

# United Against Bullying School Case Study: Using the 'bullying as a group behaviour' roles to encourage children to recognise their role

## How Vale School used the roles of bullying to encourage children to recognise their role in a bullying scenario

### Context of our anti-bullying work

Before we started the programme the general approach to dealing with bullying incidents was to work with just the ringleader and the target. Following my ABA training I then understood bullying as a group behaviour and used this as pastoral lead to deal with incidents of bullying.

### What we hoped to achieve

Adapting the way we respond to bullying incidents to work with the wider group of children involved thus removing power from the ringleader and making children understand that we all have a responsibility to make sure everyone at our school feels safe and happy.

### The action we took

This is a specific example of putting this into practice.

An incident of bullying behaviour was reported to me via a note in our worry box. I initially spoke to the child who had posted the worry to find out more about the situation. The child who had posted the worry was in the peer group but not the target of the behaviour. Their worry was 'my friend is being bullied and I don't know what to do'.

I recorded what the child told me (and all subsequent actions) on our CPOMs system. I then followed our anti-bullying policy by talking to the child being targeted to find out what had been happening and work out a response. I met with the peer group, and we discussed the different roles that they might be playing in the situation. One child said "it's nothing to do with me because I didn't do anything". I unpicked this a little more with some open questions e.g. 'What did you see happening?' and the child was able to realise for themselves that they had actually played the role of an outsider and seen what was happening on many occasions but not acted and instead ignored the incidents. This was a powerful moment in the group activity as all the children then began to acknowledge their part in the situation.

I encouraged honesty in our discussion and made it clear that this was not about blaming people but instead working out a solution to help the ringleader to change their behaviour.

Another child recognised that they had been reinforcing the unkind behaviour as they said "actually I did laugh when they did that but I didn't mean to". When we unpicked that a bit more the child realised that they themselves were worried about being bullied and had therefore chosen to support the ringleader. We talked about the power that gives to the ringleader and the impact that has on the whole situation.

Once the peer group had recognised their roles in the situation, we had a second meeting with the ringleader to then work through a solution of how to change the bullying behaviour. They decided that together they would choose to be defenders and tell an adult if they saw the behaviour. The ringleader recognised and acknowledged where the conflict had started and worked through with the peer group and me how to resolve this through better communication and showing patience, empathy and kindness. The child who was targeted wanted to be part of this second meeting, so they were able to voice where things had started to go wrong for them (as the children were actually all friends and played regularly together).

### **Impact and outcomes of the work**

I was so pleased that the introduction of the worry box had provided a channel for a child to raise their concern in the first place, so this was the first positive outcome.

Secondly, All the children involved were very responsive to the approach I took and seeing them work through the resolution with me was very powerful and rewarding.

When I contacted the parent of the child being targeted, they said "XXXX was very happy because he knows he can come directly to Mrs C. He said to his mum "She listens to me and what I had to say and I can trust her".

I have added this child (and the child doing the bullying behaviour) to my check in list and I'm pleased to say that he has continued to feel happy and safe in school and there have been no further incidents of bullying behaviour from the child who was doing this.

### **What we have learned**

This approach has needed a full commitment from all the staff, and this is a challenge! Use the ABA online training and ensure all staff are consistent in their approach. I have used role play to disseminate this case study to the staff so they could see how to support the children to find a pathway out of the conflict. This was a very useful activity to conduct with staff and enabled them to see the power of children realising the roles they play in bullying incidents.