
(An excerpt from Classrooms That Work: A Teacher's Guide to Discipline Without Stress)

Bullying

Prevention

1. Class Meetings

In the class meeting, the bully has a real chance to develop empathy and hear how their actions affect others, while making them a *de facto* part of the group. The meetings are also a great place to give them encouragement, and bullies need encouragement to counteract their feelings of inadequacy. Although it may appear that they feel superior, their constant need to prove themselves indicates vast feelings of self-doubt. People who are comfortable with themselves and have great self-esteem don't have anything to prove.

Another reason to include bullies in class meetings is that they are often ostracized, isolated, and suffer from a lack of social interest. Every opportunity must be taken to find their talents and utilize them for the benefit of the group. Realistically it could take months or even years to turn someone like this around, but be patient. Keep telling yourself that anyone this young has the potential for change. The idea here is to avoid labeling anyone "the bad kid." The other students will also learn a lot about problem-solving, consequences and motivation, by working with the bully in the class.

Because bullies mistakenly perceive others as their enemy, they need help to view others positively and cooperate with the group. Great pains must be taken to not antagonize the bully or make it look like anyone is ganging up on him.

2. Parent Study Groups -- Teaching Parenting Skills

Parents have by far the most impact on a child's development. It's unrealistic, therefore, to talk about preventing children's behavioral problems without including parents. What we need is nothing less than a campaign to help parents learn the essential skills they need in order to help their children develop social interest. This is an idea that is gaining momentum as people begin to understand that parenting involves much more than just loving children and providing the basics of life. We tend to blame parents when their children are a problem, but this blame needs to be replaced with the realization that, although parents do the best job they can, most of them have never had (or seized) the opportunity to learn the skills needed for this most difficult job. Today however, because of the huge amount of media attention and discussion about parenting, there is no stigma attached to attending a class or reading a book on the subject. In other words, we now see it as a skill that should be studied and mastered rather than something that necessarily

comes naturally.

It is not enough for teachers to tell parents that their child is a problem, they must be able to offer practical help. Every school should provide a study group for any parent who is interested, particularly those whose children are having behavioral problems. Without it, they may continue to inflame the aggression of their children by the severity of their discipline.

Here is what typically happens:

The parents of a problem child are constantly getting calls from the school telling them how bad their child is.

SCHOOL: "Mrs. Smith? Johnny is in the office again for fighting. We think you had better come and pick him up again and talk to him."

PARENT: "But this is the third time this month. Why are you sending him home to me? I don't know what to do with him. Why can't you discipline him?"

This game of Ping-Pong that goes on between the school and the parents, with the child as the ball, goes on a lot. But the irony is, it's both their jobs. Parent study groups, backed by the school, are one way to connect home and school. They offer an empathetic and supportive place for parents to turn when they are experiencing problems with their children. In fact, we believe that all parents of school age children should participate in a parent study group.

1. Adopting a curriculum which includes social living

We spend almost all of the time in schools teaching our students facts and methodologies, but almost no time on how to be successful *people*. We teach them academic skills but not *life* skills. The fundamentals of a democratic society need to be reinforced through the curriculum of the school. Included in that are the life skills needed in order to treat others with respect while maintaining self-respect. Simply put, the curriculum needs to go beyond the three "R's." It should be expanded to include things like: anger management, conflict resolution techniques, respect for self and others, communication, leadership, and even encouragement skills so that they can understand why people do what they do and be able to help themselves and each other when they are confronted with difficult situations.