

“Improvement through Taking Responsibility” Approach

Theoretical Base:

Developing mutual respect and a harmonious relationship among students is the key to eliminate school bullying. Tackling the problem of bullying is therefore an educational process to improve interpersonal relationship. This is precisely the aim of the “Improvement through Taking Responsibility” (ITR) Approach in handling bullying. Taking notice of a bullying incident, a teacher should intervene immediately to stop the incident and handle the case by adopting the ITR Approach. ITR, with its emphasis on positive attitudes in problem-solving, is designed based on local circumstances and needs and comprises the following three methods, principles and skills in counselling and managing bullying.

1. "Solution-Focused Therapy"(Metcalf, 1995; HO Wui-shing et. al., 2003; NG Kaling et. al., 2003)

Basic Concepts:

- There is no correlation between the cause of an incident and its solution. Therefore the primary objective of the interview is not to investigate into the cause of the incident.
- The interview aims at identifying strategies for timely tackling the problem.
- There must be a way (often more than one) to solve the problem. Encouragement would help the client to tackle the problem positively.
- We all have the ability to solve problems. Strategic communication would help the client to develop and make good use of their potentials in problem-solving.

2. "The No Blame Approach"(Maines & Robinson, 1992; Sullivan, 2000)

Basic Concepts:

- Handling bullying is a problem-solving process.
- Bullying is a shared concern of the bullies, the victims, the bystanders and those who can offer help, and so they should collaborate to tackle the problem.
- Blame and reprimand will only make the bullies more defiant and evasive, and may even reinforce their hostility and revengefulness against the victims. A no-blame approach would be more helpful in encouraging them to shoulder responsibility and find a solution together.
- Helping the bullies understand the feelings of the victims may prevent recurrence of bullying.

3. "The Pikas Method of Shared Concern" (Pikas, 1989; Pikas, 2000; Sullivan, 2000)

Basic Concepts:

- Every student involved, including the bullies, the reinforcers and the victims, is responsible for putting efforts to solve the problem of bullying.
- Taking a no-blame approach to understand the worries and difficulties of the students would encourage them to share responsibilities while avoiding hostility or hatred.
- Follow up interviews are essential to monitoring the development of the incident.
- The teacher should arrange an interview with the bullies and the victims to discuss ways of maintaining long-term peace and harmony when both parties feel acceptable.
- Pikas has recommended two intervention methods: Shared Concern Method (SCm) and Persuasive Coercion Method (PCm)
 - There are five steps in SCm:
 - To interview the bullies
 - To interview the victims
 - To prepare and train the students involved for a group interview
 - To reconcile
 - To take follow up action
 - The PCm focuses on handling the bullies and is used, for example, to stop very dangerous violent behaviour immediately. It attempts to reason with the bullies and arouse a sense of regret in them. Other external means are also used to stop further bullying.
 - Pikas considers that SCm should be more readily adopted to reduce students' anxiety and guide all those involved (including the bystanders) to reflect on themselves and share the responsibility. Moreover, Pikas also believes that SCm will result in more enduring improvement.