

“Improvement through Taking Responsibility” (ITR) Approach

Objectives:

1. To stop bullying behaviour immediately, and to engage all students involved in the incident to go through the five steps of "recalling", "reflecting", "taking responsibility", "effecting improvements", and "co-creating harmony" to prevent recurrence of bullying and rebuild peer relationship; and
2. To educate every student involved in the incident (including the bullies, the victims, the reinforcers and the bystanders) and make them understand that the school will not tolerate bullying, and to impose on them the responsibility of tackling the problem and making self-initiated improvements.

Characteristics:

1. Though the bully and the victim may both be responsible for the incident, the teacher adopts a no-blame approach to get the students' cooperation to share the responsibility.
2. The main emphasis of the interview is to get students' support to solve the problem of bullying. The teacher should focus on the incident and let other non-urgent disciplinary matters be dealt with later.
3. The teacher reviews and makes reference to experience concerning successful or unsuccessful attempts of students (including the bullies and the victims) to prevent bullying, and guides them to explore and identify positive and feasible solutions.

Points to Note:

1. All interviews should be conducted by the same teacher in order to ensure consistency in attitudes, methods and principles.
2. Preparation for the interview including collecting information and formulating strategies and details should be made before the interview.
3. Interviewing students should be conducted in a quiet room.
4. A brief record of the interview should be made for reference and follow-up action.
5. Depending on the circumstances, the order of the interviews can be as follows:
 - The bullies may not want to tell the truth for fear of punishment. If the teacher does not know much about the incident, he / she may interview the victims and the bystanders first and get a preliminary idea of the impact of the incident on the victims before meeting the bullies.
 - If the teacher knows roughly what has happened, he / she may interview the bullies first. The advantage is that this will not give the bullies any impression that the teacher may have prejudice against them after hearing the one-sided story of the victims.

6. If there is more than one bully, the teacher should interview the ringleader or the core member first.
7. All bullies should be interviewed as early as possible to avoid giving them the chance to discuss the matter or take revenge.
8. In the early stage of intervention, it is not advisable to conduct group interviews with the bullies and the victims together as they may blame each other, deny the responsibility and complicate the problem.

Conclusion:

1. The ITR Approach helps to stop and tackle bullying behaviour immediately. Other follow-up actions, group and / or individual counseling should be made if further improvements are needed in emotion control, stress management, problem-solving ability and social skills of the victims and bullies.
2. If the incident involves several students in a class or affects other classmates, apart from providing support at the individual student level, the teacher should also address it at the class level by explaining to the whole class what has happened and what has been done. The purpose is to clear up doubts and suspicions to avoid unnecessary conjectures or misunderstanding.