Concepts

Before reading this chapter, please complete the questionnaire below by putting a tick in the appropriate box based on your knowledge and understanding of bullying.

Questionnaire on Myths and Facts of Bullying

		True	False
1.	Fighting is a common type of bullying.	☐	☐
2.	Bullying refers to acts of physical violence.	☐	☐
3.	Bullying is part of growing up. It is no big deal and will not cause any harm.	☐	☐
4.	If the student is bullied, it is his fault. He should take his own responsibility and face up to it.	☐	☐
5.	All bullies are students with disciplinary record.	☐	☐
6.	There is no bullying in my school.	☐	☐
7.	Encouraging students to report bullying will only invite more bullying.	☐	☐
8.	Schools can put a stop to bullying.	☐	☐

Answers to "Myths and facts of bullying"

The Questionnaire on Myths and Facts of Bullying is designed to provide teachers with a deeper understanding of bullying. Some of the statements given in the questionnaire are not wrong, but they do not fully reflect the nature of the problem and are therefore considered as "false".

1. Fighting is a common type of bullying. (False)
Fighting is a common disciplinary act, but students fighting over a dispute do not necessarily constitute bullying. When both parties are equally strong, it does not constitute bullying because bullying means the intended and repeated oppression of the stronger on the weaker. (Beane, 1999; DEF,1994; Newman, Horne & Bartolomucci, 2000)

2. Bullying refers to acts of physical violence. (False)
While physical attacks like shoving, slapping, punching and kicking, etc. are more overt bullying behaviours, bullying can also take other forms. They include verbal bullying like mockery, teasing, taunting, defaming and spreading rumours; social bullying like exclusion, isolation and hostility; psychological torment; and also extortion of money and properties, etc.

3. Bullying is part of growing up. It is no big deal and will not cause any harm. (False)
During the process of growing up, the experience of bullying or being bullied is harmful to the healthy development of students. The victims suffer emotional distress. They feel tense, frightened, anxious, helpless, inferior, unable to concentrate, dislike going to school and in severe cases, develop tendencies of self-destruction. The victims of continuous bullying will suffer long term psychological trauma and are at risk of falling into depression and having low self-esteem (Olwells,1993). Researches show that some victims may become bullies later in their lives, resulting in more bullies. As

evidenced by a number of longitudinal studies, bullies, when compared with the students of the same age range, are more likely to commit crimes when they grow up (Olwells,1993). Students who witness bullying incidents may also feel uncomfortable, fearing that they may be the next victims. If the bullies are rampant bearing no correspondent consequences, some students may follow suit.

4. If the student is bullied, it is his fault. He should take his own responsibility and face up to it. (False)

It is wrong to assume that the victim should take the blame and be held fully responsible for being bullied. As a matter of fact, no one should be bullied because of his preference, inclinations, behaviours and characteristics. In the vast majority of cases, the victims are picked as targets mainly because of imbalance of power and vulnerability. There are, however, a number of victims whose provocative languages, behaviours and attitudes may trigger assault and bullying easily. These students need more intensive professional guidance and follow-up service. It is important for the school to early identify the bullies, the victims and potential targets and give them proper assistance to help them integrate into a harmonious school life where students respect each other.

5. All bullies are students with disciplinary record. (False)

Bullies come in different types, not all of them have disciplinary record. Factors contributing to bullying behaviour may include growing up experience, peer influence and social climate, etc. So we should never stereotype the bullies.

6. There is no bullying in my school. (False)

Bullying hits every school in different forms and to a certain extent. It usually occurs in circumstances where there is no adult supervision and the victims may not report the incidents. Therefore, bullying may be a hidden and often under-estimated problem. Even if you are sure that your school is bully-free, the school should always take appropriate preventive measures as precautions.

7. Encouraging students to report bullying will only invite more bullying. (False)

This is a common misconception. If bullying is tolerated by schools

or the victims are told to put up with it, it will only embolden the bullies and the problem will get worse. On the contrary, if students are encouraged to report bullying and the school follows up each case seriously, the number of reported cases may rise in the beginning, but will drop tremendously in the long run because the school faces the problem.

8. Schools can put a stop to bullying. (True)
Many studies indicate that schools with an anti-bullying policy and preventive measures succeed in reducing bullying. A whole school policy on bullying is therefore the most effective strategy to tackle and prevent bullying (DEFS, 2002; Newman, Home & Bartolomucci, 2000; Smith, 1999).

I. Definition of Bullying

Different academics have slightly different views over the definition of bullying, but most of them agree that it has three components in common, namely:

- Repetition - Bullying repeats over time. It is not a single incident.
- Malicious intent - Bullies oppress and hurt others deliberately.
- Imbalance of power - Bullies are apparently more powerful and bullying occurs when the victims are unable to defend themselves.

(Beane, 1999; DFES, 2002; Newman, Horne & Bartolomucci, 2000; Olweus, 1993)

A behaviour is defined as bullying only when it has all these three components. Overall speaking, bullying is a repeated and intended act of harm or oppression by a person or a group of persons who is more powerful or in the majority.

II. Types & Forms of Bullying

Bullying can be broadly classified into three categories as follows (DFES, 2002):

Types	Examples
Physical bullying with aggressive behavior	Punching, kicking, slapping, hitting, shoving, tripping, pulling hair, extorting money or properties, etc.
Verbal bullying	Intimidating, making nasty / abusive call, cursing, defaming, mockery, name-calling and insulting or making malicious fun of somebody by attacking his personal characteristics like appearance, ability, and ethnicity.
Indirect bullying	Spreading rumours, being hostile, ignoring, isolating, boycotting or rejecting the victim, etc.

With the development of information technology, bullies can spread rumours, post insulting remarks or make other personal attacks via electronic means, such as emails, webpages, chat rooms and text messages of mobile phones, to mock and defame the victims. This gives rise to what we call "cyber-bullying".

III. Analysis of Bullying Behaviour

- Bully — Initiates the bullying behaviour and acts as the ringleader

Assistant	Follows the ringleader and participates directly in bullying
Reinforcer	Encourages the bullying behaviour, e.g. by teasing and cheering around
Victim	Suffers from bullying
Defender	Offers comfort and support to the victim, tries to stop bullying
Outsider	Stays on the sideline

These roles are not fixed. On the contrary, they may change with the situation or development of the incident. For example, reinforcers overwhelmed by the atmosphere may become assistants if they are not able to resist. It should be noted that outsiders often play a secondary role as defenders (Sutton & Smith, 1999). Research findings indicate that proper education may give students a better understanding of the harmful effects of bullying and the importance of peer support. As a result, outsiders will not remain silent, but step in to support the victims and help stop bullying (Cowie & Sharp, 1996).

IV. Types & Bullies

1. Typical Bullies

They exhibit the following characteristics (Olweus, 1999):

- Autocratic, impulsive and inclined to use violence to oppress others
- Self-centered and show little empathy for the victims
- Social competence and self-esteem better than the average
- Able to get some peer recognition
- Male bullies are usually physically stronger

2. Passive Bullies

They exhibit the following characteristics (Newman, Home & Bartolomucci, 2000):

- Assist and reinforce the bullies after witnessing their aggressive behaviour go unchallenged. Some may take this as a shield to save themselves from being bullied.
- Belittled by peers
- Lack of a sense of security
- Some have poor social skills, get anxious easily and have low self-confidence.

Both male and female students may become bullies, though in general, male students are more persistent bullies. Male students tend to bully in a more direct way, like shoving and intimidating, etc. Their victims include male and female students. Female bullies bully others in a more indirect way, e.g. spreading rumours and exclusion, etc. Most of their victims are girls.

V. Characteristics of Victims

Summarising the views of scholars, students picked as targets may have one or more of the following characteristics (Beane, 1999; DFES, 2002; Newman, Home & Bartolomucci, 2000)

- Introverted, shy and timid
- Silent, weak in expression
- Belittled by peers, lonely at school with few friends
- Lack of social skills in handling peer relationship, likely to annoy or offend other students
- Lack of skills in handling disputes or solving problems, likely to make radical or provocative reactions
- Possessing specific characteristics or habitual behaviours different from other students.

- Having special needs, such as intellectual disability, physical disability, attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders and other learning, emotional or behavioural problems.

VI. Harmful Effects of Bullying

Bullying, in whatever forms, brings harm of different degrees to the victims. They may suffer from emotional distress, reduced social activities, lagging in various performance at school and shattered confidence and self-concept, which may affect their personality development. Even worse than that, there are overseas examples for committing suicide because of bullying. Moreover, long-term trauma may cause depression and low self-esteem in the victims in their adulthood (Olwells, 1999).

If not properly handled, bullying may reinforce the tendency of the bully to show his violent behaviour. Many longitudinal studies show that bullies are more likely to commit crimes compared with children of their age when they grow up (Olwells, 1993). Hence, the harm inflicted on them cannot be overlooked.

As to the bystanders, they may feel uncomfortable and helpless when witnessing bullying. Some may blame themselves for not lending a hand, while others may join in under group pressure or for fear of otherwise becoming a target. For those involved in bullying or those swayed by bullying, they may resort to violence for solving problems.

VII. Concluding Remarks

Bullying in whatever form is unacceptable. It harms the victims, the bullies and the bystanders, and affects the overall discipline

and atmosphere of the school to a certain extent. Schools should address the problem of bullying seriously and take positive steps to prevent and stop bullying.