



The “No Blame Approach” to Bullying

December 2006

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Background...

- Developed by Barbara Maines & George Robinson, the philosophy is based on long-standing work with pupils with emotional and behavioral problems; it is a positive approach to punishment.
- Since bullying is an interaction which establishes group identity, dominance and status at the expense of another, then it is only by the development of higher values such as empathy, consideration, unselfishness, that the bully is likely to change their behaviour and function differently in social settings.
- Investigation and interrogation rarely get to the bottom of the problem or situation.
- Rather, it seems as though this leads to the bullies being hostile, and punishments are futile as they may lead to the victim being hurt. All this attention on the bully leads to a shift of attention from the victim
- The No Blame Approach has been used effectively in primary and secondary schools as well as college environments (Maines and Robinson, 1994).

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Why it Works...

The first thing the approach does is focus on how the victim is feeling; focusing attention on feelings draws attention away from blame. This causes the bully and supports to think about the impact of their behaviour.

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- It draws the bystanders and noninvolved students into finding a solution to the problem.
- It is a whole school approach; it relies on group dynamics and the empathy of the group members.
- No one has to hide behind an untrue picture of what happened as no one is going to be blamed for anything that occurred.

Why it's Popular...

- It deals with potentially complex situations in a straightforward way.
- There is no need for extensive and difficult investigations.
- It brings about change quickly, it's easy to use and it works.

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In Addition...

- Nothing about this approach is manipulative or requires specific training beyond an understanding of the seven steps of the approach
- Does not assume that teachers are or can become therapists as the approach is based upon those skills that a teacher already possesses- the ability to work effectively with individuals and groups

BOTTOM LINE ACTIONABLE MESSAGE



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Limitations of the Approach...

- Some people suggest that the “no blame approach” be used in only certain bullying situations (i.e. the less serious bullying cases)
- It may be difficult to reward a decrease in misbehavior, thinking that it is not right to reward a child for behaviour that is expected in another child.
- For the no-blame approach to reduce bullying, the whole school must be committed to it. In pilot studies, lack of training for all members of the teaching staff on issues related to bullying and the no-blame approach led to lack of success.
- Lack of training for parents in understanding the need for co-operation with the school’s policy on bullying has also been a problem.

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The Seven Steps...

- **Step One – Interview with the victim:** talk to victim about their feelings, but do not question them about the incidents directly.
- **Step Two - Convene a meeting with the people involved:** teacher arranges to meet with the people who were involved (minus the victim).
- **Step Three – Explain the problem:** teacher tells them about the way the victim is feeling.
- **Step Four - Share responsibility:** the teacher does not attribute blame but states that they know the group is responsible and they can do something about it.
- **Step Five – Ask the group for their ideas:** each member of the group is encouraged to suggest a way in which the victim could be helped to feel happier.
- **Step Six - Leave it up to them:** the teacher ends the meeting by passing on the responsibility to the group to solve the problem.
- **Step Seven – Meet them again:** about a week later the teacher discusses with each student, including the victim, how things have been going.

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