreds of studies tell a different story. The encouraging side of this finding is that, with the right support — counselling, coaching, and other targeted interventions — even those who experienced serious bullying or displayed significant aggression as children can become highly capable, caring, and fulfilled adults.

How Bullying Harms the Brain

The neurological effects of repeated abuse are real and measurable. Research using functional MRI imaging found that children who had experienced violence showed heightened activity in the brain regions associated with threat perception — a pattern similar to that seen in soldiers with combat experience. Over time, this creates serious problems: increased stress, anxiety, and risk of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Chronically elevated stress hormones have also been linked to greater risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and addiction.

The Immediate Effects on Targets

The most visible, immediate effects of bullying include:

- Physical injuries — wounds, bruises, and related harm.
- Stress-related health complaints — persistent headaches and stomach aches.
- Sleep disturbances — insomnia and nightmares.
- Emotional distress — low self-esteem, depression, and in the most serious cases, suicidal thoughts or actions.
- Academic impact — loss of interest in attending school, declining quality of schoolwork.
- Distrust of adults — particularly those perceived as having allowed the bullying to continue.

The Words of Children Who Have Been Bullied

No research finding conveys the reality of bullying as vividly as the words of the children who have lived it.

> "It makes you feel small. It makes you hate other people. You feel as if nobody is helping you." — A secondary school student

> "Some children bully you when you are bright because they are jealous. Somebody should teach people that when they are jealous, they mustn't take it out on others." — A student bullied for being academically strong

> "It was the worst experience of my life. Even now, I still don't like small children because I know what they can do." — A fifteen-year-old, reflecting on primary school

Long-Term Consequences for Targets

Research suggests that children who are repeatedly bullied are more likely to become targets again in adulthood — as if the role itself becomes internalised. Studies have also found a sobering link between sustained bullying and later involvement in the criminal justice system. The body keeps the score, even when the child appears outwardly fine.

Why No One Should Want to Be a Perpetrator

The consequences of bullying behaviour extend well beyond the schoolyard — and they are serious for the perpetrator as well as the target. Uncontrolled bullying is frequently the first step in a trajectory that leads to juvenile and adult criminal activity. A longitudinal study found that bullying behaviour among boys significantly increased the risk of criminal behaviour in adulthood. By contrast, only a small fraction of boys who had not bullied had criminal records.

Perpetrators are also more likely to struggle with forming positive relationships in adulthood, and to experience problems with substance abuse. It is worth holding this thought: helping a child stop bullying is not only about protecting the target. It is about protecting the perpetrator too.

The Bully-Target: The Most Anxious of All

Some students occupy both roles simultaneously — they bully others, but are also bullied themselves. These 'bully-targets' tend to display the highest levels of anxiety, and research has found that their adjustment problems can be worse than those of either perpetrators or targets alone. They are also more likely to carry weapons to school and to become involved in physical fights. This group requires particular attention and care from both counsellors and teachers.

What About Bystanders?

Bystanders — students who witness bullying without being directly involved — are often overlooked. Yet research shows that bystanders witness approximately 85% of bullying episodes, making them the largest group of students affected. The experience of witnessing bullying can:

- Teach students that aggression brings rewards — and encourage imitation.
- Generate fear that the perpetrator will one day turn on them.
- Cause sadness, anger, and a sense of helplessness among those who empathise with the target.

Research has found that most perpetrators will stop their actions within ten seconds of being told to do so by a group of bystanders. Bystanders, acting together, hold enormous power. The challenge is helping them understand and use it.

The Age Group That Needs Special Attention

Research consistently identifies children aged 11 to 13 as the most active participants in school-based aggression. This is a critical transition period, marking the onset of adolescence and the shift from primary to secondary school. Students at this age are navigating new social hierarchies, new peer groups, and significant changes in their own bodies and identities. Targeted support at this stage can have a transformative impact.

✓ Bullying is the repeated, intentional harassment of a student who is unable to defend themselves. It is different from ordinary conflict.

✓ Bullying takes direct forms (physical, verbal, property damage) and indirect forms (exclusion, gossip, reputation damage).

✓ Specialised forms include You're-Different bullying, sexual bullying, financial bullying, and — increasingly — cyberbullying.

✓ Cyberbullying is qualitatively different from traditional bullying: it follows targets home, reaches wide audiences instantly, and is difficult to escape.

✓ Bullying causes significant harm to targets — neurological, emotional, physical, and academic — and its effects can persist into adulthood.

✓ Perpetrators are also harmed: bullying behaviour in childhood is strongly associated with criminal activity, substance abuse, and relationship difficulties in adulthood.

✓ Bystanders witness the majority of bullying episodes. When they act together, they can stop bullying quickly.

✓ The research is clear: bullying can be substantially reduced in schools where the right approaches are consistently applied.

A Final Word on Section A: There Is Good News

The research is unambiguous: bullying can be substantially reduced in schools. There are programmes, policies, and approaches that have been proven to work — in Norway, in the United States, in Japan, and increasingly across the world. Schools that commit to a whole-community approach — involving principals, teachers, counsellors, parents, and students — see real and lasting reductions in aggression.

Bullying is a wrong we can set right. We can. And we must.

SECTION B

How Schools Stop Bullying

A Guide for Principals, Teachers and Guidance Counsellors

A Declaration on Teacher Education

Bullying prevention must become a core component of teacher education worldwide.

Every teacher who stands before a 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 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/Departments of Education, teachers' colleges, universities, and professional teachers' associations are therefore urged to:

- Include bullying prevention and conflict resolution as compulsory modules in all pre-service teacher education programmes, at both primary and secondary levels.
- 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.
- 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 to signs of abuse or acute distress.
- Ensure that all teacher education programmes address culturally responsive approaches — recognising that each school context has specific social dynamics that require tailored strategies.
- 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.

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.

Section B is a practical guide for the school professionals 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 educators who have seen, in their own schools, what works.

Section A established what bullying is, why it happens, and what damage it causes. Section B 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.

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 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.

One further insight from the research is worth holding throughout this section: 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.

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.

Principals carry enormous responsibilities — managing staff, meeting academic targets, engaging parents, maintaining facilities — often with fewer resources than they need. 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. 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 allows it. Unless that culture changes, individual interventions address symptoms without touching the cause.

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, and ancillary workers. Bullying does not only happen in classrooms. It happens in corridors, canteens, playgrounds, and changing rooms — spaces often monitored by non-teaching staff. A programme that leaves those staff members uninformed has significant blind spots.

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:

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

Involving Students in the Solution

The most strategic principals involve student leaders in planning and implementing their bullying prevention programmes. 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 has confirmed that young people 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. The range of responses available includes warnings, behavioural plans, activity and venue restrictions, suspensions, and — in the most serious cases — exclusion.

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

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:

1. Make clear, in regular addresses to the school, that aggression in any form is unacceptable — and mean it consistently.
2. Invite specialists in conflict management to address students, and ask teachers to extend the conversation into the classroom.
3. Incorporate anti-aggression activities into classroom work.
4. Ask students to alert school personnel immediately when they witness or experience any form of physical harassment.
5. Explain to bystanders — clearly and repeatedly — that they have a collective responsibility to intervene when it is safe to do so.
6. Hold at least one dedicated meeting or retreat with school staff on the subject of bullying prevention.

A Principal Speaks

Sometimes the most important work of bullying prevention happens not in the classroom but in the staffroom. One principal who successfully raised academic standards 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. 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 secondary school principal

The Staff Retreat: Getting Started Together

Before the Retreat

Give participants adequate advance notice. Ask each person to submit a brief written statement setting out their personal philosophy on bullying prevention, 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.

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.

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. Common agreements include:

- 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.

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.

Who	What	By When
Class teachers	Introduce the BPIP to their classes and invite student input on consequences for mild breaches.	End of following month
Guidance counsellor	Distribute a brief questionnaire to identify current levels of student-reported aggression.	Within one month
Student leaders	Meet with staff to share student perspectives on bullying — what is happening, where, and what would help.	Within two weeks of retreat

Quality Circles: Sustaining the Momentum

A Quality Circle (QC) 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 student leaders.

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

7. Define the problem clearly. What is happening? Where? How often? Who is most affected?
8. Generate possible solutions without immediately evaluating them — all ideas are welcomed at this stage.
9. Assess each solution: what are its likely benefits, limitations, and resource requirements?
10. Select the best solution and plan how to manage its potential downsides.
11. Plan the next steps and decide who is responsible for each.

✓ 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.

✓ 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. A great teacher does not only teach a subject. They teach students how to be in the world.

Two international examples deserve mention. Jaime Escalante, working in a violence-prone high school in Los Angeles, helped students who had been written off 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 students in Chicago who had been labelled learning-disabled, produced extraordinary academic results through the same combination: uncompromising expectations, deep care for each student as an individual, and positive discipline. These principles 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 are sometimes the targets of bullying — from students, and occasionally from parents. 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. Being part of the solution makes teachers feel safer themselves.

What Teachers Can Do in the Classroom

- 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.

- Set high expectations for behaviour as well as academic performance. Teachers who convey — genuinely — 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. When students help to create the rules, they are far more likely to enforce 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.
- Share concerns promptly with colleagues and with the principal. 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 argued that schools teach some analytical thinking, but the kind of thinking that is exploratory, creative, perceptual, and action-oriented is rarely taught explicitly. Research 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. 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 schools where corporal punishment has been abolished by law, teachers who had no alternative strategies have reported that some students interpreted the change as a sign of weakness and became more disruptive, not less. Policy change without teacher preparation produces precisely this outcome. The two must go hand in hand.

Be in Control of Yourself First

A teacher who shouts or loses their temper in response to a confrontational student has handed that student a victory. 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.

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.

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. A word of caution: in any subsequent joint meeting, a particularly shrewd 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 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: 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)		

Classroom Exercises for Students

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 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 hold more power than they typically realise.

Discussion and Essay Topics (Secondary and Tertiary Level)

- What causes students to bully each other? Are those causes the same across different countries?
- 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 our society 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. Students who have received basic training in mediation skills tend to produce richer dramatic material and arrive at more nuanced solutions.

School Yard! — An Unfinished Story (Senior Secondary)

The following story 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.

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 among the most important adults in any school. 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.

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. 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.

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 children and young people found that students were genuinely motivated to learn assertiveness skills when they understood their connection to stopping bullying.

Assertiveness training works best when delivered to groups rather than only to individuals. A structured assertiveness training programme typically runs across five to ten forty-minute sessions, and includes:

12. A calming exercise to open each session and help students settle into a reflective frame of mind.
13. Students, with the counsellor's facilitation, identify the communication challenges they most want to address.
14. The counsellor demonstrates improved responses to those challenges, which are then role-played by students, with feedback.
15. Close attention is paid to non-verbal communication — body language, tone of voice, eye contact — alongside the words used.
16. Students practise the assertive behaviours, beginning with the least challenging scenarios and gradually working toward more difficult ones.
17. Progress is evaluated together, and adjustments are made where needed.

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.

The limitations of peer counselling must be honestly acknowledged. Most perpetrators will not seek out peer counsellors. Targets dealing with serious or sustained harassment need more support than peer counsellors are equipped to provide. The role is supplementary: to listen, to validate, to explain, and to encourage. Before becoming peer counsellors, students need preparation in active listening, a clear understanding of the boundaries of their role, training in confidentiality, and guidance on record-keeping.

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:

- Do not bully.

- When you see bullying, help the target — either by intervening directly (if it is safe) or by getting an adult.
- Include others — actively invite students to be part of activities and groups.
- 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. Data changes minds. A principal who is presented with evidence that 40% of students in Year 9 have witnessed physical aggression in the past month, and that certain locations are identified as the most dangerous spaces, is far more likely to act than one who hears only a general impression.

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. Parents should also be informed of their children's participation.

Designing Questionnaires

When developing questionnaires, 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?' Students define bullying differently, and the word itself can feel stigmatising. More productive questions focus on specific behaviours and situations.

Interviews: Going Deeper

Questionnaires tell you what is happening. Interviews help you understand why. The following questions have proved useful in a range of school settings:

General questions:

- 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?

- How do teachers treat students? Can you give me examples — both good and not so good?
- How do students treat each other? Give me an example of students handling a conflict well.

Bullying-specific questions:

- What does bullying look like at this school? Can you describe what you have seen?
- How does bullying affect the students here? How widespread do you think it is?
- Have teachers or other staff taken action to reduce bullying? What has happened?

Personal questions (for one-to-one interviews):

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

✓ 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.

✓ 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.

Summary: What Schools Can Do

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
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.	Start of each year
Teacher	Use positive discipline — with proper preparation.	Consistent application
Teacher	Teach thinking skills explicitly, integrated across subjects.	Ongoing
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.	Start of each year
Guidance Counsellor	Conduct research on the prevalence and nature of bullying and share results.	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

Every school has, within its walls right now, children who are afraid to go to the canteen, students who are dreading the coming week, 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. Part 2 — written for parents and students — completes the picture.

— End of Part 1 —

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Three free resources on bullying prevention are available at www.fipaglobal.org