Method of Shared Concern (Modified)
How to intervene in the Bully Dynamic

Eva de Gosztonyi, psychologist
Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management
“Building the Capacity of the English School Boards of Quebec”

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Authors

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Why this Method?

✓ Humanistic and Developmental
  ▪ Assumption of basic “goodness.”
  ▪ Builds attachment with adults
  ▪ Provides a non-threatening relationship with a caring adult.
  ▪ Elicits a small amount of empathy for the victim.
  ▪ Helps many to get “back on track.”

✓ Avoids punishment
  ▪ Keeps bullying from going “underground.”
  ▪ Keeps lines of communication open.

✓ Helps keep students safe
  ▪ Allows for swift adult intervention without a need for an “air tight” case

Why this Method?

✓ Works effectively on the “bullying” group dynamic.
✓ Relatively easy to learn and implement.
✓ Requires some time investment but no materials or resources.
Method of Shared Concern (Modified)

Why this Method?
- It works with the bully dynamic proposed by Dr. Gordon Neufeld: “Alpha Awry”
- alpha complex defended against caring and responsibility
- BULLY INSTINCT & syndrome

History
- Developed by Anatol Pikas, Department of Education, University Upsalla, Sweden – 1970s (same time as Olweus)
- Used extensively in Australia by Ken Rigby who has described this method in detail.

Recent Research METHOD OF SHARED CONCERN
K. Rigby & C. Griffiths – 2011 Addressing cases of bullying through the Method of Shared Concern
- Reports from school children in a variety of countries suggest that school-based interventions tackling cases of bullying are often unsuccessful.
- Method of Shared Concern: use was explored in depth in 17 cases of ‘moderately severe’ peer victimization.
- Detailed reports of the meetings with students suspected of bullying and the target were obtained from the practitioners.
- The practitioners and each of the students were subsequently interviewed to ascertain the effectiveness of the Method.
- Positive outcomes were achieved in a large majority of cases (12 out of 15) for a range of age groups and educational settings.
- Appropriate and inappropriate applications of the Method in resolving bully/victim problems are examined and discussed.

Parameters of the Method of Shared Concern
Rigby warns, NOT to be used:
- In relatively mild cases.
- In very serious cases.
- When a violent act has been witnessed by an adult.

BULLYING: The Group Dynamic
- Bullying is often a group interaction
- Members of a bullying group:
  - Feel the pressure of the group to take part.
  - Want to find justification for tormenting victim
  - Are afraid that the group will turn against them.
  - Have guilt feelings that they are several against one.
  - Don’t know how to get out of the situation.

The Basics
- Believe that we can intervene effectively in a bullying situation.
- Understand the steps of the Method.
- Let others in the school know about the Method to support this kind of intervention.
Method of Shared Concern (Modified)

What you need to know

- Do not need a lot of proof before being able to intervene.
- The attitude of the intervener will determine the success of the intervention.
- By dealing with each student individually peer attachment is lessened.
- This method does not condone bullying behaviour. It strongly invites and expects responsible behaviour.

Identification of a Bullying Situation

- Become aware of a student or student whom you suspect are being bullied.
- Become aware of students who are engaging in bullying type behaviour.
  - The information about the bullying should not come from the “victim”
  - Avoid the perception that the victim “ratted” on the bully suspects.

Phase 1: Individual meetings with the bullying suspects

Step 2: Transform bullying into shared concern

- The student is asked to say what he/she knows about the situation.
- Use questions or statements such as:
  - “Do you know what is happening?”
  - “Do you know anything about it?”
  - “How do you see what is happening to Tom?”

Method of Shared Concern (modified) - Outline

Once a “suspected” bullying situation has been identified

- Phase 1: INDIVIDUAL meetings with the bully suspects
- Phase 2: Meeting with the student ‘wrongly done by’
- Phase 3: Further individual meetings with the bully suspects
- Phase 4: Further meetings with student ‘wrongly done by’

Attitude of the Intervener affects the success of the Method

- Warm and empathetic.
- Believe that the bully suspects are caught in the bullying group dynamic.
- Have a desire to understand the point of view of the bully suspects and a desire to help them.
- Believe that the bully suspects can change their behaviour.
Phase 1: Individual meetings with the bullying suspects

Step 3: Reaching a TURNING POINT

- This point is reached soon as the student has acknowledged some awareness (not necessarily guilt) relating to what has been happening.
- This requires only the smallest acknowledgement, such as, “I suppose so.” or “Yeah, I guess so.”

Phase 1: Individual meetings with the other bullying suspects

Close monitoring is essential.
- At this meeting, no threats are made
- No warnings are given.
- The remaining students in the group are seen individually and
- Steps 1 to 4 are repeated.

Phase 1: Individual meetings with the bullying suspects

Step 4: Stimulate constructive solutions

- Ask the student directly what she/he could do to make the situation better.
  (Note that the interviewer is not trying to get to the bottom of the matter or to apportion blame.)
- Express strong approval for any constructive proposal.
- If necessary, suggest a small step that could be taken
- Arrange for a follow-up meeting to see how things are going.

Some Variations

① The suspected bully denies knowledge of what is going on.
  - Genuine ignorance
  - Refusal to co-operate
  - Respond by saying, “Well it seems like you don’t want to talk about this now. We can talk later.”
  - This gives the bully suspect a clear message that he/she is not getting out of the situation.

② The bully suspect denies personal involvement or says that it was someone else.
  - Response: “Well, you have influence with her/him/them. I wonder if you could have a word with them. They would respect what you say.”
  - This encourages the leader to use his/her alpha in a more appropriate way.

Some Variations

③ The bully suspect pressures the interviewer to tell who “ratted”.
  - Response: “No one had to tell me, I can see that Tom is upset. I just need some help here. Since you seem to be someone who is “in the know”, I was hoping that you could help me.”
  - Refocus on the task at hand, which is to help the victim.
Phase 2: Meeting with the student ‘wrongly done by’

- Meet with the student ‘wrongly done by’ after you have met with all the bully suspects.
- Express concern, sympathy and support over what has been happening.
- Let the him/her know that you have been speaking with the bully suspects and that they are ready to make changes.
- If this is a provocative student discuss changes that could be made in their behaviour.
- Let the him/her know that you will meet again soon to see how things are working out.

Phase 3: follow-up meetings

- Further individual meetings are held with the bully suspects to check to see if they have honoured their promises and to monitor progress.
- Follow-up meetings are held with the student ‘wrongly done by’ to monitor progress.

Evaluation

Kathleen Mauro, psychologist (retired)
Peter Hamilton, psycho-educator (retired)
Eastern Townships School Board

- It takes time.
- It is a lot of work until you get used to the Method.
- Must go back to do follow-up.
- Students said that it was effective.
- Students wanted to have the follow-up.
- Built relationships for future interventions.

Legal Considerations

Do parents need to be notified about the intervention?

- In the case of the bullying suspects, no, since the student(s) are not being accused of anything.
- In the case of the victim, if you feel the parents need to be reassured that something is being done.

Legal Considerations

What if a parent does complain that the bully is not being punished?

Pikas suggests saying the following:

“*You have to make a choice between revenge and security for your child behind the backs of teachers. I can provide the second and therefore I have to refrain from the first.*”

OR

“*Do you want the bully punished or for the bullying to stop?*”

“Legal” Considerations

I contacted the OPPQ to discuss the method of shared concern. At our Action Plan Meeting, it seemed to have caused a few worries regarding consent. So, I asked the person responsible and here is the answer I got.

The school should mention to all parents at the beginning of the year that there is an Anti-bullying Policy in the school. Various staff members (including professionals) may meet with a student to discuss bullying (alone or in a group). In this case, a psychoeducator can meet with a student under 14 without parental consent to discuss a bullying situation (method of shared concern). It is an intervention that does not require a regular follow-up, an assessment of needs, an IEP/intervention plan nor confidential information. We are not performing a reserved or specific psychoeducational act therefore, we do not need consent.

We are simply implementing our Anti-bullying policy. However, if we choose to work with the student and set goals, we are then in need of parental consent.
The only part that I am unclear on is what is meant by “setting goals”. In the Method of Shared Concern the student is asked to do something to help the other student and the adult says that they will check in to see “how it is going”. I don’t believe that this is a “goal” as the intervention is to make the situation better for the other person, not to “psycho-educate” the child the adult is speaking to in a formal way (the child can refuse to co-operate.)

Yes, we ask the student to do something about the situation, but it is not a psychoeducational (SMART) goal. Therefore, even if we “check in” with them, it fits in our anti-bullying policy and not a professional mandate. A principal, a teacher, a SET could do the same intervention without consent from the parents.

The OPQ said that it’s ok. However, if we choose to work on his personal traits (self-esteem, confidence, etc.), set goals and meet regularly, we need consent.

Legal Considerations

If a parent does complain, what protection does the interviewer have?

- As long as the school has a Safe School or Anti-bullying policy, the Method of Shared Concern is part of the activities that are carried out in a “Safe School” just like using Steps to Respect or other anti-bullying activities.
- Part of the school repertoire of activities to keep the school safe.
- Do not keep a dossier for individual students.

RESOURCES

The Method of Shared Concern: A Positive Approach to Bullying in Schools by Ken Rigby (2011)

Ken Rigby.net: http://www.kenrigby.net/11d-Shared-Concern-Method


more interviews: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7Fj7Cmgz-A

RESOURCES

DVD on The Method of Shared Concern

Dr. Ken Rigby
www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/

Pikas, Anatol, New Developments of the Shared Concern Method. In School Psychology International 2002, Vol. 23 (3): 307-326. This article can be found on the web at: