

These are the four most frequent questions I hear from educators after trainings based on my book *Schools Where Everyone Belongs* (see <http://www.stopbullyingnow.com> for details and overview). I have written my thoughts about these questions and welcome your reactions. You will find many new resources and a summary of new research at <http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/bookadditions.htm>

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- *We want to bring a speaker to our school to talk to students about bullying (or: We want to train our older students to educate our younger students.) What should we look for and focus on? What kinds of bystander action should we encourage? (Pages 2 and 3)*
- *We have implemented a rubric-based discipline system for aggression toward peers and find that we have a lot of repeat offenders. How can we make our system more effective? (Pages 4-8)*
- *How do we develop effective individual plans for persistently aggressive students? (Pages 9-11)*
- *How can we make our use of the think-about-it reflection process more effective? (Pages 12-16)*

*We want to bring a speaker to our school to talk to students about bullying (or: We want to train our older students to educate our younger students.) What should be the focus?*

Avoid using any presentation that focuses on telling youth who are bullied to change their behavior- for two reasons:

- Youth who bully are unlikely to listen when their targets tell them to stop. If targets pretend the bullying isn't bothering them, there is a risk that the bullies will try harder to get the response they are looking for. And if we train targets to use clever responses there is a real risk that the exchange will escalate into a fight.
- More fundamentally, when we give targets responsibility to stop the bullying by themselves we are telling them that the bullying is their fault. *"If you would just..."* translates easily into *"Why haven't you..."* Imagine telling employees who are being sexually harassed: *"We will teach you how to deal with it yourself."*

Similarly, we should avoid any presentation that focuses on telling the whole student body that bullying is bad in the hope that the bullies will listen. Young people who bully tend to tune out the messages in these workshops. They may even get ideas about how to make their bullying more effective and so do it more.

Katherine Newman writes in her great book *Rampage: the Social Roots of School Shootings*:

*"Efforts to focus on changing either the bullies [through telling them to be kind] or the victims are unlikely to be effective, ... The desire to behave better... is a weak motivator compared to the status gains that come from teasing and harassment.... Victims have no real way out of these situations [through their own actions] because their low status makes most of the recommended strategies... ineffective."* (293)

Effective conversations with young people:

- Are interactive and build in opportunities for discussion and skill practice through interactive theater or other techniques.
- Are realistic- they are based on hearing from young people about what they see happening at their school. Effective discussions focus on actions young people are likely to take and that we know will be effective.
- Help young people develop a vision of what climate they want at their school, what they want adults to do to reach that vision, and what they can do to reach it.
- Focus on bystander perspectives and actions. We can focus on the many young people in any school who want bullying to stop and who stand by quietly when they see it. We seek to teach specific, safe, effective actions by these potential defenders. In lower grades, I would suggest a whole-student-body approach to teaching bystanders to be active supporters of targets. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade and above I have found that it can be more effective to spend more time in training and backing up groups of young people who self-identify as potential defenders of targets.
- Happen in the context of adult actions to model respectful behavior, to build mentoring relationships with youth, and to structure consistent, escalating consequences for young people who hit, tease, or exclude others.
- Happen in the context of adult readiness to protect young people who do tell us, who stand up to bullies, and who befriend youth who are excluded.

- *What kinds of bystander action should we encourage?*

In talking with more than 40,000 students around the United States about bystander behavior, I began by training them to carry out the three bystander actions we often see in the literature:

- Tell the bully to stop
- Tell an adult
- And reach out in friendship.

I found that the first of these suggestions was a problem. Often young actors demonstrating this intervention to students would 'bully the bully' and start a fight. Even when I coached them to tell the bully to stop using peaceful methods, many of them seemed irresistibly pulled toward getting in the bully's face, calling the person names, and having the audience admire their courage. On the other hand, if the actor playing the bully was intimidating enough I have found that the actors playing bystanders may stand frozen when they are supposed to demonstrate this technique. Students told me (or wrote to me later) that they would not tell bullies to stop in real life, because it seems too dangerous. For some years I sought ways to help young people overcome these difficulties- teaching them to tell the bully to stop in a group, from a distance, and in a friendly way. Still many of them seemed pulled toward the more dramatic and more risky confrontation methods described above. These experiences helped me understand the problem.

1. Young people who watch television have seen so much aggressive confrontation that the aggressive model seems more real to them than any peaceful model we try to teach them.
2. Young people are legitimately afraid of standing up to bullies directly. They may fear losing the friendship of popular peers. They may fear being targeted themselves.

One day I realized that there was a parallel adult situation that could guide my work: What would I do if I looked in through a store window and saw a robbery in progress? The one thing I am sure of is that I would not go into the store and tell the robber to stop. This analogy has helped me understand what advice we can give to bystanders. What, I have begun asking them, *would an adult who cared do in that situation?*

I hope I would take the time to call 911 and give the police as much information as I could. The police would accept an anonymous report if I wanted to tell them that way. They would not tell me I was tattling. And if I gave my name I would be protected from retaliation.

And what could I do later? Young people are clear that I could help the business owners clear up the broken glass and shop at that store more or support the owners and employees financially in some other way. I could advocate for more police presence and organize a neighborhood watch.

I think this analogy can guide us in helping young people to support targets of bullying. When we discourage young people from telling bullies to stop (except in situations that feel safe), we can empower them to use the safer and more effective alternatives of telling adults and befriending the target. And if we are encouraging them to tell adults, adults should know that it is those adults' responsibility to respond and to protect youth who do tell them. I asked a group of high school students what they want adults to do about bullying. They said:

*"Let us report bullying with protection- privately and confidentially.*

*Welcome our reports and act on them.*

*Form strong positive relationships with us so we feel free to report bullying to you.*

*Don't be afraid to take action to stop bullying.*

*Listen- keep your eyes and ears open."*

*We have implemented a rubric-based discipline system for aggression toward peers and find that we have a lot of repeat offenders. How can we make our system more effective?*

Rubric-based discipline for peer-to-peer aggression is described in detail in *Schools Where Everyone Belongs* (Research Press, 2005) I have had many questions about fine-tuning such discipline systems. I would suggest starting with an assessment of your intervention:

- Are the rules clearly defined?
- Is the rubric for peer aggression separate from other discipline systems?
- Are forms in use clear and useful?
- Is reporting consistent and are consequences being consistently applied?
- Is there a clearly understood and consistently followed protocol for moving from reports of aggression to consequences?
- How do we handle allegations of aggressive behavior that was not witnessed by adults?
- Are young people who break the rules held fully responsible for their actions?
- Do adults use positive feeling tone and recognize positive behaviors within the context of aggressive incidents?
- Do adults model positive behavior?
- Are effective consequences being used? Do they start small and escalate?
- Do you build individual intervention plans for habitually aggressive students?

*Are the rules clearly defined?* When rules are general (“*We will treat each other with respect*”) it is difficult to get consistent enforcement because every adult will have a different definition of the wanted behavior. It is inevitable in this situation that students will experience the rules as changing every time they move from one part of the building to another. Young people in this situation may not take responsibility for their own actions, as they will see the adult who punished them as the problem. When rules are behaviorally specific (“*No name calling that refers to ability, appearance, family background, or other topics likely to make someone feel bad about themselves,*”) staff are more able to apply them consistently.

*Is the rubric for peer aggression separate from other discipline systems?* After seeing many schools try to mix consequences for aggression with those for defiance, tardiness, and refusal to do schoolwork- with very mixed results- I am convinced that this idea is not a good one. There are two difficulties inherent in creating one uniform rubric to cover all types of negative student behavior.

- It is very difficult to sort mixed misbehaviors into categories so young people and their parents see the system as fair. Name calling and not doing homework are two different kinds of behaviors.
- With class disruption or refusal to work it is productive to expect teachers and other school staff to take several steps before referring a student to the office- and to be actively involved in the solution of the problem even after that point. For peer-to-peer aggression direct reporting to the office is often better. When we mix these behaviors in one rubric and one reporting form, we risk confusing staff and students and diluting our effectiveness.

*Are the forms in use effective and clear?* I recommend using three specific forms for tracking and dealing with aggressive behavior. Each of these forms is in *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*.

- A reporting form- informal, brief, and easy to fill out. Since this form will often be filled out in a hurry- and since it will involve the names of other students- this form should be used internally only and not sent home to parents. Some schools shred it at the end of the process.

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- A letter to be sent home by the administrator- done on NCR paper so a copy can be filed, two copies can be sent home (one to be returned signed), and one copy can be sent to the teacher. This letter documents what the student did, the investigation process if one was needed, what the student said, what the consequence is, and what the consequence will be next time if the student chooses to tease or hit again. Often schools print their behavior rubric on the back of this letter so the parent can refer to it and see that the process has been followed.
- And a think-about-it form for young people to use with supervision as they reflect about what they did and who they hurt.

*Is there consistent reporting; are the rules applied consistently?* Consistency from adult to adult, from student to student, and in different parts of the school teaches young people to take responsibility for their own behavior. Inconsistency teaches them to blame others when they get in trouble. We encourage consistency when all staff are involved in defining specific behavior expectations, when clear procedures make interventions easier, and when we hold all students to the same behavior expectations. Interventions that focus on intentions or on the reactions of the target of the behavior (“I was only joking;” “I’m his friend- I don’t mind,”) make it hard to be consistent. These approaches encourage bullying young people to become skilled liars, and to pressure their targets to say they don’t mind. Interventions that focus on specific behavior expectations with no regard for intention or for what the target says (“That behavior is not allowed here,”) allow us to be more consistent and more effective. If both young people have broken the rules both should be held responsible unless one or both of them had no other alternatives- or unless one of them has been consistently bullied over time and has not been protected by adults. Even in this situation- when a target of bullying retaliates aggressively- we should be cautious about excusing the behavior, which risks encouraging further aggression.

*Is there a clearly understood and consistently followed protocol for moving from reports of aggression to consequences?* I have found that the following structure makes consistency most likely:

1. Everyone reports- there is a simple reporting form that helps all staff tell the administrator about incidents of aggressive behavior toward peers.
2. As soon as possible after the reported incident (often within 24-48 hours), the administrator uses a structured, brief interview to help the young person take responsibility for his or her actions, to have the student look up the consequences for those actions on the school behavior rubric, and to look up the consequences for future aggression. That interview also includes notifying parents about the behavior and about current and future consequences. If the behavior was not witnessed by staff, the administrator encourages the student to own up to what he or she may have done. If the student continues to say he or she did not do what was reported, the administrator interviews the other students who were nearby, one at a time in an effort to find out what really happened.
3. The student has more opportunities to reflect on his or her actions and to develop conscience in a later interview with the counselor or detention supervisor.

This protocol is similar to steps taken in most workplaces when there is an allegation of sexual harassment. These procedures have been developed to ensure consistency and to protect targets.

*How do administrators handle allegations of aggressive behavior that was not witnessed by adults?*

Administrators may be tempted to meet with the two students - the reported aggressor and the reported target- together. In listening to the two of them, we may believe, we can decide which is telling the truth. This intervention strategy carries great risks with it. The aggressor may be a

more skilled liar than the target. The aggressor may be more socially competent than the target and therefore better at appealing to our sympathy. Instead, I have found that finding out which other students were nearby and interviewing them separately is a more reliable way to find out what really happened. It is important that we ensure the privacy and safety of young people who tell us what happened- and that we build a school climate where young people know they help their friends best when they tell the truth. Telling the truth about your friend's misbehavior helps that friend change that behavior and thus avoid more serious trouble later in life.

Often we do not need to interview the witnesses. When young people who have been aggressive know that we will make every effort to find out what really happened, and when they know that we will tell their parents if they told the truth, they often own up to their actions. This is especially likely when we maintain positive emotional tone through the investigation process and when consequences are small, predictable, and fair.

Sometimes the outcome of our investigations is a finding of 'not proven.' In these situations we can increase supervision of the student or situation in question, insist that the student stay away from the reported target, and wait for future incidents when we may be more able to find out what did happen.

*Are young people who break the rules held fully responsible for their actions?* The language that we use can help young people to take responsibility for their actions- or can help them avoid that responsibility. When we accept their use of the word 'because,' in sentences like "I hit her because she stared at me," we discourage personal responsibility. When we ask young people to "tell me what YOU did," we encourage responsibility. When students tell us that they were reacting to a problem, it is important to help them see that they had other choices. We hold them responsible for the choices they made.

We can avoid language that describes students' behavior as coming from an internal state or difficulty ("Sarah, I understand you had a hard time keeping your hands to yourself in the hall." "John, Ms. O tells me you couldn't control yourself in math class.") These statements give students excuses for their behavior and can be replaced with descriptions of the behavior ("Sarah, I hear you hit two students in the hall." "John, Ms. O tells me you called other students 'stupid' in class.")

Many young people will describe their actions as 'accidents.' We can help them by drawing the parallel between what they are saying and the driver who chooses to drink and drive, with no intention to hurt another person. If that driver then crashes his or her car into someone else or hurts a passenger through impaired driving, that injury is no accident. And when we avoid anger in dealing with young people who have been aggressive, we help them to take responsibility by keeping the focus on what they did rather than on how we feel about what they did.

*Do adults use positive feeling tone and recognize positive behaviors within the context of aggressive incidents?* We have been so deeply trained in the use of I-messages ("I feel A when you B, and I want you to C.") that we lose sight of the very real problems with this form of communication. Using our emotions as a consequence for young peoples' behavior discourages them from looking at their own behavior as the source of the trouble they are in. In addition, we know from our own experiences in life that being confronted with another person's anger often has the result of creating a fight-or-flight response. We are more effective as disciplinarians when we treat the young people we deal with respectfully and help them focus on what they did rather than on how we feel about them. When we tell young people and their parents about positive actions within the misbehavior (for example, telling the truth about misbehavior), we communicate our optimism and interest in a way that makes teamwork and cooperation more

likely. Telling the truth should not lead to a lower consequence. Yet it should be recognized as a sign that the student is making progress toward change.

*Do adults schoolwide model positive behavior?* Young people of all ages observe and imitate adults. It is important to examine how adults in the school use their power. We should encourage them to speak respectfully to and about students, to be fair, and to praise more than they criticize. These expectations are much easier to reach if education professionals themselves are treated respectfully by administrators, school boards, and the community. It may be helpful to create a staff code of conduct through staff discussion, outlining what types of feedback, disciplinary practices, and ways of talking with students are encouraged at the school. Some schools have staff agreements in which staff commit to letting each other know when they have moved across the line into disrespectful ways of talking with young people.

*Are effective consequences being used? Do they start small and escalate?* Small consequences, like recess detention and silent lunch, can be a very important part of rubric-based interventions. It is important that they be used effectively.

Factors that might make recess detention for aggression ineffective include:

- Having the detention happen in a public area, like the school office, in which students will get a lot of attention from adult passers-by or in which they can get a lot of attention through talking out, making noise, or disrupting the secretaries' work.
- Having recess detention in an isolated space without direct adult supervision. Students will, then, be free to interact, draw, sing, and otherwise amuse themselves. An extreme (though instructive) example of the risks in such an approach can be found in the movie *The Breakfast Club*.
- Allowing students to complete schoolwork during recess detention. Time flies. The work is done. The time does not serve as a deterrent to future aggression.
- Having the supervising adult argue with, lecture, or nurture the students in detention. Many aggressive youth are starved for adult attention of all kinds. Having the adult provide that attention during the consequence time may lead to young people choosing to earn the consequence again in the future.

Factors that are likely to make recess detention or silent lunch effective are:

- Having the detention happen in a more isolated but well-supervised area so adults can ensure that students do not gain attention or have fun during the time.
- Separating consequences for aggression from consequences for not doing schoolwork, so students who have been aggressive can either write about what they did and what was wrong with it or sit quietly and do nothing.
- Having a set of rules for the detention or silent lunch posted on the wall. Here is one possible set of rules: "inside recess time only counts if you arrive on time, sit quietly, avoid interacting with others, and complete the think about it form accurately. If you fool around, play, talk with each other, or refuse to complete the form correctly you choose to stay in for more days." Follow through with these rules without more than one reminder and in a matter-of-fact way. Ask students at the end of the recess or lunch time if they have chosen to make this time count. If they have, acknowledge that. If not, ask them what happens next. When they tell you that they will be in for an additional time, tell them they are right.
- Adults supervising these times should have work to do to help them not interact with the students more than necessary. If students try to draw us into conversation or power

struggles it is important that we have something to do in the room to occupy us and keep us from being drawn in.

- And we should have a set of consequences that escalates for further incidents so young people do not learn to accept inside recess or silent lunch as trivial.

*Do you build individual intervention plans for habitually aggressive students?* See the next section of this frequently-asked-questions list for methods for creating individual plans for students who are persistently aggressive.

Here are two more frequently-asked questions about rubrics:

***How do we integrate sexual, racial, or other types of legally prohibited harassment into a rubric?***

It is important to maintain the consequences, procedures, and legal protections that apply to these kinds of harassment. The severe category of a rubric should make it clear that some severe behaviors are subject to school policy or state or federal law leading to consequences for these types of harassment. Then we can include a consequence for severe harassment that does not fall into these categories.

***Some issues that our committee has encountered have been how to use rubrics and WHEN is something considered "bullying." In light of the definition (of bullying) including repeated behavior over time, the committee has talked about not sending home our parent communication form until the second time an incident occurs...using the first time as a "warning," since a pattern of behavior is not yet established.***

I have found it better not to call specific actions 'bullying behavior', which requires repetition, power imbalance, and intent, but to call it what it is- hitting, exclusion, name-calling, threatening, etc.. We should still be calling sexual, racial, or other legally sanctioned harassment by those terms because targets of those types of harassment have legal protections and we have legal obligations. I have found this approach is better for three reasons:

- You may well not know about prior events and so a single event may be an example of repeated behavior.
- Young people, especially those who are gifted at lying and manipulation, may convincingly tell you that they did not intend to hurt; in addition, power differentials can be hard to see from the adult perspective.
- and most important, I think, parents get very defensive and fight with you when you use the word 'bullying' about their child- seeing it as an attack on the child's character and thus their parenting. In my experience, you hear: "He didn't mean it," "My child is NOT a bully," "I know my child wouldn't want to hurt anyone," and "It takes two..." much more often when you use the word "bullying" than when you just describe the actions ("He hit a student in the stomach." "He called a student "trailer trash.") I discussed this issue with Dan Olweus, who agrees that we can deal with a single incident and that, when we consequence peer-to-peer aggression we are consequenceing the subset of that aggression that we call bullying.

*How do we develop effective individual plans for persistently aggressive students?*

After a set number of aggressive incidents in a year (this number varies from three to five in different rubrics), it is probably time to think about an individualized intervention to help the student change. With adolescents we should also be thinking about strategies to protect the rest of the student body from the behavior while we are working to change it. You will find a sample rubric that spells out the process of creating an individual plan in more detail at <http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/bookadditions.htm#rubric>

In creating an individual plan, start with these basic principles:

- Keep the schoolwide behavior expectations consistent as we modify consequences and other interventions. If we modify expectations, we tell aggressive youth that they cannot control themselves.
- Keep the two subgroups of aggressive youth in mind.
  - Some young people are persistently aggressive primarily because they have poor social skills and poor impulse control. Plans for these young people should include social skills and self-control training, immediate interventions based on review of the incident, helping the student understand his or her other options, and intensive skill-practice. These students will also need help appreciating incidents in which they made better choices and encouragement in the process of changing their behavior.
  - Others- the majority of aggressive youth, according to many researchers- plan their aggressive behavior. Their aggression is the result of a desire for power rather than being impulsive. These students will benefit more from plans that put them in the position of having to earn the ability to interact informally with peers through their own changed behavior, paired with empathy-building interventions that help them find other ways to meet their needs without hurting others.
- Keep parents involved through helping them see small steps toward progress, maintaining positive feeling tone with them, being scrupulously fair in investigating each report even though the student has a pattern of aggressive behavior, and helping them find effective roles in the intervention. It is important that parents know that their efforts make a positive difference. Harry Truman once said *"It's amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit."*
- And keep in mind that changing entrenched behavior patterns may take time. We will need to look for and celebrate decreases in intensity and frequency of aggressive behaviors.
- In designing individual plans, I have found the following analysis helpful:

Most students:

- Need to hear the rules; may not need us to be specific.
- Learn from seeing others get in trouble
- Respond to positive feedback, positive feeling tone, and positive behavior modeling by adults.
- May break the rules occasionally but will learn from getting in trouble rapidly

Some students:

- Need to have specific rules posted.
- Need to get in trouble a few times to learn.
- Respond well to losing privileges, though it may take time to see change.

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- Respond to positive feedback, positive feeling tone, and positive behavior modeling by adults.
- Need our help to connect what they did with its effect on others.
- Need our help finding alternative ways to solve the problem or meet the need they were working toward.
- Work over time to build new behaviors.

Some students:

- Need to have the rules posted schoolwide and high levels of consistency from adult to adult.
- Need to get in trouble many times to learn.
- Need to learn specific alternative skills for reacting to situations through practice and positive feedback.
- Need positive feedback, positive feeling tone, and positive behavior modeling by adults. Need to know they do not control adults' emotions.
- Need our help to connect what they did with its effect on themselves, and only after that realization is reached can they connect with the effect they had on others.
- Need our help finding alternative ways to solve the problem or meet the need they were working toward.
- Work over a longer period of time to build new behaviors. May need counseling interventions, attentional rewards for behavior change, frequent parent-teacher collaboration, and other interventions.

And a smaller number of students, in addition to the interventions just listed, also:

- Need us to be prepared to protect peers from being hurt by them indefinitely, in case their behavior does not change.
- Need to know that every privilege has to be earned.
- Need structured ways to know what they do right and how their positive behavior makes their lives better (for example, a brag book)
- Need to know that consequences are open-ended and indefinite in length. Going back to 'normal' status after misbehavior will be earned one step at a time through sustained behavior change, not just through the passage of time.
- Need consequences, both positive and negative, that have meaning to them and which may be larger than normal consequences.

In thinking about which consequences to use for persistently aggressive young people, we have considered both out-of-school and in-school suspension. Out-of-school suspension (except when used to ensure the safety of the school community) has the potential for making negative behavior patterns worse, as some students enjoy the increased freedom that suspension sometimes brings with it. In-school suspension, while often an effective consequence for class disruption, can be less effective for aggressive behavior toward peers for reasons described in *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*. Classes-only is a modified form of in-school suspension in which students attend class but do not participate in the more informal opportunities to interact with peers that happen during and after school. Here is a description of that consequence and of how it can be used in individual plans:

“Many schools use suspension or in-school suspension when students choose to hurt others. To help our students learn, our school often uses classes-only instead. Classes-only status means that the student attends all classes and stays in the office or another designated location during all recesses (before school, snack, after-lunch, and after school). The student will also eat lunch in the office or in another designated location. Students on classes-only status may read or do schoolwork quietly while in the office or other designated location.

Classes-only status may be earned through our behavior rubric or may be part of a student’s individual plan. Classes-only may be earned for a fixed number of days or until there is change in aggressive behavior (indefinitely).

Indefinite classes only status is defined in this way:

- The student will begin with classes-only status for one week.
- At the end of that week, the student will earn back one of the recess blocks or lunch for the next week if he or she has not hit or otherwise hurt peers during that week. For week 2, the student will be in the office or in a designated location for all but one of the recess and lunch blocks. The administrator will decide which recess or lunch block is earned.
- At the end of each week after that, the student may earn back one more recess or lunch block if he or she does not hurt others. If the student hits others during a week, he or she will stay at the same level. Persistent or serious aggression during any week will lead to the student returning to full classes-only status and starting again from the beginning.”

*How can we make our use of the think-about-it reflection process more effective?* The think-about-it process, described in *Schools Where Everyone Belongs*, is designed to help young people think about their behavior, develop conscience and empathy, and learn alternative ways to meet their needs.

Here are some of the questions people have asked about using it:

- *Some students refuse to write about the questions.*
- *Some students seem to give 'rote' answers without meaning what they write.*
- *How is this intervention organized? Where does it happen?*
- *Is this intervention effective for other behaviors than peer-to-peer aggression?*
- *We send the form home for students and parents to do together. Can that work?*

The think-about-it process is an intervention to guide young people in reflection. It is based on these questions and sub-questions:

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### **What did you do?**

*Please be specific. Start with "I." Tell me later about what the other student did.*

### **Why was that the wrong thing to do?**

*Who did you hurt? How do you know you hurt them? What did you see and hear after you did what you did?*

### **What problem were you trying to solve? What goal were you trying to reach?**

*Did you want attention? Did you want to be left alone? Were you trying to have fun? Were you already mad about something else?*

### **Next time you have that problem, how will you solve it without hurting anyone?**

*Please list three ways to solve the problem.*

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These are guidelines for using this process effectively:

- The think about process is designed to be used ONLY for peer-to-peer aggression, not for class disruption, refusal to do schoolwork, or disrespect to staff. These other types of behavior should be addressed through consequences and other interventions; this particular intervention is unlikely to work with them.
- Supervising the think-about-it process is an art and a skill that grows with practice. The process will be more effective if a relatively small number of adults supervise it consistently and develop their skills in this intervention, rather than having this duty rotate between many adults.

- Young people do the think-about-it writing during recess detention, quiet lunch, after-school detention, or other supervised consequence time after they know what their consequence is. Using this intervention after young people have learned what their consequence is makes it more likely that their writing will be the product of genuine reflection rather than being an attempt to talk their way out of a consequence.
- Students write their answers to the questions. They may write at a table or on clipboards while they face away from each other. If they have trouble writing they can dictate to an adult. In this case, adults should resist the temptation to help by suggesting words or by paraphrasing.
- The supervising adult is in the room, and moves from student to student as young people tell him or her that they are done with one of the questions. The adult has two primary roles:
  - ensuring that young people do not make the consequence time into a reward through fooling around or interacting with each other;
  - and helping young people complete each stage of the think about it process fully before moving on to the next. If the stage is not completed properly, See below for suggestions about helping the student complete each stage and for dealing with students who refuse to participate in this process.
- Completing the think-about-it form is the student's responsibility rather than the adult's. The student should do 70% of the work; the questions and protocol 20%; the adult 10% of the work.
- The supervising adult should have other things to do when students do not need help- email to answer, a book to read, a report to write. Having something else to do helps the adult avoid giving the students too much nurturing attention (and thus avoiding the risk of making the consequence time rewarding). It also helps the adult avoid nagging at or lecturing students, which may also risk making the consequence time rewarding. And when students try to start an argument about completing the form, the supervising adult should return to his or her other tasks to avoid being drawn in. We can remind students that the consequence time does not count if they choose not to complete the form fully. They can then choose to make the time count or to refuse to complete the reflection process and have their consequence extended to additional days.

### When there are problems....

When there are problems with the think-about-it process I have most often found that they can be traced to the student having answered the first question (*"What did you do?"*) incompletely or in a way that avoids taking responsibility. As I discussed in my book, I have found that students will often begin by denying (*"I didn't do anything,"*) move to externalizing (*"I hit him because he...."* or *"They were calling me names so I called them a bunch of %\$%\$s"*). Students are then likely to minimize the behavior (*"I called her a name," "I pushed him a little," "I only gave him a driller."*) If the process is unsupervised or done at home; if the supervising adult is untrained or overwhelmed; or if the student is persistent in maintaining these avenues of avoiding responsibility, we may allow the student to move on to the subsequent questions without moving to a statement of full responsibility for his or her own actions. I have found that this full acceptance of responsibility is the most important factor determining the effectiveness of the think about it process. Examples of a statement that meets the criteria for moving to the second question are these: *"I called Jennifer a &^\$%"; "I grabbed Jeremy and pushed him to the ground;" "I started a rumor that Mark wets the bed." "I punched Tajandra in the face."* When the student does not reach this type of statement, they are likely to give brief and insincere

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responses to *"What was wrong with what you did?"* and to say *"There WAS no problem,"* in response to *"What problem were you trying to solve?"* In addition, in these situations, their alternative plans for solving the problem without hurting someone will be rote, nonreflective responses like *"Just walk away"* or *"Just don't hit any more."* The student will be unlikely to learn anything from the process after writing these statements.

The art of supervising this process involves telling young people that they have not yet fully answered the question they are working on, then leaving them to it and returning when they tell us they are ready for us to edit with them again. I have seen creative writing teachers use the same process well- moving back and forth between students at work, giving brief feedback, and moving on to the next student or waiting until another student was ready. As I wrote above, the supervising adult should have other things to do.

I have found it useful to have a list of questions ready to help students refine their answers to each question. On the next page are some suggestions. Remember to keep these interventions brief and to avoid being drawn into discussion, argument, or helping the student too much. You may want to print the next page and have it nearby when you are supervising this process.

## Questions to help young people as they work on reflection forms:

### For "What did you do?"

- Start with "I"
- What words did you use?
- Where on his body did you hit him?
- Tell me about what they did later- start with "I" now.
- Please write it again leaving out "only" (or "just").

### For "What was wrong with that?"

- (When students say : "The school has a rule about that," or "Because I got in trouble,") Yes, we do have a rule against it..... Why do we have that rule?
- (When students say: "It might have hurt her...)" **Did** it hurt her?
- (When students say: "I hurt him," and you don't think they mean it)
  - How can you tell?
  - What did he do after you called him a \*&^?
  - What did you see?
  - What did you hear?

### For "What problem were you trying to solve?"

"When people hit or call names they are usually trying to:

- get someone to leave them alone
- impress their friends
- have fun
- deal with anger about something else
- or be listened to.

Do any of those sound like the problem you were trying to solve?"

If the word "problem" doesn't apply, ask what goal they were trying to reach or what they wanted to happen after they did what they did.

If the student chooses a goal, like hurting someone, that you cannot honor or agree with, ask them which of the goals above they were trying to reach by hurting someone.

It can be helpful to ask young people if they think they will ever have that problem or goal again in life and if they think they will need to have other ways to solve the problem in the future. It doesn't hurt to let them know that adults also have to solve these problems in ways that don't hurt others.

### For "Next time you have that problem, how will you solve it?"

- Will you ever have that problem again?
- Brainstorm 5 ways you could solve it.
- Will each one work?
- Choose the one to try first
- Choose a backup if that doesn't work.

Remember to look for two things here in agreeing that the student has met the criteria for this question:

- The solutions should address the problem being solved. "Just walk away" might work as a way to deal with being angry. It won't help if someone took something of yours.
- The solutions should all involve positive effective safe actions. "Don't do it again" gives the student no guidance about what to do or how to do it, and thus should not be accepted.

**Problems with the reflection process (continued):**

The other most frequent problem with the think about it process involves young people refusing to complete the questions. The best way to minimize this problem is to use the approach described above:

- Having the reflection process take place during recess, lunch, or detention so there is a built-in incentive to finish it and thus have the consequence end when it was supposed to. If students do this process during class time they may see an incentive for not completing it and thus having to miss more class time.
- Having the reflection process presented as a matter-of-fact expectation for all students who have earned consequences for aggression “to help you not do it again” is more likely to work than asking students to “do this for me.” “Now it’s time to....” may work better than “Now I want you to...”
- A clear set of rules for the consequence time which make it clear that the consequence time doesn’t count if young people do not complete the process fully. Following through on this expectation consistently- without reminding, anger, or power struggles- will make it more likely that young people will choose to complete the process. If they do not do so, they can work on it the next day.
- The person supervising the process has other things to do and is willing to walk away from the student while maintaining a supervisory presence. Walking away and doing something else makes power struggles less likely.
- When the student claims persistently and believably that he or she did NOT do anything, and that they are being punished unjustly, it is sometimes necessary to arrange another meeting with the student and the administrator to review what has happened.
- If the student’s behavior disrupts the consequence time or provides entertainment for the other students there, it is sometimes necessary to remove the student to the office and have him or her earn a more powerful consequence like classes-only.

In addition, it is important to recognize that some persistently aggressive youth may find the process of taking full responsibility for their actions and for those actions’ consequences very difficult. For these students we may choose to use only the first question; to allow “Because I got in trouble” as an adequate answer for the second question, or to make other temporary modifications in the continuing hope that these students will be able to complete the whole process in future incidents.

I hope you have found this information helpful. I welcome your thoughts, further questions, and suggestions from your own practice.

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