Who Are Involved in Bullying?

This chapter looks at the various groups involved in bullying and concludes that it involves more than just the bully and the victim. Through case studies, research evidence and story a diverse model of the involved emerges, with emphasis placed upon the role of bystanders as well as how schools can support parents whose children are mixed up in bullying.

A simplistic definition of a 'victim' might be one who is bullied, and a 'bully' would be the perpetrator of such acts, but if defining bullying is complex and problematic then this translates into problems in applying such labels to the involved. Acceptance of a definition based solely on notions of intent and hurt would mean that a single aggressive act could lead to deployment of such pejorative labels as 'bully'. If use of the term 'bullying' is increasing, embracing a wide variety of forms of negative action, then it follows that there will be an equally extensive use of the terms 'bully' and 'victim'. Any policy, or practices, that label pupils 'bully' and 'victim' runs the risk that these terms can have a negative impact on pupils' self-esteem and potentially on parents with whom schools may well need to work co-operatively. 'Bully' and 'victims' are the terms used in the literature, and this book is no exception, but, especially in the case of the victim, use of them is likely to compound the damage done. They are emotive terms and can 'fan the flames' of conflict rather than facilitate resolution, and they also represent a model of bullying that confines it to immediate participants, allowing others to avoid both influence and responsibility and seeing themselves as not involved. As with much of the literature on bullying many of the ways of countering bullying focus on the immediate participants – the 'bully' and their 'victim' – and, while what follows aims to develop understanding of these key players, there is also a discussion of the further group of key players, the rest of us – the wrongly named 'non-involved'.

Victims

'It is one thing to observe patterns of social behaviour. It is another to experience them'
(Cullingford and Brown, 1995).

ACTIVITY

Who are the victims?

Participants: Staff

Time: 30 minutes

Equipment: Pen and paper.

Consider the pupils (class, tutor group or group) that you are currently working with or have taught recently.

1   Who were being 'picked on' or bullied?

2   How did you know?

3   What factors do you think led them being selected for bullying?

Share your views with a colleague and write a list of the characteristics or reasons that you have identified as leading to those particular pupils being bullied.

Why do some pupils become victims? There are many answers to this question. For example, a pupil may possess an attribute that attracts the attention of bullies such as:

- problems with learning;

- no problems with learning, indeed seen as a 'swot';

- physical attributes/difficulties;

- a lack of appropriate social skills or capacity to make friends;

- behaviour problems;

- a mixture of the above.

Victims are, in one way or another, often different from the social norm and that difference is evident and known by others. The significance of a pupil being different as a determinant of being bullied has been mentioned in research into pupil perceptions of victims of bullying. Cullingford and Brown (1995) found that 36 per cent of pupils felt that pupils were victims because they were different and that difference could be something as minor as hair colour. Once singled out, victims run the risk of becoming generally unpopular, socially rejected, a 'common enemy' and bullied by more than the initiator.

Another reason why particular children are bullied is connected to theories of attachment. Developed from research with pre-school age children, Cowie, Boulton and Smith (1992) link children with 'ambivalent-avoidant' attachment relationships with their parents, i.e.

they receive inconsistent and haphazard levels of care and doubt their own ability to influence the caregiver, to an increased likelihood of being bullied. If this were the case then identifying such children as vulnerable would be difficult, although it may manifest itself in evidence of the child having a low sense of self-worth.

Low self-esteem, whether a cause or consequence of bullying, distances some pupils from their peers. Pupils with low self-esteem are more likely to be bullied than their peers with higher self-esteem, although it seems doubtful that low self-esteem, in itself, encourages other pupils to target an individual initially and it is more likely to be the way that the bullied pupil responds which leads to incidents (Sharp, 1995). Amongst the implications of this is recognition that it may well be too late to leave intervention until a bullying action has turned into a bullying relationship. The damage will already have been done and the pupil has been identified by peers as powerless, low in self-esteem and incapable of mustering an effective defence. They are then in need of support from others, be they adults or their peers. Simply urging such pupils 'to tell' implies that they possess the courage and power to do so, and to take the consequences that might result. Adults in classrooms often know who is involved or vulnerable (it was probably not difficult to identify them in the activity *Who are the victims?* – page 32) and supporting them when they come forward with information would be part of effective, but difficult, practice in countering bullying. The major dilemma faced in working with victims is whether there should be a requirement for them to change their behaviour or appearance in order that they do not draw the attention of bullies or whether they have the right to continue to look and act in any way that they wish.

ACTIVITY

Who should change their behaviour?

Participants: Staff

Time: 20–30 minutes

Equipment: Pen and paper.

In small groups, consider whether pupils who are being bullied should be required to change their behaviour or appearance or whatever is attracting the attention of the bully. Make a list of situations that might demand change and consider how best this might be achieved. Follow this with a full group discussion that considers the implications for the anti-bullying policy.

In my own research, pupils have identified reasons why children say that others in their class are being bullied. Although they were not asked to name anyone, they clearly had certain peers in mind, were knowledgeable of their experiences and even confessed to bullying their classmates. Their reasons are included in the table *Pupils' views on why some children are bullied* (page 34) and they have implications for preventative strategies and for inclusive practice, which is all too often associated with, and confined to, children with learning difficulties and is centred on disability rather than the celebration of individuality and tolerance of idiosyncrasies, difference or the unusual.

From the perspective of a preventative approach to bullying, eliciting the views of pupils is helpful and from them come implications for practice. For example:

- How will pupils develop a celebration of physical difference in a culture that appears to value limited bodily shapes and sizes?

- In an inclusive educational world how do we create a world that celebrates the many forms of intelligence that have been identified, yet few of which are formally assessed by the educational system?

- Should we teach children to be assertive, as opposed to aggressive, and how not to respond when other pupils appear to lose control?

A further complication is the cyclical nature of the problem in that once a pupil starts to bully another it can lead to retaliation, which attracts the bully further and the move to a bullying relationship begins and, before long, the role of the victim is institutionalized – everybody

Pupils' views on why some children are bullied (pupils aged between 9 and 11 years)	
Physical attribute	She is very skinny. He smells a bit and is dirty. He is fat. He comes from a different country. He's poor and he's got eczema. Their size or skin.
Learning problem	She can't read well. He is not very good at things. Some people can't do things as well as others. They are sometimes rubbish at work in class.
Emotional disposition or reaction	They get in moods easily. They are sensitive and don't stick up for themselves. They show off a lot and can get into a mood easily. He gets in big stress.
Retaliation	She is so bossy … she makes horrible remarks and is just a pain. He thinks he is better than people. They show off and lie and she 'dobs' on people. He picks on you first. She keeps on telling off people for been stupid and showing off.
Unclassified/various	Something about them that they don't like. For no reason. They don't like that person. A boy in our class gets picked on because he is new.

knows they get bullied. The answers to these problems are unlikely to come from perpetrators and those they pick on. Those who have been bullied extensively often show an unwillingness to report matters to teachers, occasionally deeming them unprepared to afford time and uninterested in their experiences (Lee, 1993). When a child has been repeatedly victimized, certain behaviours and attitudes tend to emerge which are inconsistent with their usual behaviours. Children are often too embarrassed and humiliated to report victimization, despite advice to tell, and initial support for victims may need to come from their peer group. The significance of the onlooker or bystander cannot be overstated.

Groups of pupils often adopt an informal hierarchical social structure within a class, with two or three pupils appearing to have power over a group and dominating the class, and the bullying is as much to do with membership, being 'in the gang', as with a perceived need to intimidate others. Pupils are looking to gain social power for themselves and, in doing so, exercise power over others. In a world of 'top dogs' and 'underdogs' the latter has little appeal for pupils. Therefore, maintaining the structure serves the interest of the majority, who fear becoming 'underdogs' themselves.

Within the social world of schools there are pupils who adopt a relatively pro-victim stance, especially evident amongst primary school pupils, and their sympathy is not linked with any negative experiences of their own nor any fear of bullies (Rigby and Slee, 1991). These are the pupils who find security in the knowledge that the world is a just place and they place emphasis on fairness. Such repositories of hope tend to decline, but not disappear, in older pupils where there is certainly a stronger tendency amongst pupils to locate blame with the victim rather than the bully (Hazler, Hoover and Oliver, 1992).

As indicated in the chapter on definitions, one noted subgroup is the 'provocative victim' who invites the attention of bullies and almost appears to need to be bullied. In their case, bullying may not always be something done *to* a person but that there is an interactive element, i.e. the victim contributes to the problem. They are characterized by being both anxious and aggressive, and often behave in ways that cause irritation and tension. They are occasionally hyperactive and have been noted as possessing problems with concentration. Their impact on class dynamics can be extensive as they possess an ability to provoke inappropriate behaviour amongst many children, perhaps the entire class. The consequence is that they lead to many pupils resorting to bullying behaviours when they might not normally be considered to be bullies. They are hard to like; even staff may find it hard to like them. As they have been instrumental in inviting the bullying, they also present specific challenges to the 'shared concern method' or 'no blame approach', discussed in detail later, in which attempts are made to help bullies acknowledge the hurt felt by their victims and act in alternative, more positive ways.

The Outlook for Those Who Are Picked On

Most, tragically not all, victims of school bullying do survive their experiences, but often carry their emotional scars for a lifetime. By the final year of secondary education, there is usually a decline in the number of bullying incidents, but victims know who the bullies are and seek to avoid them, tending to shun social contact, and an invisible boundary exists between what are now young adults. The bullying may well have left emotional scars, led to feelings about unhappiness at school that will stay into adulthood and may even remain for the rest of their life. It is hard not to

conclude that they are unlikely to have achieved their full potential, as living in fear and being unhappy are not precursors to effective learning, and this proved to be the case for Edward.

ACTIVITY

Edward – case study of a victim of bullying

Participants: Staff

Time: 40 minutes

Equipment: Pen and paper.

This is not a fictional case but is a real account of a pupil from a senior class in a primary school. In small groups consider:

1   whether he is contributing to the bullying;

2   whether there should be pressure placed upon Edward to change his appearance or behaviour;

3   the strategies that need to be adopted to improve the situation for Edward and pupils like him.

Follow this with a full group discussion that shares conclusions and consider implications for practice.

EDWARD CASE STUDY

Question: 'Who picks on Edward?   Answer: 'Most of them do.'

Edward: Hell of a lot bully me and I get uptight about it and I get vicious. I'm the one that gets bullied. It's probably because they don't like me. I've hardly got any friends in school.

According to his peers what had led him to endure negative attention from others within the class was varied, but their responses could be categorized into four broad areas:

1 Background
His peers exploited features of his background, such as being an only child, living with his mother, no father in residence and being from a poorer home than many of his contemporaries

Sharon: It's where he comes from, where he lives, I don't know why but people just don't like him. I think he smells and things like that. Sometimes I'm a bit horrible to him but we all are – it's just a joke.

2 Ability
He was one of the weaker pupils academically in his class and was extracted for additional support with reading.

3 Appearance
Edward was also physically distinctive. He suffered from a skin complaint which, when added to his being overweight, meant that there were sufficient physical attributes for others to focus upon. He also was unkempt, presenting the image of not being able to look after himself or caring about how he appeared. His self-esteem seemed very low indeed.

4 Reaction

He was quick to anger, responded physically and sought to gain attention either positively or negatively or he became extremely upset and the tears flowed.

> **Derek: some friends of mine go round picking on him. They call him names like cos they think it's funny … he goes off crying.**

Edward conveyed an air of resignation and he painted a picture of isolation from almost the entire school community. When his classmates gathered in a circle he sat under a table away from the others, with no one commenting and considering his behaviour strange. He revealed that even very young pupils were not kind to him and 'dinner ladies' did little about him being bullied at lunchtimes. He was not alone in being over-weight and having learning difficulties, yet no one else appeared to possess the low status, which was coupled with a desire to draw attention to himself. He fulfilled the criteria that determined who will be selected for bullying (Whitney, Nabuzoka and Smith, 1992) in that he:

(a) possessed characteristics that distinguished him, physically and attitudinally, from others;
(b) was less socially integrated and therefore did not benefit from the protection a group can provide;
(c) responded aggressively and, therefore, may have provoked others to bully him.

Talking with his peers revealed little indignity or outrage about the victimization that he endured. In the opinion of some, Edward's demeanour meant that he almost invited negative attention and it was understandable that he was selected. Edward's characteristics were offered as justification for his selection.

Edward's story illustrates that particular pupils experience so much bullying that it becomes accepted, institutionalized even, at times, condoned by the social network of the class and, in this case, re-enforced by the attitude of the teacher. Children spoke of Edward with few endearing tones and he aroused little in the way of support or affection. Terms such as 'kid' and 'joke' were used as justification for actions against him, with an implied humour and lightness that Edward himself did not perceive nor share. There appeared to be a cyclical element in that he was selected for bullying because of physical or emotional attributes and, consequently, had developed such reactions as telling the teacher which, in turn, attracted more negative attention.

The case of Edward challenges two common features associated with bullying. First, that it is a playground phenomenon. Many of the bullying experiences of Edward happened in places other than the playground and at times other than recreation times. They stemmed from relationships that were part of everyday experience in and out of the classroom. The second feature, the assumed covert nature of bullying, is also worthy of question. The bullying of Edward was manifest and the willingness of many pupils to talk about it affirmed that bullying was blatant, visible and, in his case, almost tangible. Being 'picked on' was such a dominant feature of Edward's classroom and school life that when asked to nominate children who get bullied he was the anticipated immediate first choice of his teacher. However, Mr Y made no mention of him and selected others that might fit the label before eventually citing him.

> **Mr Y: Now Edward is definitely a victim. He could wear a placard with that on and it wouldn't tell the children anything that they didn't know.**

He described how even a new pupil to the school had selected Edward 'as someone he could victimize', implying he possessed transparent vulnerability. He elaborated by suggesting that Edward was a contributor to his situation and that his manipulative behaviour might be considered a form of bullying. His statement that some of his 'behaviours could be interpreted as bullying towards the other children' was based on the

way that Edward demanded to be treated as a special case and that, to this end, he could be manipulative, even ensuring that 'teachers run around in circles to accommodate him'.

Edward's ragged appearance, poor co-ordination and reactive nature were factors that may have influenced him being bullied, but, because they generated little outrage, they were more difficult than factors such as race to address openly. His experiences of bullying were institutionalized within the classroom and play-ground relationships, and were taken for granted by the teacher, who exhibited an understanding as to why others might select him. Edward encountered few positive social experiences and little friendship, which meant that he was either tolerated at a distance or bullied.

Bullies

Before considering typologies of bullies it is important to reflect on the difference between an *aggressive bully* and an *aggressive child* since it is becoming more commonplace, especially in the media, to describe many forms of aggression as bullying. The major distinction centres on the fact that victims form a part of the process for the bullies, indeed there is almost a need to create a victim. Aggressive children are more random and not necessarily directing their aggression at specific individuals. Bullies possess power over specific victims or exploit a characteristic that is provocative. This distinction has implications for practice and policy in that approaches to dealing with bullying need to acknowledge that what has taken place was deliberate and controlled, whereas the aggressive child often has lost self-control.

Olweus (1999) suggests that we should view bullying as a subcategory of the broader aggressive behaviour and that violence forms another subcategory but both violence and bullying do not exist totally separately. Certain forms of bullying are violent and vice versa. However, *much that bullies do is not violent*, yet causes emotional hurt and much upset, for example, the occasional brawl in the playground would not qualify as bullying. Again there are implications for practice as there is a growing tendency to label all violence as 'bullying' which is a failure to acknowledge that bullying is more about establishing power over another person through hurtful, but not necessarily violent, means.

Bullies (Sometimes Called Aggressive Bullies)

The motivation to bully often puzzles the caring professions, and the behaviour of bullies can also arouse many emotions including feelings of hostility. It is important to understand why children are driven to bully others. Included in these are:

1 a desire for power, dominance over others and control;

2 a desire for social prestige that results from bullying, including seeking compensation for their own inadequacies as they crave social influence (Hazler, Hoover and Oliver, 1992). Bullies are often popular, especially in primary and the early years of secondary schooling. Even though their popularity can wane in the later secondary years, it does not sink to the low levels experienced by victims of bullying;

3 their home environment and upbringing which may include parent(s) permitting aggressive behaviour of the child towards peers and siblings, a lack of warmth and emotional attachment to parents (especially mother), unclear boundaries about behaviour or the use of aggressive behaviours by the parents;

4 a mixture of the above.

ACTIVITY

Working with parents

Participants: Staff

Time: 20–30 minutes

Equipment: Pen and paper.

Schools cannot change the backgrounds or upbringing of their pupils who bully, but they can influence and provide support for parents whose children may be bullying.

1 In small groups consider how awareness of factors such as:

(a) desire for power;

(b) desire for social prestige and status;

(c) lack of warmth from, or licensed aggression by parents:

can influence practice and the way that the school works with bullies and their parents;

2 Create a form of words that might be written into your anti-bullying policy.

3 Similarly, construct a similar statement for parents of the victims of bullying.

Meet again in the larger group and reflect on each statement and seek to construct a final form – it may have to be a compromise!

Amongst the challenges presented by the factors mentioned above are, in terms of control, power and prestige, how many opportunities do pupils have to be genuinely involved in decision-making and democratic processes and to exercise a degree of control in their life at school? Teachers relate to me that the whole culture of contemporary education sometimes appears to be predicated on a received curriculum and dictated from the powerful political centre. If that is the case, it is hardly surprising that anti-bullying initiatives have not always been greeted with enthusiasm and commitment in all schools. It is also understandable that where schools have set up pupils' councils and other forms of pupil involvement, including some with an anti-bullying focus, pupils who have bullied others are excluded. However, this represents one of the few opportunities for such pupils to observe or be part of decisions being made and acted upon in a non-aggressive manner.

Regarding the home environment and the lack of clarity and consistency in terms of parenting, it is clear that school can provide a compensatory environment. In order to do so the

school needs to be clear and consistent in its application of anti-bullying strategies and the development of positive peer relationships. Unfortunately, as shown in the previous chapter, even at the level of terminology, the subject of bullying has not always been dealt with consistently in schools. At its most basic level, although staff may have differing views on what constitutes bullying, in theory, in practice pupils should not experience behaviour considered to be bullying in one classroom or year group and not in the next.

In contrast with the images of bullying as a bleak, out-of-sight, clandestine activity, children are often honest about their involvement in bullying and are prepared to talk about it. Given a context in which they are not being judged or punished they are able to talk with honesty and even tones of regret. There are those who simply confess and are even able to talk about their motives for doing so.

> Well if I'm honest yeah sometimes.

> When you start teasing him and everything he goes off in a huff. It is really funny.

Pupils who admit to bullying often give reasons for their actions and justify what has taken place, sometimes locating the fault with the victim or stating that the action was not deliberate and the hurt was unintentional.

> Kevin might cos he likes to think that we bully him, like when we get him.

> Adele, I used to always pick on her because Georgia kept really coming to me crying

> I don't mean to upset them, it's just that sometimes they get on my nerves.

Passive Bullies

'Passive' bullies (Besag, 1989) seek power for themselves but tend to adopt their role following initial action by aggressive bullies. They have been described as 'sad', having few endearing qualities, problems at home and a preparedness to accept blame without implicating the aggressive bully. They are likely to be less popular with peers than aggressive bullies but those closest to the bully might form cliques that insulate the group against unpopularity. They may not bully directly, but they preserve the informal social structure of the class.

Bully/Victims

One of the many faults with a simple bully and victim model is that it sometimes assumes that children are either victims, bullies or not involved, but research (Stephenson and Smith, 1987) has revealed that a number of children are both bullies and victims. It is tempting to speculate that the hostility directed by these children towards their victim is fuelled by their own experience of being victimized. Such a group, if it is a discrete group and not a manifestation of the idea that the more children become victims the more they are likely to bully, brings into question labels such as bully, victim and, even, bystander. It is essential not to lose sight of the concept that bullying is a behaviour that many pupils participate in to some extent and the use of labels such 'bully' and 'victim' can arouse many negative emotions. The idea of bully/victims

draws into question that groups and subgroups are permanent and mutually exclusive (Lee, 1993). The triadic notion of bully, victim and non-involved could be a simplification and such descriptors may inhibit advancement in our understanding of bullying. Some children bully or are victimized in particular contexts, social groups or classes. An analysis of confidential telephone calls (La Fontaine, 1991) led to an observation that two-thirds of victims reported being bullied by more than one person and suggests that the children who carried out these acts were not all 'bullies' and that it did not reflect a permanent feature of their behaviour or character.

Bystanders

Bullies are often unwilling and victims unable to change, and therefore, amongst other factors, the significance of the bystander is in their potential to influence or bring the required change. A definition of the 'bystander' might be all those who are not bullies and victims of bullying but know that bullying is occurring, but the term is often associated with those who witness bullying yet appear to sanction it by their inertia in countering it. Those not directly involved often know what is happening and who is involved, and their indirect involvement has a capacity to impact upon their own lives and they may be said to be 'emotionally involved'. The bystander notion could also apply to staff who see bullying as inevitable, as in the case of Mr Y in the story of Edward, or parents who know that their children are involved as bullies, yet take no action or even condone it.

Bystanders have a critical role to play in the informal culture of schools and their views and insights would seem significant, especially if they are to be central to any intervention programme. Therefore, I have taken a broad definition of the term and, given that one of the principles of prevention is a belief in collaboration between all parties rather than the assumption that it is one person's responsibility to ensure an end to the bullying, the following section is subdivided into:

■ Pupils;

■ Staff;

■ Parents.

Pupils

If involvement applies to witnessing events, then large numbers of pupils are implicated. Cullingford and Brown (1995) found that 50 per cent of pupils admitted to having seen bullying. Therefore, the distinctive feature that often leads to pupils being selected for picking on steps beyond the awareness of bullies alone and gives a message that many pupils know of the feature and it may become institutionalized. There develops a collective awareness about why the pupil has been selected and bystanders now become highly significant in the bullying relationship. Once that distinctive feature is institutionalized, the awareness of the social group may also have an impact on the behaviour of the victim, reinforcing the likelihood of further bullying. A once speculative act of bullying now becomes a major part the pupil's life in school and, perhaps, outside it. The status of 'victim' becomes established, as does increased feelings of

lower social and academic self-worth amongst victims. A bystander is considered to be a person who does not become actively involved in a situation where someone else requires help (Clarkson, 1987). Someone requiring help implies knowledge of the need for help and there are those who:

1 know what is going on and who are involved but do nothing;

2 seek to exercise their power in the punishment of bullies and in doing so adopt methods that confirm that aggression and the abuse of power is a potent weapon;

3 disempower victims of bullying by over-protection – the 'rescuers';

4 despite knowledge of the potential impact of bullying on learning, the feelings of others and the school ethos, remain inert.

The notion of a bystander may be addressed in a number of ways. In working with pupils in schools, I have found the following story opens up the idea and develops the theme of involvement and the value that it may have for all parties. It is an adaptation of a tale sent to me by a friend from the USA who used it as part of a 'friendship week' which, in itself, is an idea that has merits as part of a policy promoting positive behaviour.

A STORY OF FRIENDSHIP

One day, when I was in secondary school, I saw a thin, smallish kid walking home from school, not my school but another school whose uniform I did not recognise. His name was Karl. It looked like he was carrying all of his school books. I thought to myself, 'Why would anyone bring home all their books on a Friday? He must be a real swot.'

I had quite a weekend planned with a party and a football game with my mates tomorrow afternoon, so I shrugged my shoulders and went on. As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running towards this kid, Karl. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about 10 feet from him. He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. So, I ran over to him as he crawled around looking for his glasses and I saw that he was crying. As I handed him his glasses, I found myself saying, 'Those kids are real prats. They really should get lives.'

He looked up at me and simply said, 'Thanks!' A big smile came to his face. It was one of those smiles that showed genuine gratitude. I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out, he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school before now. I have never talked to or really got to know a kid from a private school before. We talked all the way home and I carried some of his books.

He turned out to be okay, pretty cool in fact. I asked him if he wanted to play football on Saturday with my mates and myself. He said he would. We were around each other for most of the weekend and the more I got to know Karl, the more I liked him, and my friends all seemed to think the same of him.

Monday morning came and there was Karl with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, 'You are really building some massive muscles with this pile of books every day!' He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years, Karl and I became best friends, despite going to different schools. We began to think about university. Karl decided on Plymouth and I was going to Cardiff. I knew that we would always be friends, that the distance would never be a problem. he was going to be a doctor, and I was aiming to be a marine biologist.

Karl qualified highest in the whole of his year group at university which allowed me to carry on teasing him all the time about always being a swot and always carrying books. Because of his success he had to prepare a speech for the graduation and he invited me. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak.

In his Graduation Day, I saw Karl. He looked great. He was one of those blokes that really changed and became the real Karl during his time at university. He had filled out and was much bigger now and actually looked good in glasses. He had more girlfriends than I had and all the girls seemed to love him. Frankly, sometimes I was jealous and today was one of those days. I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, 'Hey, big fella, you'll be great!' He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. 'Thanks,' he said.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. 'Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years – your parents, your teachers, your siblings, but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story'.

I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mum wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. 'Thankfully, I was saved. A friend saved me from doing the unspeakable.' I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular young man told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his parents looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Not until that moment did I realize its depth. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life – for better or for worse. You have that choice and that power.

Another way to work with bystanders is to consider the reasons or excuses that we are all capable of offering for why it is easier not to get involved in what is happening and remain a bystander. An aggressive exploratory act from a bully aims at establishing an imbalance of power, from which a victim is created and the role is sustained as much by the reactions of others as further attention from the bully. Not all onlookers are motivated in the same way. While there are those who watch and take no action, despite being upset, there are also those who appear indifferent, removed from the emotion. The role of bystanders in reinforcing any change of power or status is significant as they form key components of 'the audience'. Clarkson (1996) has developed a variety of categories of bystander that step beyond bullying and into all aspects of human relationships. They provide a framework which can be applied to the bullying phenomenon and which highlights that this third party, whether witnessing, colluding with or running away from bullying, has motive and reason behind his or her action. Before considering the framework it is important to emphasize how hard it is to be anything other than a bystander is and that the risks of intervention include loss of status, friendship and power, and

also carries the risk of being bullied, but the alternative is licensing bullying and, eventually, the problem will return, often very personally. Clarkson's description of the various categories are in italics.

ACTIVITY

Bystanders – the keys to the solution?

Participants: Staff

Time: 50 minutes

Equipment: Pen and paper and distribute photocopies of **The various forms of bystander** (pages 44–5).

In smaller groups discuss:

1   Whether they are categories they recognize in the responses of their pupils?

2   Whether they are categories that they recognize in themselves?

3   How best to introduce these as discussion points with the class/school?

4   The implication for policy statements of a 'no such thing as a bystander' approach.

In a larger group, share innovative, plausible ways forward. The key objective will be how to generate a culture in which every pupil has the right to be safe in school and the responsibility to ensure the safety of others.

The various forms of bystander	
Wash hands **'It's none of my business'**	Victims request help but meet with a refusal to intervene. Responsibility is denied, mediation refused and victims may even be blamed.
Neutral **'I don't want to take sides'**	There is an appearance of fairness and being non-judgemental, although it is clear that there is a powerful party and a powerless one. Victims are left with a negative view of neutrality.
On the fence **'The truth lies somewhere in the middle'**	This bystander avoids making a judgement on the basis it is all a matter of perception – 'the fallacy of the mean'. It may be hard exactly to define bullying, but it is not as difficult to discern hurt and disempowerment.
Equilibrium **'I don't want to rock the boat'**	This is a fear of confronting the bullying. A superficial peace is maintained and emotions, especially those of the victim, are kept under the surface. Staff who have a good relationship with a pupil who bullies may be concerned that tackling the bullying will have a negative impact on their relationship.