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Chapter 6
School-Family-Community Partnerships

Evidence for strengthening school-family-community partnerships .................. 184
Actions for strengthening school-family-community partnerships .................. 187
  • Strengthening family links ........................................................................ 187
  • Working collaboratively with health, education and community service providers ...... 192
School stories ................................................................................................ 197
Toolkits for action ......................................................................................... 200
  • Toolkit 6.1 How welcome do families feel in our school? ......................... 200
  • Toolkit 6.2 Family Communication Sheet 1: Communicating with your children ...... 201
  • Toolkit 6.3 Family Communication Sheet 2: Discussing bullying .................. 202
  • Toolkit 6.4 The Method of Shared Concern ................................................. 205
  • Toolkit 6.5 The Family Friendship Carnival .............................................. 207
Evidence for strengthening school-family-community partnerships

School-family-community partnerships

Schools that encourage active participation of students' families and local and regional service providers, recognise that addressing bullying is the responsibility of the whole-school community. Creating link with relevant health, educational and community agencies that provide services to students and their families will foster vital support for school action to reduce bullying.

I'll give you $9000 to send your child to another school

In a desperate attempt to tackle bullying, the principal reached out to the parents
The key link between actions and messages implemented in the school setting and those applied in family and community environments is recognised in the Health Promoting Schools model as a way to reinforce learning and behaviours. In addition, the Social Ecological model described by Bronfenbrenner (1977) acknowledges the key role of both the school, and families and communities in influencing child and adolescent development. In both models, children and adolescents are exposed to adult role models who can help shape their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. It is important to present consistent messages to children and adolescents to encourage uptake of positive and prosocial behaviours and attitudes, which they implement in all settings.

Research shows collaborative partnerships are beneficial in fostering school action to reduce bullying. These key partnerships can be between:

- the school and students’ parents/caregivers and families
- the school and relevant service providers in the community.

In this chapter, the importance of school links with family and with community organisations are discussed as ways to promote this consistent approach, as well as an opportunity to work within resource limitations and expertise.

**Strengthening family links**

Bullying is not just a school issue. According to a socio-ecological perspective, the occurrence of bullying can be enabled and maintained over time by complex interactions between factors, both within and outside the individual. Individual characteristics (such as self-esteem and empathy) influence, and are influenced by, factors in the wider context in which the individual is embedded, including the influence of peers, teachers, schools, families and communities. The links between the major settings in which a student participates is also important, as is the congruency between these environments regarding bullying prevention strategies.

It is vital for schools to work with families to foster strong links that will facilitate a coordinated response to reducing bullying, and the promotion of consistent messages about bullying. Positive teacher communication with parents has a beneficial influence on the development of a positive school climate. Similarly, parental involvement, including taking an interest in their child’s school work, is associated with less bullying behaviour among adolescents.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Key Understandings and Competencies, information provision and skill development for parents is necessary to reduce bullying behaviour. It is likely the beneficial effect of such information and training lies not only in the actual content, but also the communicative mechanisms through which they are delivered to parents. This strengthens links between students’ school and home, and demonstrates a collaborative effort by schools and families to reduce bullying.

In Farrington and Ttofi’s meta-analysis, information for parents (for example, information about the bullying prevention initiatives at their school or general tips about bullying) was identified as an important program element related to a decrease in students’ bullying others. Parent training (information nights, teacher-parent meetings) was significantly associated with both a decrease in bullying and being bullied. Given that cyberbullying has generally been found to occur more outside of school hours, rather than during school, developing parent awareness about cyberbullying is crucial and can assist in preventing and responding to cyberbullying.
Many students who are frequently bullied do not report the bullying[66, 184, 260, 261] and report they would receive greater support from talking to a peer about bullying, compared to speaking with an adult.[184, 186] Parents may be unaware of their child’s experiences of bullying,[262] and similarly teachers have been found to underestimate the prevalence of bullying reported by students within their school.[260] Adequate recognition of the signs and symptoms of bullying, through regular communication between students’ families and the school, will facilitate timely resolution of bullying incidents and provide support for students involved in bullying situations.

Students who perpetrate potentially offensive Internet and mobile phone practices have parents who are less involved with their computer and Internet use.[203] Perpetrators of Internet harassment are also more likely to report a poor emotional bond with their caregiver, as well as more frequent discipline and more infrequent monitoring on the part of their caregiver.[77] These findings suggest there is a need to communicate with parents to encourage them to employ strategies to effectively monitor and communicate with their child about cyberbullying.

Being cyberbullied is also associated with a family composition other than living with two biological parents (for example, single, remarried, adoptive parents, grandparents, foster care).[178] Schools can help reduce the likelihood of students being cyberbullied or help them to respond to cyberbullying more effectively, by providing targeted information to all caregivers at times and in locations which maximise attendance and understanding.

**Working collaboratively with health, education and community service providers**

Working to create and strengthen links with relevant health, education and community agencies will help to support the schools’ action to reduce bullying. In Farrington and Ttofi’s meta-analysis,[4] one of the program components associated with a decrease in being bullied was cooperative group work among different professionals (such as teachers and other professionals) in working with students involved in bullying. Involvement in bullying has been associated with anxiety,[82] depression,[82] low self-esteem,[84, 264] suicidality,[260] poor academic achievement,[65] poorer relationships with peers and increased loneliness,[65] as well as poorer physical health.[93] Given this range of factors linked to bullying, it is crucial to form partnerships with professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, general practitioners, social workers, youth workers and education support services, to provide additional assistance to students who are involved in bullying, and also to identify those students who may be at increased risk of involvement in bullying situations.
**Actions for strengthening school-family-community partnerships**

**Strengthening family links**

Involving students' and families in the school's strategies to address bullying will increase the chance of achieving lasting behaviour change in students. Some ways to achieve this include:

- involving students' families in the schools' operations where practical and appropriate
- creating opportunities for input into school planning and policy
- planning activities to ensure regular positive communication
- using numerous channels of communication to reach all families
- cooperating closely with families to ensure early recognition of the signs and symptoms of bullying, and determining those students who may be at increased risk of involvement in bullying
- collaborating with families to resolve specific instances of bullying and provide targeted support to the student involved in bullying and their family
- acknowledging differences in family, parent and community priorities.
Strategies for good practice: Strengthening family links

1. Schools provide regular, positive communication to engage families and encourage their involvement.
2. Students invite families to school events and activities.
3. The school’s response to reducing bullying is developed in collaboration with families.
4. There is close cooperation between staff and families in responding to specific bullying situations that arise.
5. Families and the community are encouraged to consistently demonstrate an intolerance of bullying behaviour.

Schools provide regular, positive communication to engage families and encourage their involvement

Establishing and maintaining open channels of regular, positive communication with families leads to the development of a school culture that values their important contribution. Leaders that recognise diverse cultures in their school community will make use of multiple communication channels, including the translation of written materials to reach the whole-school community. This is particularly important prior to and following student transition from primary to secondary school. Families are also becoming more open to using electronic communication via email or school portals where regular information and active links to resources can be provided to families.

Regular communication with families:
- ensures they are continually updated with current information on policy development and organisation
- encourages conversations across school and home
- fosters curiosity for schools and families to learn about each other
- helps them feel valued and respected as real partners who can help solve problems
- increases their willingness to become involved on a number of levels, bringing their many and varied skills into the school
- builds positive relationships
- makes parents feel welcome at school
- cements common understandings related to school, family and community priorities and actions to reduce bullying.

Use School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.1 to survey families (electronically or in hard copy) to determine how welcome they feel at the school. Try to accommodate, where possible, families who do not speak English as a first language. Collate the results and appoint a committee comprised of parent, principal and teacher representatives to decide how best to use the information. Formulate and implement recommendations to help parents feel more welcome in the school. This set of questions could be used in conjunction with whole-school assessment strategies described in Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.2.

Family communication sheets can provide the impetus for family discussion about school matters, including increased communication and reducing bullying. School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkits 6.2 and 6.3 include two family communication sheets that can be included in the school’s newsletter,
which can be enlarged to create posters displayed in areas of the school used by families, or distributed to families in need of support with communication strategies and bullying behaviour. In addition, Supportive School Culture Toolkits 2.1 and 2.2 provide further examples of ways to communicate with parents through newsletter and assembly items.

Students invite families to school events and activities

Many parents comment that the only time they are invited to the school, especially in secondary schools, is when their child is behaving inappropriately or there is some other problem. It can be valuable to ask families how they want to be involved with the school, find out which days/times suit them better and ask how they would like to receive communications.

Inviting families to special activities which provide positive experiences, in addition to assemblies, will help them feel more comfortable and welcome in the school and more inclined to make return visits. This is particularly beneficial following transition to secondary school when students may feel disconnected to their new school. Invite families to events using the natural groupings which occur within the school, for example, send invitations to a meet and greet through student pastoral care/tutor groups, so families feel they have a group to which they can belong, especially if the tutor group remains together for a number of years. Attendance by parents is always better when their children are performing, when children personally invite their parents via a letter or similar, and when child care is provided.

The Solid Kids, Solid Schools Aboriginal bullying prevention project found that Aboriginal family members who were part of this study reported feeling more willing and comfortable visiting schools, in addition to the recommendations already mentioned, when they could see evidence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture within the school through staffing, language and other related content within the formal curriculum and via art and music. It was important for Aboriginal families to have other Aboriginal people within the school to act as a liaison between the school and the children’s home.

Some activities used effectively by schools include:

- family sports days
- special assemblies (for example, NAIDOC Week or Sorry Day, grandparents’ day or male carers/father’s day to encourage male carers to attend)
- ICT information/social media workshops with students and families. (These work well when students are involved in or lead the presentations.)
- expert guest speaker presentations discussing topics with families such as cyberbullying and cyber safety.

When families feel strong connections to schools, they are more confident and willing to work in partnership with schools to support their children’s learning. In addition to traditional school-home communication opportunities, the Friendly Schools and Families project distributed family communication and activity sheets which focused on family and school connectedness, parent-child engagement and communication pointers. The aim of these sheets was to increase the level and quality of communication between parents and their children, such that parents were more receptive to school communication and thus were more informed of, and attended more school events.

One way to engage families in the development of a supportive school culture is to host a Family Friendship Carnival, as described in School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.4. The aim of the carnival is to involve staff, students and parents in activities designed to encourage all school community members to practise and enhance social skills in a fun and non-threatening environment.
The school's response to reducing bullying is developed in collaboration with families

Many parents are concerned about the effects of bullying on their children; however, they are often unsure how to help their children prevent bullying and respond effectively, especially when the bullying is perpetrated via technology as for cyberbullying. By involving parents in the development of behaviour policies (see Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.5) that relate to bullying (and other issues) schools can strengthen the likely impact of these policies on student behaviour. By working together, the whole-school community can:

• foster positive attitudes and friendlier schools
• develop a safe and happy environment for children
• encourage children and adults to talk about bullying
• let children know that bullying is unacceptable behaviour anywhere in the community.

Schools can create links with families and communities by providing targeted information sessions which educate families about how to:

• work in collaboration with schools to develop students' social skills
• help their children initiate and maintain positive friendships, both online and offline
• respond effectively if their child is being bullied either online or offline
• respond effectively if their child is bullying others (including siblings)
• use social media in positive ways.

These strategies demonstrate to parents the strong commitment of school leaders to establishing a positive school culture where all members feel safe, valued and supported. It is important for students to see their parents and the school working together with a common desire to help them feel safer, happier and supported at school. This partnership will be most effective when parents:

• encourage children to talk about online and offline bullying, both at school and at home
• cooperate with class teachers to share valuable information about how their children are feeling
• talk and work with their children's school to help achieve the most positive outcome for their children
• become familiar with their school's bullying/cyberbullying policy which should outline how the school plans to respond to these behaviours.

In Supportive School Culture Toolkit 2.4, the role of bystanders is discussed and could be shared with parents to assist them to understand how their children can help to reduce bullying behaviour. In addition, Supportive School Culture Toolkit 2.5 provides information about the development of assertiveness skills in students to increase self-esteem and confidence.

There is close cooperation between the school and families in responding to specific bullying situations that arise

When schools and families cooperate in responding to specific bullying incidents a positive outcome is more likely. This demonstrates the school’s commitment to resolving the problem collaboratively, in a transparent and consistent manner. Chapter 3 (which includes Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.5) and Chapter 6 describe ways that parents/caregivers of the target/s, the perpetrator/s and the bystanders can be effectively involved in the school’s response to a bullying incident, especially if the incident is severe.
Parents can:

• discuss with their children positive ways to develop and maintain friendships
• encourage children to think about how bullying behaviour makes others feel
• explain the concepts of respect, cooperation and negotiation.

Parents can be supported to use the following questions when specific bullying situations arise:

1. If you saw your friend being teased how would you feel?
2. What could you do?
3. If your friend asked you to help bully another child, how would this make you feel?
4. What could you do?
5. Who would you talk to if you were bullied?
6. What would you do if you were bullied?

When a bullying situation arises it is important to separate the child and the behaviour and that students are not labelled as ‘bullies’. By doing so, the message students receive is that bullying is a bad behaviour, not that a student who bullies is a bad person. It is easy to focus on ‘busting’ the bullies, however, a strategy like the Method of Shared Concern that promotes and demonstrates how to solve problems and find positive solutions, is usually more effective and likely to lead to longer-term positive behaviour change.

Restorative techniques such as the Support Group Method and Method of Shared Concern benefit if parents understand their purpose and expected outcomes. School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.4 describes the Method of Shared Concern in a format suitable for families and school staff and contains an additional family activity that may assist in reinforcing the process followed in this technique to resolve relationship conflicts. Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkits 3.1 and 3.2 provide information about these techniques in more detail for school staff.

When children are bullied, parents can assist their children and the school by supporting the identification of a group of people (support group) their child feels comfortable talking with and turning to for help. Role-playing what they would say if they approached these people about a bullying situation will assist students to feel more comfortable seeking support, and reassure parents their children have the skills to ask for help if they need it. This group generally includes:

• parents
• classroom teacher
• teachers on duty at recess or lunchtime
• other school staff members
• school friends
• family friends.

CHPRC research found that it was valuable for the school to always advise parents if a bullying incident occurred that involved their children, similar to the process a school would use if a student was to visit the school health centre for an illness or injury during the day. Depending on the severity of the incident it may not be necessary for the parents to visit the school, but at least be apprised of the school’s action in response to the incident. This communication allows parents to be well aware of incidents and the actions by the school, and also helps parents to talk with their children following these incidents.
Families and the community are encouraged to consistently demonstrate an intolerance of bullying behaviour

To change behaviour, bullying reduction strategies need to focus not only on the school environment, but also include the home and community. Parents can:

- encourage children to talk about bullying both at school and at home
- cooperate with class teachers to share valuable information about how their children are feeling
- talk and work with the school to help achieve the most positive outcome for their child
- become familiar with the school’s bullying policy.

To build a consistent, positive community response that actively discourages bullying behaviour may require a shift in attitudes and knowledge about the harms associated with this behaviour for both the target and the perpetrator. To achieve this normative change, teachers, families and the wider community need to be aware of what behaviours constitute bullying, especially covert bullying such as social exclusion, rumour spreading and cyberbullying. They also need to know what action to take if they see a bullying incident and to be aware of what young people perceive if adults take no action when they bullying occurring. If an adult observes bullying behaviour or other forms of aggression and takes no action, there is a likelihood this behaviour will continue and may intensify compared to a situation where there is no adult present. This has important implications for the whole-school community which may be seen by students to be condoning bullying through their inaction when the behaviour occurs in their presence.

The whole-school community can send a strong, consistent message about bullying, when they are provided with:

- current evidence-based information about bullying behaviour
- open and encouraging invitations to attend meetings to discuss bullying behaviour and engage in decision-making regarding possible school actions
- ongoing information about school action, progress and policy.

Working collaboratively with health, education and community service providers

Due to the social, psychological, emotional, physical and academic harms linked with bullying, it is imperative to build and maintain strong partnerships with relevant professionals both within the school (such as student services teams) and external to the school (for example, social workers, youth workers, clinical psychologists, mental health agencies). This ensures students experiencing difficulties related to bullying (and other issues), who are not able to be supported by trained school staff, can be efficiently referred to these services to receive appropriate support. Engaging the expertise of these professionals in the development of school planning and policy to reduce bullying, allows this behaviour to be considered within a broader health and education context. This has particular relevance in relation to use of technology on and off school grounds, and the impact of cyberbullying and other types of social media behaviours.

External service providers for school activities such as extra-curricular activities, for example, also need to be aware of school policies related to bullying and other student duty of care issues and need to be well briefed on actions they are required to take, based on the school policy when teaching students from the school. Local community groups can also be engaged to assist in providing resources to support school action to reduce bullying, such as libraries, clubs and other recreation venues for extra-curricular activities.
Forming partnerships with IT professionals is also useful to help inform school action to address cyberbullying and other inappropriate online behaviours. This can help schools, students and families keep apprised of technological development and the implications of this for online behaviour. Partnerships can also be formed with police, to investigate the legal issues around bullying, and particularly around cyberbullying due to its potential to escalate within a short period of time.

**Strategies for good practice: Working collaboratively with health, education and community service providers**

1. School action to reduce bullying involves the support of the student services teams.
2. The school invites, encourages and values the participation of the community to reduce bullying behaviour.
3. Partnerships are established with organisations engaged with the school to provide resources and expertise to support specific efforts to reduce bullying behaviour.
4. The school consults and works with community, health and education support services to respond to specific instances of bullying where appropriate.
5. The school identifies opportunities for students and families to link with other professionals when further support is required.

**School action to reduce bullying involves the support of the student services teams**

Student services teams typically refer to school staff associated with the pastoral care of students, including the school psychologist, social worker, school nurse, chaplain and school-based police officer. School leaders who actively engage student service teams in seeking their input and advice on school policy and practice as part of the whole-school effort to reducing bullying behaviour, develop and sustain a positive school culture which supports all students. Student services teams can provide families with:

- support around student issues
- support services
- links to, and assistance in, accessing support services beyond the school for students experiencing difficulties
- information about new approaches to discipline, communication and positive interactions with their children.

Some families may feel more comfortable speaking with staff from support services than other staff, and may also be more open to discussing the issues they are facing and the help they need with these trained professionals. School staff who are not trained psychologists may occasionally be put in situations where they are being asked to provide support to students that is beyond their training and expertise. It is important to provide a structure for staff to recognise their limitations and know who to refer students to, in order to ensure their duty of care. However, all staff can be trained to provide initial support to students such as was identified in the KIT+ research conducted by the CHPRC. In this study it was found that the Co-LATE Model (see Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.7) was an effective discussion framework for staff to demonstrate to students that staff are supportive and want to help where they can.
The school invites, encourages and values the participation of the community to reduce bullying behaviour

When schools ensure that professional assistance from the community is available and accessible, they are more likely to experience greater support from families as they are seen to have a strong commitment to reducing bullying behaviour. Engaging the community strongly communicates that the school is not prepared to ignore bullying behaviour and will seek support from external organisations to assist with their approach to this issue. Many outside agencies, such as community policing, welcome invitations from schools to meet with leaders, staff and parents to discuss and plan how all sectors can effectively help each other to ensure that consistent messages are communicated about bullying behaviour.

Partnerships are established with local community organisations engaged with the school to provide resources and expertise to support specific efforts to reduce bullying behaviour

A key part of developing a positive school culture is to encourage student commitment to community projects and clubs. Many students, particularly secondary school students, spend time engaged in the local community. While some students have families who support and encourage this engagement, others need to rely on school leaders and staff to raise awareness and assist them to take advantage of what the community has to offer. Community organisations also want to reduce bullying and are likely to be receptive to partnership opportunities with interested schools. When community organisations and schools work together for a common goal, opportunities and capacity to build a wider culture of disapproval of bullying is increased.

The school consults and works with community, health and education support services to respond to specific instances of bullying where appropriate

Designing a plan that provides a step-by-step approach to preventing and effectively responding to bullying behaviour and is clearly understood by all members of the whole-school community provides a consistent response. This plan allows for responses to incidences of varying severity and enables individuals to understand their role in implementing the plan.

Consulting community, health and education support services about the schools’ response plan increases awareness of the school’s efforts to reduce bullying behaviour and opens communication channels between schools and external support agencies. Community, health and education support services could assist school staff to:

- increase their capacity and confidence to identify bullying behaviours and symptoms of bullying
- increase their capacity and confidence to respond to different levels of severity and types of bullying situations
- identify the nature and severity of bullying situations and make decisions about appropriate and protective responses
- increase their knowledge of how to effectively refer students when they need additional support services.
The school identifies opportunities for students and families to link with other professionals when further support is required

Schools can increase their capacity to support students and families by providing current information about external student support agencies that can assist students with needs beyond the capacity of schools. While many parents will be receptive to working with the school to reduce bullying behaviour, they may not know where to go to for help and support if the involvement of external professionals is recommended. The student support team can compile and disseminate information about external professionals/agencies and ensure effective and sensitive referral of students and families.

School staff knowing and using the appropriate protocol and procedures for referring students and their families to other professionals, makes it more likely that appropriate services will be obtained. More than just knowing the protocol for referral, it is often helpful if school staff have some awareness of the services to which they refer students. Questions for consideration:

- Is the service located close to students’ home or accessible by transport services?
- Is there a cost for attending?
- Does the service cater for, and are the staff trained to effectively deal with, school-age children?
- Is the service located somewhere accessible to students?
- Does the service provide opening hours which are accessible to school students?
Summary

As demonstrated in theoretical models such as the Health Promoting Schools model\[243\] and the Social Ecological model,\[257\] students' families and communities influence and have a role to play in their development of positive, prosocial behaviours. Moreover, bullying is not just an issue for schools to respond to, especially with the opportunities for bullying via technology (cyberbullying) which often occurs outside of school grounds and hours. Hence, schools which encourage active participation of students' families and local and regional service providers recognise that addressing bullying is the responsibility of the whole-school and its wider community.

Three school stories are provided in this chapter to illustrate ways CHPRC research schools have implemented strategies to foster student-family-community partnerships. Schools wishing to implement these and the strategies outlined in this chapter may refer to the five school-family-community toolkits provided.

- **School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.1** provides an example of how to evaluate the extent to which parents feel welcome in the school.
- Two family communication sheets are included in **School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.2 and 6.3** as examples of ways to engage parents and promote common understandings across the whole-school community.
- **School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.4** describes the Method of Shared Concern (which the school may choose to implement) for parents. A version for staff is included in **Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.1**.
- **School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.5** provides an example of a family engagement strategy, a friendship carnival, to engage parents and promote consistent messages between the school and families regarding social skill development and interpersonal relationship skills.

Several other toolkits included in this book are identified in this chapter. While the principles discussed in this chapter are particularly relevant for the involvement of families and communities in school action against bullying behaviour, it is important to involve both groups at all opportunities to ensure a consistent approach.
School Stories

Brief background to school initiative

This school made changes to encourage parents to think in positive ways about the school. Often these parents had experienced bad schooling themselves. The school attempted to enable parents to be a proactive influence in their child’s education.

School profile

• Metropolitan government school
• 1,020 students
• Years: K-7
• A multicultural school with a small percentage of Aboriginal students and a transient community. The school felt there was only a limited amount of parental support.

Action

The school believed parents were becoming alienated and wanted to engage parents more fully. The school staff established programs/strategies to involve parents including the four week ‘Parents as Partners’ program, a course which taught parents how to help with reading, writing and language activities in class. The school attempted to minimise the number of students per parent and increase the one-on-one interaction during the scheduled activity. This program was offered to Year 1-3 parents. The student services manager made himself available for daily contact. The school held ‘Captain’s Table’ meetings fortnightly between parents and the principal to discuss important issues.

Conference sessions were conducted with students being bullied, the students engaging in bullying behaviour, and their families. The tone of these sessions was informal with refreshments provided. They were designed to facilitate discussion of bullying issues and potential solutions. Strategies that could be used at home were made available to parents by the student services manager, school psychologist, teachers and school nurse.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

Initially, parents did not want to talk about personal problems that may have affected their child’s behaviour. Many were, therefore, unwilling to come to meetings to discuss their child’s behaviour and possible solutions. From a logistics point of view there were also problems with finding a conference time to suit the part-time school psychologist or nurse, as well as fitting in with teacher’s non-teaching time and parents’ schedules.
Overcoming difficulties

The conferences were set in an environment conducive to discussion. Armchairs are provided as well as tea, coffee and biscuits. As few participants as possible are involved in the conference, to ensure parents weren’t embarrassed to talk about sensitive issues. Early morning or late afternoon meetings are scheduled, where appropriate, to ensure all parties can attend with particular emphasis on participation from fathers where possible.

More information about the strategies used by this school can be found in the following toolkits:

• School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.4

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**Brief background to school initiative**

This school identified a need to increase parent involvement in behaviour modification strategies.

**School profile**

- Metropolitan government school
- 781 students
- Years: K-6

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**Action**

The school engaged in strategies that did not at first appear to address bullying, however, over time, came together to reduce and prevent bullying. The steps used to promote anti-bullying messages, strategies and activities at the school included:

1. Establishing and consistently applying a behaviour management policy.
2. Having staff ratify and review the ‘Behaviour Management in Schools’ policy.
3. Ensuring that parents were contacted in cases of student absenteeism. Non-supported absenteeism would be reported to welfare.
4. Recording incidents on a computer database to facilitate immediate follow-up.
5. Gradually encouraging parent support (they were originally aggressive).
8. Inviting offending children and their parents to a 10-week course, run by four facilitators (two for parents, two for the children). Parents and children would meet separately for one hour then regroup for the last half-hour.

The Exploring Together program provided students with frameworks for social interaction and problem solving to resolve issues and conflict without violence. Problem solving skills were taught to students so that they were able to deal with incidents themselves. The program taught students to look at how other people felt and choose a win/win solution.
The Exploring Together program aimed to build better relationships between parents and children. Two courses were run per year (in Term 2 and Term 3). Up to eight students per course could attend. The resources and facilitators for this program were provided by Perth City Mission. The program targeted students who were involved in repeated incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Students were identified by classroom teachers and through computer database records of inappropriate behaviour. The program involved the students, their parents and teachers and focused on the development of social skills, parenting practices and the strengthening of family units. There was a student group, a parent group and meetings for partners and teachers. In promoting positive social relations, the school believed that consistency, role modelling, interaction with parents and the belief that things could be improved were essential.

To achieve cooperation between parent groups and school staff regarding behaviour management, the school believed that stability of staffing, communication and staff role modelling for parents were essential. Communication occurred through a formalised procedure of follow-up with parents after incidents, through newsletter articles (social skills snippets) and casual discussion in the schoolyard. Students were encouraged to share what they learnt at school with their parents.

The school recently built a new playground for junior students. This initiative was partially funded by the local shire. The parent body helped to raise additional funds and to build the actual playground. This new playground has provided the junior students with constructive play opportunities. Furthermore, it has provided them with a separate play area from the older students, and thus has reduced the potential for bullying.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

At the start of the program, parents were resistant to the Exploring Together program as they did not see behaviour problems with their children at home. Many parents did not understand that children sometimes behaved differently at home from at school.

Overcoming difficulties

Meetings held with the parents to discuss the problems and the program allowed parents to understand the program before they joined up. It was also found that after the first program was run, the response from parents was positive and through word-of-mouth others wanted to join.

More information about the strategies used by this school can be found in the following toolkits:

- Supportive School Culture Toolkit 2.1
- Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.5
- School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.2
- School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.3
- School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.4
**Toolkits for action**

**Family Links Toolkit 6.1**

**How Welcome Do Families Feel In Our School?**

Dear parent,

Please take a few minutes to fill out the following brief survey to tell us how you feel when you visit our school. Be honest as answers are anonymous – there is no need to write your name on the sheet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am greeted in a friendly, courteous way when I contact the school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school provides a valuable orientation program.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school provides informal opportunities for staff and parents to get to know each other during the school year.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal makes time for students and their families.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school encourages students and families to share their ideas on ways to improve our school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school actions relevant suggestions made by students and parents.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school encourages positive parent-teacher communication.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school caters for families where English is their second language.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school communicates important information in an effective way.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please write any other comments and/or suggestions here:

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

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Communicating with your children

Talking with your children regularly about everyday topics will increase the chances of them talking to you about more difficult issues such as bullying. When your children talk to you consider the following:

• **Stop** what you are doing, **look at them** and **listen**.
• **Be supportive** and encourage them to talk.
• Show your children you **enjoy** talking with them.
• Let your children know you are **always interested** in what is going on in their lives, not only when they are in trouble or having problems.
• Arrange **opportunities to share time** with your children when you can talk while doing an activity together, for example, cooking, craft, going to the football, family meal times or family meetings.
• Ask your children their **opinion** on events, issues and general daily proceedings, so they feel their opinion is valued.
• **Praise** your children. Not just when they have had success but also when they have tried.
• Encourage and role model **positive language**, for example: ‘I really like the way you asked your brother if you could borrow his bike.’
• ‘Catch’ your children doing good things and **congratulate** them in as many creative ways as you can.
• During the evening meal ask everyone to share their favourite part of the day or what they hope to achieve tomorrow.
• Sit beside your child while they are on the computer and ask them to **explain** to you how what they are using works.
• **Ask lots of open-ended questions** that require a sentence answer like:
  - *What happened today? Who did you spend time with at lunch today? How can we make things better? It sounds like you are pretty unhappy, what has been going on?*
• Allow for ‘**cooling off**’ time if you or your child are feeling upset or angry.
• Check you have **understood** what your child is trying to tell you.

Stay in touch

Consider using the following questions to get ‘up-to-date’ with your children and encourage them to ask you questions too.

- What is your favourite game?
- Who are your friends and why do you like them?
- What makes you laugh?
- Who is your favourite band?
- What do you like doing most at school?
- What are you most afraid of?
- What is your favourite website?
- What is your favourite television show?
- What are the best things we do together as a family?
- What would you like us to do more of as a family?
Family Links Toolkit 6.3
Family Communication Sheet 2

Discussing Bullying

What is bullying?

Bullying is when a person or a group of people offline or online (mobile phone or Internet):

- Make fun of and tease someone in a mean and hurtful way.
- Tell lies or spread nasty rumours about someone to try to make others not like them.
- Leave someone out on purpose or not allow them to join in.
- Hit, kick or push someone around.
- Deliberately damage, destroy or steal someone’s things.
- Threaten or make someone feel afraid of getting hurt.

It is NOT bullying when:

- Teasing is done in a friendly, playful way.
- Two people who are as strong as each other argue or fight.

Cyberbullying – using, for example, a mobile phone and/or the Internet – is when a person:

- Sends nasty or threatening emails or messages on the Internet or via mobile phone
- Sends mean or nasty comments or pictures about others to websites e.g. MySpace, Facebook, MSN or to other students’ mobile phones
- Deliberately ignores or leaves others out over the Internet
- Pretends to be someone else online to hurt them or make them look foolish.

Cyberbullying can happen when things such as hurtful text messages, pictures, video clips, and emails are being sent to you. It can also happen when these things are sent to others, about you.
Why do children bully?

- to get what they want
- they are afraid of being the one left out
- they are unhappy so take it out on others
- they are jealous of others
- it seems like fun
- they are bored
- they enjoy the sense of power
- their significant role models bully
- because they are being bullied themselves
- to try to be popular and to get friends at school.

Possible signs your child is being bullied:

- decreased interest in school
- reluctance to attend school and/or absenteeism
- below average academic performance
- complaints of headaches or stomach aches
- request to change schools
- frequent damage to or loss of personal items
- frequent injuries such as bruises or cuts
- lack of friends and socially withdrawn
- interrupted sleep patterns
- unhappy, miserable, moody and/or irritable
- threaten or attempt to harm themselves.

When discussing bullying it is helpful as a parent to:

- listen and react in a calm, helpful and supportive manner. Show you understand they are upset by the bullying
- encourage them to explain what happened and how they feel about it
- consider there may be factors you are not aware of, such as the involvement of others or previous events
- ensure they know what support services are available at school
- highlight the importance of having more than one good friend as this reduces the impact of bullying
- support them to plan safe actions they can take to improve the situation
- help them identify trusted people they can talk to including, school staff, friends and other family members
- tell them bullying is wrong and they have the right to feel safe and happy.
Helpful parent responses

If your child tells you about being bullied:

* Believe your child because it is important that your child feels confident to talk to you about problems.
* Take the child's concerns seriously without being over protective.
* Listen to your child. Show you understand that they are upset by the bullying.
* Encourage your child to talk about the situation.
* Tell your child that bullying is wrong and remind them that they have the right to feel safe and happy.
* Keep in mind that there may be other factors involved in the situation that you may not be aware of, such as other people who are involved, or other things that have happened in the past.
* Be aware of your own responses and react in a calm, helpful and supportive manner.
* Make sure your child knows how to get help and support at school.
* Help your child enhance their friendship skills (having more than one good friend has been shown to reduce the likelihood or impact of bullying).
* Encourage your child to participate in activities other than those related to the school so they have other friendship groups.
* Help your child reflect on what has been done to resolve the situation so far.
* Help your child work out a plan of what they could do to help make the situation better.

What can I tell my child to do if bullied?

Like most complex problems there is not a single strategy that will stop all bullying. As a first step, it is usually best to encourage your child to talk about what has happened.

Action plan for children

When I have a problem I can:

* try to stand up for myself in a positive way
* walk away and ignore the person completely
* try to talk to the person I am having a problem with
* get help from someone in my support group
* try coming to an agreement with the other person
* ignore the situation and keep playing or working
* talk to a friend to get some ideas to help me make a decision
The Method of Shared Concern

The key to stopping bullying is getting those involved to talk about what is happening and decide on some ways to change the bullying behaviour. The Method of Shared Concern concentrates on finding a solution to the problem. This strategy can also be used at home by parents and caregivers.

The Method of Shared Concern aims to change the behaviour of students involved in bullying incidents and improve the situation of the student/s being bullied. This method helps students to develop empathy and concern for others and gives them strategies that will enable them to get along cooperatively and safely in the school and home.

Practical steps of Method of Shared Concern:

All students who are involved in a bullying incident are asked to meet and talk with a designated staff member. The process usually begins with the student who was bullying. Clear steps are used in each meeting to reach the point where each student has suggested ways to help improve the situation for the student being bullied.

1. Individual meetings are held with each of the students involved in the bullying situation, for example, the student or students bullying, the student/s being bullied and any bystanders.
2. Each student is asked about the problem and to suggest ways in which they personally could help to improve the situation.
3. The student being bullied is also given the opportunity to discuss what happened and encouraged to think of ways to improve the situation.
4. Follow-up meetings, discussions and planning continue to give the students who bully others the opportunity to change and learn ways to improve their attitudes and behaviour, and to put these into practise in a supportive environment.

Schools that use this method report positive results in reducing bullying behaviour. Bullying can be a difficult and complicated problem which takes time and patience to resolve properly. By being supportive you can contribute to the long-term reduction of bullying in your child’s school.

What can parents do to support school action to reduce bullying?

Schools want to hear from parents if there is a problem. The focus should always be on making sure students feel safe and happy at school.

If you feel there is a problem:

* Talk to and listen to your child and help them develop some strategies to cope.
* Talk to your child’s classroom/form teacher about the situation and decide what will be done. Arrange for a follow-up to discuss outcomes.
* Once you have talked to the teacher, support these decisions at home.
* Keep in contact with the school, even if the situation has improved, to ensure the changes are maintained.
The school priority is to stop bullying and reduce the chance of it happening again. Your school has a whole-school policy on bullying which provides the students, teachers, staff and parents with information about the school commitment to reducing bullying behaviour at school.

**Family Activity: Role Play Shared Concern At Home**

The aim of restorative techniques is to establish ground rules that will help everyone to get along together. The Method of Shared Concern is one way to achieve this. In addition to its use at school this technique can be used at home. Try role-playing this situation to find solutions to home-life problem.

**Situation:**

*Child:* You are not happy because your parent won’t let you go over to your friend’s house this week.

*Parent:* You are not happy because your child has made a mess in their bedroom and hasn’t cleaned it up even though you have asked many times.

**Shared Concern Role Play:**

*Parent:* ‘[Child’s name], I want to talk to you about how you are feeling. I can see that you are not happy.’

*Child:* Pretend that you are not happy about not being allowed to go to your friend’s house. Explain how you feel and why you feel it is not fair.

*Parent:* ‘So you are telling me that you are not happy because (repeat the basic message your child gave you). I am not happy because your room is still a mess even though you said you would clean it up.’

*Child:* Explain how you feel about not cleaning up your room.

*Parent:* Listen to your child and then say, ‘What do you think we could do to make this situation better for us?’

*Child:* Try to think of an idea.

*Parent:* If your child comes up with a sensible idea then agree to try it. If they can’t think of something say, ‘All right, you think about it and see if you can come up with something. I will speak to you again (later today or tomorrow morning) to see what you have come up with.’

Try making up your own role-play situations to practise the Method of Shared Concern. Ask different members of your family to practise. This is a fun way of practising how to sort out your problems and you will find it much easier when there is a real problem.
Family Links Toolkit 6.5

The Family Friendship Carnival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>Evidence suggests that enhancing social skills within the school community promotes positive social environment where bullying may be reduced and student learning improved.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who?</td>
<td>The carnival could involve students, staff and most importantly, families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What?</td>
<td>The carnival may be structured similar to a tabloid sports day where staff, students and families work together in cooperative activities to achieve a common goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When?</td>
<td>The theme of this carnival is to promote friendship, cooperation, team work, sharing and other social skills within your school community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Planning your Family Friendship Carnival

- Choose an appropriate time for your school to host the carnival. Consider planning the carnival to coincide with International Friendship Day (the first Sunday in August).
- Choose whether your Family Friendship Carnival will be a full day or half day event.
- Choose games which promote social skill development and are fun to participate in.
- Decide on the structure of the day:
  - number of tabloids or stations
  - how long will each group spend at each station
  - how long will students be grouped (mixed age groups or in year levels)
  - how will parents be involved? (as ‘officials’ or part of each group)
  - how will staff be involved? (as ‘officials’ or part of each group)
  - decide on the most effective ways to promote the carnival within the school community.

Promotion

This is the most important component in building anticipation of the Family Friendship Carnival. Students, staff and parents should be targeted in the specific promotion of this event.

Staff:
- keep staff informed of the plans for the carnival
- provide clear instructions to all staff regarding starting and finishing times, activities planned, agenda for the day and each staff members role for the day
- communicate all aspects of the promotion of the carnival to staff, so they are aware of what information is being sent home.
• ask staff to promote the carnival to their students and set aside time for students to write a personal letter/invitation to their parents.

Students:
• inform all students of the upcoming carnival at assemblies and encourage them to talk about the carnival with their family
• involve students in the promotion of the day
• general discussion in class about the carnival
• involve students in selecting cooperative, friendly games for the carnival.

Parents:
• inform parents of the Family Friendship Carnival as soon as you have set the date
• ask students to send a personal invitation home to invite their parents to participate in the carnival
• invite parents to be a part of the carnival as participants with their children or as ‘officials’ on the day
• place regular reminders in your school’s portal/newsletter reminding parents of the carnival
• use assemblies to regularly discuss the carnival with parents, staff and students
• involve the school P&C/P&F in suggesting ways to involve families and ways in which the carnival could be promoted to them.

Running the day
Your school’s Family Friendship Carnival can be conducted in whatever way is most suitable to your school community. Some suggestions to consider during the day are as follows:
• prepare an agenda or timetable for the day
• consider whether you will assign an official to each station or to each group. Some schools have found both methods effective. By assigning a teacher or parent as the official to each station, provides an opportunity for staff to interact with all students and parents
• consider having a scoring system to award prizes to the winning groups on the day. If you do have a scoring system, consider staff to monitor the scoring and judging the overall winners. Also consider how each activity can be scored
• provide plenty of shade, water and sunscreen.

Activities
It is important to choose activities with the aim of the carnival in mind; to involve the whole-school community in activities that promote friendship, cooperation and other social skills to achieve a common goal. Ideally the activities should last no more than 15-20 minutes, however, this can be altered if there is a wide variety of activities that are of a short duration. Some key elements to look for in potential activities for the school’s Family Friendship Carnival are:
• to involve group work and team building
• suitability for all age groups of children to adults
• simple to explain and conduct
• to encourage cooperation and sharing
• to allow for scoring or counting (if desired).
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