

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This book is a plan for a series of school workshops on intervening in cases of identified bullying. It is not intended as a substitute for policy development and preventive programs delivered in classrooms, such as social and emotional learning (SEL), but rather as a necessary supplement for addressing actual cases of bullying.

As teachers are aware, schools normally give a great deal of attention to providing a positive school ethos and promoting positive relationships between members of the school community, including staff, students and parents. Much has been written about what schools can do to prevent bullying (see Rigby, 2007, 2021b; Wicking & Rigby, 2021; Salmivalli et al., 2005). When this is achieved, bullying is less likely to occur. However, even in the best run schools, cases of bullying continue to arise and must be addressed.

It is worth reminding ourselves of why action is needed. There is now a mountain of evidence confirming that if a child is continually bullied at school, the effects on their wellbeing are often serious and sometimes long-lasting. These include prolonged anxiety in social situations, depression, absences from school and workplaces, and the inability to form positive relationships and succeed occupationally (see Rigby, 2003). A second reason for action, not so widely acknowledged, is the harm that can be done to a school and its teachers when no appropriate action is taken to deal with the bullying and the school is deemed culpable.

As an expert witness in cases of bullying where legal action is taken against a school, most commonly by a parent of a bullied child, I am keenly aware of the shock and dismay schools experience when faced with such a situation. The school is always asked to say what they did and did not do about an alleged case of bullying, and why. The school is also asked to provide a copy of the anti-bullying policy operating at the time of the incident or incidents. Records of what the school actually did, who was involved and the outcomes of these interventions are also requested. When a school is found to be seriously at fault, large fines are commonly imposed; the school's reputation is tarnished; and individual staff members may experience career setbacks. Worse still, staff members may have to live with the belief that if they had acted otherwise the victimised child would not have suffered so badly.

## INTERVENTIONS IN CASES OF BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

This is not to say that schools can invariably stop cases of bullying from continuing. In most cases the bullying continues – and in some cases it actually increases! A summary of available evidence on the effects of case interventions in Australia, England, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands and the United States is compiled in Appendix A (page 45), and an extensive meta-analysis of reported outcomes for some interventions is given by Ttofi and Farrington (2011).

The first thing we should bear in mind is that resolving cases of bullying has repeatedly been shown to be difficult, often unsuccessful and sometimes counterproductive. Indeed, the evidence from a number of countries, based on student reports, indicates that among students who have gone to teachers for help, most interventions are not entirely successful in getting the bullying stopped. Both teachers and school counsellors differ among themselves on what course of action should be taken (see Bauman et al., 2008). The common response is to apply what has been called the *traditional disciplinary approach*; that is, to identify the bully or bullies and apply sanctions or punishment (Sherer & Nickerson, 2010). This approach is sometimes appropriate and effective, but in a very large number of cases, alternative or supplementary approaches have been found to be much more successful in getting the bullying to stop (see Thompson & Smith, 2011; Rigby & Johnson, 2016). Unfortunately, teachers are often unaware of alternative methods or lack the training or confidence to use them.

The purpose of this book is to provide information about a range of methods and offer the means by which they can be understood and used appropriately. It emphatically does not seek to replace the expertise and professional judgement of teachers based upon their personal, day-to-day experiences of observing and interacting with students. Rather, it provides a rationale (which must be discussed) for taking one course of action rather than another in response to a case of bullying. It provides a considered basis for making judgements and carrying out actions that can over time result in a substantial reduction of bullying in schools and a corresponding increase in the wellbeing of students, especially of those for whom bullying and the fear of bullying is a recurring nightmare.

The content of this book is largely based on *Bullying Interventions in Schools: Six Basic Methods*, which I first published in 2010. The role-plays and exercises provided have been extensively workshopped in many Australian schools and also internationally over the last ten years.

This book provides concise descriptions of methods of intervention in actual cases of bullying and the rationales for employing them. Further, it provides a series of exercises and role-plays designed to assist teachers in carrying out each method of intervention. It is not proposed that any single