

PEER VIOLENCE

Jacek Pyżalski

I. DEFINITION ASPECTS

When does peer violence become severe?

- a. When any act of physical violence occurs.
 - b. When there are elements of cyberbullying.
 - c. When violence is regular, intentional, and contains an element of imbalance of power.
-

Answer **c** is correct. The severity of peer violence does not depend primarily on its form (on what tools the perpetrator uses, e.g. whether it is physical violence or cyberbullying). Much more important is the way in which aggressive acts are committed. The features of peer violence listed in answer c are characteristic of its most serious type – bullying. The most common concept of peer violence was created by Dan Olweus, a precursor of research on this problem (he began his first research in the 1970s). This theory assumes the simultaneous occurrence of three properties: repetition (regularity), intentionality and imbalance of forces (Olweus 2013; Pyżalski 2012, 2015, 2022).

It is worth taking a closer look at these.

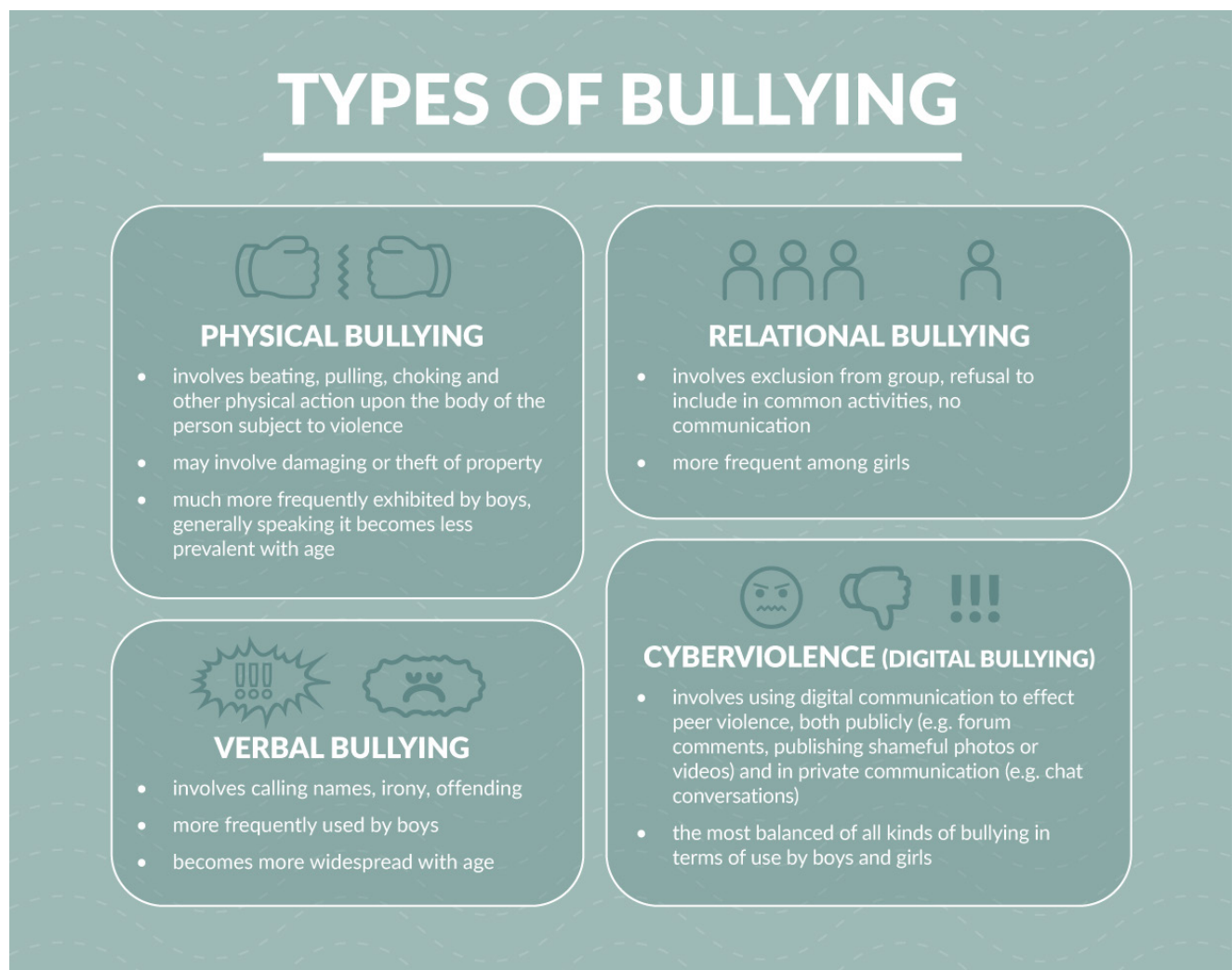
Repetition means that the perpetrators act for a long time – they repeatedly use acts of aggression against the same person. Therefore, it is not bullying when hostile actions are incidental and are related to a single event, e.g. when students quarrel about an issue on one occasion.

We must realize that even if the acts of aggression against someone are minor, their repetition time after time accumulates the effect. This often escapes our attention because we focus on a single situation that seems trivial, not on the fact that it is part of a larger set of unpleasant events that the person experiences over a long period of time.

Intentionality, on the other hand, manifests itself in the fact that young people who are violent want to hurt another person and often derive satisfaction from doing so. However, it is worth mentioning that usually at the beginning, when the perpetrators take the first hostile actions, this **negative motivation is still absent**. Aggressors indicate other reasons than wanting to hurt someone, e.g. the need to be admired by a peer group. Very often, at the beginning, the intensity of hostile actions is not high – the victim is, for example, “just” excluded from the group.

Finally, the last property – **imbalance of power**. It involves a disproportion of power between the perpetrator(s) and the victim. Of course, it is the perpetrators who are stronger than the victim – and certainly this is how the person experiencing aggression sees it. This is most evident when we talk about physical force. More often, however, the advantage is associated with other characteristics of the perpetrator than physicality. For example, the perpetrator may communicate much more efficiently and win every verbal battle in public.

The definitional picture of peer violence would not be complete without a typology depicting the different types of bullying distinguished according to how it is perpetrated. It is shown in the figure below.



The most important consequences of bullying on the part of the victims, as confirmed in numerous studies, include: depression, social anxiety, reduced self-esteem, psychosomatic disorders, and in more serious cases even problems such as suicidal thoughts or attempts (Due et al. 2014). Bullying has many serious consequences, which often persist a very long time – research indicates that negative consequences in the area of mental health can occur even in adults, many years after a period of peer violence.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

Due P. et al. (2005). *Bullying and symptoms among school-aged children: international comparative cross sectional study in 28 countries*, European Journal of Public Health, No. 15 (2), pp. 128-132.

Olweus, D. (2013). *School Bullying: Development and Some Important Challenges*, Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, No. 9, pp. 751–780.

Pyżalski, J. (2012). *Agresja elektroniczna i cyberbullying jako nowe ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.

Pyżalski, J. (2015). *Przemoc rówieśnicza w szkole – badania retrospektywne studentów pedagogiki*, „Studia Edukacyjne”, No. 34, pp. 177–196.

Pyżalski, J. (2022). *Electronic Aggression* [in:] Yan Z. [Ed.]. *The Cambridge Handbook of Cyber Behavior*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Vassallo S., Sanson A., Olsson C. (2014). 30 years on: Some key insights from the Australian Temperament Project, *Family Matters*, No. 94, pp. 29-34.

Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



PEER VIOLENCE

Jacek Pyżalski

II. EPIDEMIOLOGY

Which type of peer violence is least talked about?

- a. Physical violence.
- b. Cyberbullying.
- c. Relational violence.

Answer **c** is correct – relational violence, consisting mainly of exclusion and isolation, is the one mentioned least often. It is the most overlooked and ignored type of peer violence (Bauman, Del Rio 2005). A lot is said about physical violence (answer a). Examples of its appearance at school are often discussed in the media and presented in an emotional, sensational way. Some people completely equate peer violence with physical violence. We also hear a lot about cyberbullying (answer b) – a hot topic that is talked about a lot in public. Sometimes the focus on it becomes excessive, so that other types of violence become overlooked.

*In many cases, before active peer violence occurs
(e.g. beating, name-calling or insulting on the Internet),
the person experiencing it is subjected to relational violence (excluded)
for a long time. That is why it is important to diagnose this
type of violence and act wisely at this very early stage.*

If we look at the results of studies on the epidemiology of peer violence, we notice that the data on the prevalence of this problem vary widely. The differences are also seen in studies performed at a similar time and in the same country. What is the reason for this? Mostly this is due to differences in the design of research tools (Vivolo-Kantor et al. 2014). An particularly important concern is whether the study focuses on agency (the fact that someone used aggression) or victimization (experiencing peer violence).

First of all, as we said before, bullying occurs when violence is repetitive, involves imbalances of power and intentionality. We must point out that not all research tools take these characteristics into account. Some simply ask if this kind of experience has taken place – without checking whether it has been happening on a regular basis. Studies also cover different time frames. Some ask about lifelong experiences, others about the year, month or week preceding the survey. Finally, the question of the imbalance of power, that is, the superior power of the perpetrator or perpetrators over the victim and the helplessness of the latter, is not always considered. If we do not take this characteristic into account, students completing questionnaires will include among the violence they experience quarrels, conflicts and disputes that do not necessarily constitute bullying but are involved in various forms of aggression towards each other. Finally, the property of bullying which is measured the least is intentionality. Questions about it actually only apply to perpetrators who can indicate that they acted specifically to harm another person. When asked about victimization, a person experiencing violence can only guess what the aggressors' motivations were.

The measurement issues discussed above are very relevant – one should be aware of them and choose diagnostic tools deliberately. If the tool does not take into account the characteristics of bullying, then what is measured is not bullying. In that case we usually investigate the broader phenomenon of peer aggression, also including its other forms, less destructive than bullying. At the same time, of course, the percentage of young people considered perpetrators or victims in such studies is higher than when the tool – due to its design – narrows the measurement down to the actual phenomenon of bullying.

Finally, some tools contain a list of specific manifestations of violence, e.g. beating, name-calling, posting malicious comments on the Internet. Clearly, therefore, different lists will mean different percentages of people experiencing or committing peer violence. As we mentioned earlier, some manifestations of violence are overlooked in many tools, so their scale is unknown in a given population. This applies in particular to relational violence manifested by exclusion from the group, lack of communication and invitation to joint activities.

The knowledge presented in this section is very important from two perspectives:

1. We must critically analyze the results of various diagnoses and analyses, paying attention to the design of the tools used to collect data. This will allow coming up with the right conclusions.
2. We should choose with particular attention the tools for practical diagnoses to be used in a particular school. If you do not specialize in this field, it is better to consult and use a good quality tool to obtain reliable results that will be useful for planning adequate preventive or intervention solutions.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

Bauman S., Del Rio A. (2005). *Knowledge and belief about bullying in schools: Comparing pre-service teachers in the United States and the United Kingdom*, „School Psychology International”, No. 26 (4), pp. 428-442.

Berger, K.S. (2007). *Update on bullying at school: science forgotten?*, Developmental Review, No. 27 (1), pp. 90-126.

Vivolo-Kantor et al. (2014). *A systematic review and content analysis of bullying and cyber-bullying measurement strategies*, „Aggression and Violent Behavior”, No. 19 (4), pp. 423-434.



Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



PEER VIOLENCE

Jacek Pyżalski

III. A COMMON MYTH

Is the following statement true or false?

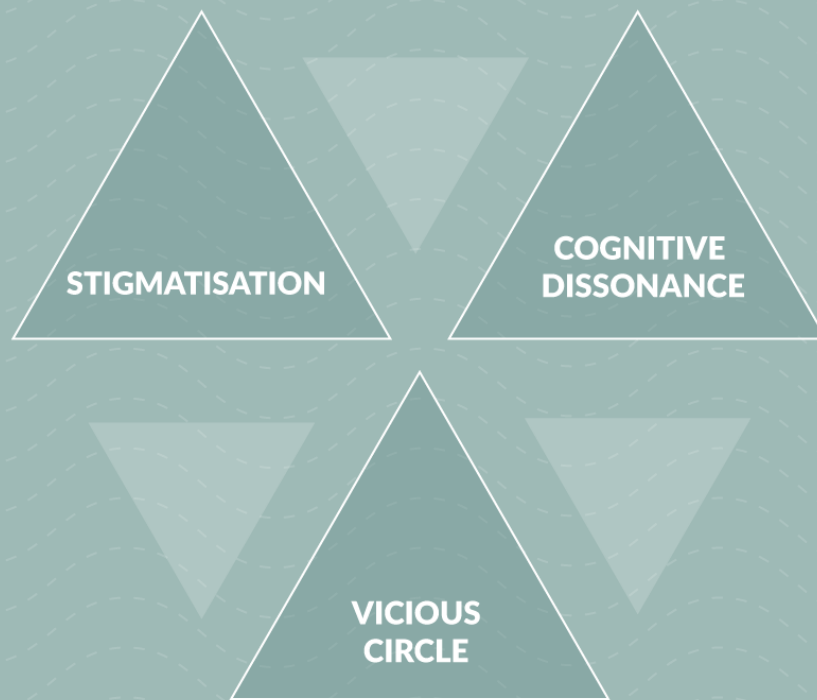
Teachers should intervene the same way into any situation of aggression between young people.

The statement is **false**. The key words here are „the same way”. So it is not about not reacting, but about the fact that the reaction should not always be the same.

Peer violence is a process similar to a forest fire. It starts with single sparks and ends with a huge fire which destroys everything. It is very easy to join the process of bullying, because all people who are involved in it are driven by strong psychological mechanisms. We need to know them in order to understand why it is so easy for people from whom we would never expect such behaviour to become perpetrators of serious peer violence.

Three very important mechanisms discussed in the context of peer violence are shown in the figure below. They are interrelated and usually, when bullying continues for a longer time, they coincide and amplify each other's impact.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS AT PLAY IN PEER VIOLENCE



Source: Own work.

The key is the phenomenon of **stigmatization**, which, according to the late rehabilitation pedagogue Bronisław Urban (2000), makes the person perceived more and more negatively and stereotypically in the group. It is given a kind of label. This phenomenon develops over the following process:

1. In the beginning, isolated confrontations take place. A pupil may point out a certain embarrassing trait of another person by saying, "I don't want to sit at the desk with her because she's dirty." Sometimes these actions seem small and are easy to overlook. These can be, for example: snipes, ironic comments, mocking or including someone as last when distributing something in the classroom (even if it does not result from the natural order, e.g. from seating). It is very important to be mindful and sensitive to such matters in order to notice them early. At this stage, aggressive behavior is incidental and does not usually have a significant severity, but it can be (and often is) the beginning of something more serious.

It is worth remembering that we ourselves can also be the root cause of confrontation. This will happen when we react too nervously, use harsh words under the influ-

ence of emotions, are sarcastic or express disapproval non-verbally, but in a manner which is legible for students. This can provide a model of behavior for the peers of the person towards whom we behave in this way.

2. At the stage of judgment, the person begins to be treated aggressively by many and a lot of the time. Everyone else focuses only on those qualities that have been noticed and judged negatively. More and more people are beginning to perceive that a person experiencing violence only has these characteristics. In addition, sniping at someone is sometimes funny and is a kind of glue bonding the group. On the other hand, the person experiencing violence begins to become helpless and slowly loses hope that he or she will be treated better in the group.
3. The final stage of the stigma process is “entering the role”. The person experiencing violence often succumbs to what their peers think and say about them. In addition, he or she begins to behave in accordance with the expectations of the environment (Urban 2000). So the mechanism can be very simple.

If we consider the stages of stigma, it becomes clear that it is best to act early. At the stage of confrontation, it usually turns out to be effective to enforce the rules of conduct towards others, established in the class and to react together in this way to manifestations of peer aggression. Such – only seemingly trivial – actions will usually be too weak when things reach the stage of judging or entering the role. At this latter stage, the image of a person has already been fixed.

The second mechanism is **cognitive dissonance**. This phenomenon, described by the classic social psychology author Leo Festinger (Aronson, Wilson, Akert 1997), occurs when we do something inappropriate and at the same time incompatible with our positive beliefs about ourselves. It is in such moments that there is a mental tension that we try to minimize. This can be done by changing our behavior (so that it is consistent with what we think about ourselves) or by changing the way we think about the reason why we take such actions.

What does it look like in the case of peer violence? Usually, a young person joins in harassing someone else unintentionally. She or he does not want to hurt anyone, but does it because a significant person does the same. Often in a different context, e.g. outside of school, the abuser may even be friends with the person towards whom they behave this way. And this is where the dissonance steps in – the pieces clearly do not fit each other. Someone causes pain and distress to another person, and at the same time thinks “I’m okay, I’m not hurting others”. So there is discomfort that can be eliminated by thinking worse and worse about this person. That way, justification is achieved: “well, maybe I’m hurting her, but she has deserved it.” The longer someone hurts somebody, the worse they think of the person being hurt.

Again, it becomes clear that it is better to act early. In the later stages, young people will create and perpetuate very negative beliefs towards the person who is the victim, and it will be very difficult to change these beliefs.

The last mechanism is referred to as the **vicious circle**. It consists of the fact that a person badly treated by others for some action begins to repeat it more and more often. For example: someone constantly tells on others, which is met with negative reactions from the group. He could stop, but – usually automatically – he is more likely to engage in behavior for which he is disliked. This, in turn, again makes the group behave in even more hostile ways – hence the name “vicious circle”.

Such a process is very difficult to stop. It is also difficult to understand, because from a logical point of view it makes no sense. And yet it does occur, as it results from emotions experienced by both parties.

The conclusion is the same once again: the sooner we act, the less likely the vicious circle is to perpetuate.

Going back to the question from the beginning of the chapter, let us emphasize that it is a good idea to act whenever we see peer violence. But always in a way that depends on the stage of the problem. At the beginning, simple actions (e.g. calmly showing disagreement with a certain behavior) suffice, which at later stages of peer violence will usually prove ineffective.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

Aronson E., Wilson T.D., Akert R.M. (1997). *Psychologia społeczna. Serce i umysł*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka.

Pyżalski J. (2012), *Agresja elektroniczna i cyberbullying jako nowe ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.

Urban B. (2000). *Zaburzenia w zachowaniu i przestępczość młodzieży*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



PEER VIOLENCE

Jacek Pyżalski

IV. TYPICALLY AT SCHOOL...

What is the best way to counteract peer violence at school?

- a. React to cases of peer violence noticed.
 - b. Support building good peer relationships from the beginning of the class functioning as a group of people.
 - c. It is a good idea to apply the solutions in a and b together.
-

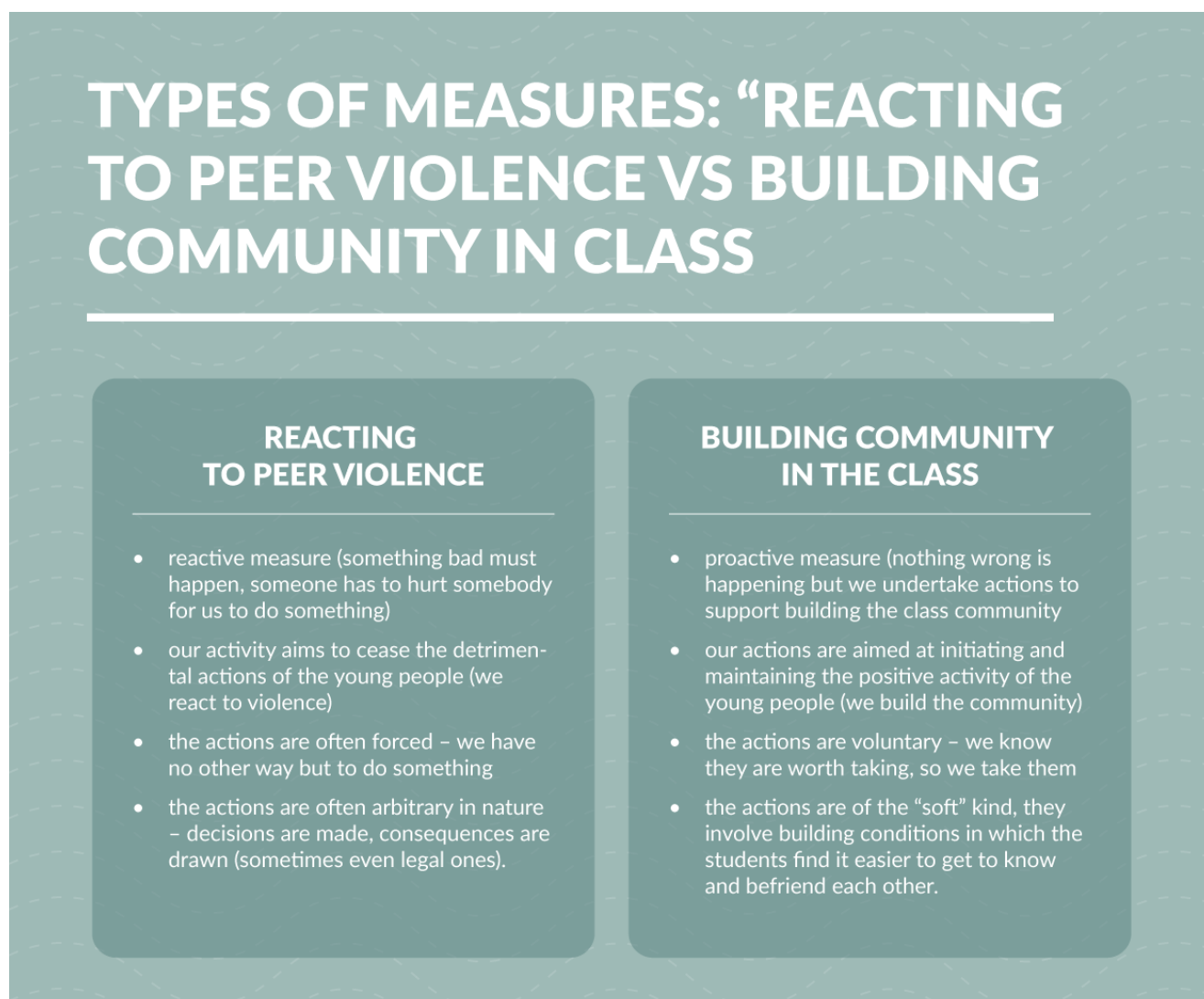
Obviously, **c** is correct, and probably the answer chosen by most readers. We all know, after all, that it makes sense on the one hand to react when bad things happen (someone hurts another), and on the other hand to take actions towards building up the good (in this case: building community in the class). Why therefore – if this is so simple – do we have this question in our materials? This is the point exactly: because something that seems obvious as a general recommendation proves very hard and is not done so often at all when it comes to pedagogical practice (see Pyżalski 2018).

In the daily life of many schools, the answer to peer violence is mostly reaction to situations where someone gets hurt. Undertaking different measures before the problems arise happens less frequently. We need to note that such a pattern applies to all kinds of violence (Barlińska et al. 2018). In case of relationship violence (exclusion), the problem is even more widespread – we try to help someone who is excluded rather than take action to prevent such exclusion in the first place. This has been demonstrated in numerous studies (see Bauman, Del Rio 2005, 2006; Woods, Wolke 2013).

This is understandable. In our lives, we tend to react to things that have already come to be. This is the case with our health – we get treated when illness comes, but are much less mindful of prevention.

Back to our typology of measures (reactive vs. proactive): we need to know that is very intuitive and pragmatic. It will be useful for analysing both our own activities in the area of peer violence and the actions of the institution we work in as a whole. Such discernment is very useful if we want to implement any changes wisely or broaden the scope of solutions we apply.

To understand the difference well, it helps to look at the comparison below:



Source: Own work.

As we review these types of measures carefully, it is worth remembering that both are necessary for coping with peer violence in school. However, it is the intense activities geared towards building a community in class that should be prioritised. It is a good idea to pursue them from the first day of working with the young people.

Most people working at school report that they do implement solutions of this kind. Unfortunately, the way they are implemented – and hence also their efficacy – is very limited. Most of the time, measures are limited to organising teambuilding activities and events (trips, dances etc.) for the students. Of course, these are not inappropriate solutions, but they will

certainly not be sufficient for building a community in class, which is why it is worthwhile to use a broader range of practices supporting establishment of bonds between peers in a class.

Of course, even if we implement the wisest of solutions to bond the group together, different forms of peer aggression may still emerge. It is recommendable to react to those, right when they are isolated incidents and have not yet turned into structured violence, i.e. bullying. Studies demonstrate, however, that such teacher reactions are not always present, and they depend on many factors, including the behaviour of the person affected by violence – e.g. whether or not it seems that he or she provokes the peers' behaviours (Sokol, Bussey, Rapee 2016).

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

Barlińska J. et al. (2018). *Ich słowami – obraz pomocy w sytuacjach cyberprzemocy rówieśniczej z perspektywy uczniów*, „Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka”, No. 17 (4), pp. 82–115.

Bauman S., Del Rio A. (2005). *Knowledge and belief about bullying in schools: Comparing pre-service teachers in the United States and the United Kingdom*, „School Psychology International”, No. 26 (4), pp. 428–442.

Bauman S., Del Rio A. (2006). *Preservice teachers' responses to bullying scenarios: Comparing physical, verbal, and relational bullying*, „Journal of Educational Psychology”, No. 98 (1), pp. 219–231.

Pyżalski J. (2018). *Przeciwdziałanie przemocy rówieśniczej w szkole – krytyczny przegląd stosowanych rozwiązań*, „Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka”, No. 17 (1), pp. 30–45.

Sokol N., Bussey K., Rapee R.M. (2016). *The impact of victims' responses on teacher reactions to bullying*, „Teaching and Teacher Education”, No. 55, pp. 78–87.

Woods S., Wolke D. (2003). *Does the content of anti-bullying policies inform us about the prevalence of direct and relational bullying behaviour in primary schools?*, „Educational Psychology”, No. 23, pp. 381–401.



Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



PEER VIOLENCE

Jacek Pyżalski

V. HOW CAN ONE INFLUENCE IT?

To what extent can the presence of aggression and peer violence in school be reduced?

- a. It can be done 100%.
 - b. Victimisation rates can be brought down to 17–20%.
 - c. The influence we can have on it is small – it is a major success if the victimisation rates can be reduced by 3–5%.
-

Answer **b** is correct. Such are the rates reported by researchers investigating the effects of multiple programs in parallel and comparing their effectiveness (e.g. Ttofi, Farrington 2011). Of course, the effectiveness indicators differ depending on the length and intensity of programmes and on their components (i.e. what specific measures are implemented).

From a practical standpoint, what is most important is which programmes (sets of measures) bring good results and what should be taken care of to achieve results meeting the expectations. In-depth analyses of the best solutions in this area indicate that effective programmes for counteracting peer violence in schools tend to have several key elements in common, which are presented in the figure below. The list presented can be used by school staff to familiarise themselves with the current violence counteraction practices and to reflect upon what can be improved, and how.

PROVEN PROGRAMMES FOR COUNTERACTING PEER VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL FEATURE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS AND PRACTICES:

- They deal with all types of peer violence, i.e. physical, verbal, relational (exclusion) violence, as well as cyberviolence.
- They focus on everyday life and regular activities, rather than just educational activities providing knowledge about the violence phenomenon.
- They engage the entire school community – not just learners, but also the teaching staff, parents and school personnel (e.g. janitors, kitchen staff).
- Measures for counteracting peer violence are put together in the form of a cohesive strategy, which everyone knows well and understands.
- Training related to peer violence is participated by the entire school community (with content adapted to different groups separately). The training sessions are aimed at specific practical skills and ways to act in the school community.
- Activities of the school geared towards counteracting peer pressure are subject to evaluation (verification of their effectiveness).
- In the case of students, the solutions apply to all: victims, perpetrators and witnesses of peer violence.
- Intervention measures (when the violence is already present) are considered as a last resort. Before them, cohesive preventive measures are implemented, including those focused on building class communities (as described in our training, in the module prepared by P. Plichta).
- The measures are long-term, rather than one-off actions (such as a one-off theatrical performance about violence for the pupils).
- The programmes also develop the awareness of legal responsibility and procedures applicable to major cases of peer violence (in liaison with institutions such as the police or the family and guardianship court)

Example programmes proven to be effective in scientific studies, worthy of further reading, include:

- Youth Matters (USA)
- Olweus Bullying Prevention (Norway)
- KiVa (Finland)
- Zero (Norway)
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (USA)

Many of these programmes were also adapted for use in other countries.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

Ttofi M.M., Farrington D.P. (2011). *Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: a systematic and meta-analytic review*, „Journal of Experimental Criminology”, No. 7, pp. 27–56, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-010-9109-1> (accessed: 30.03.2022).



Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



PEER VIOLENCE

Jacek Pyżalski

VI. THE IMPACT OF THE TEACHER'S COMPETENCE

What abilities must teachers have to effectively act upon peer violence?

- a. They must understand the psychological mechanisms of peer violence and individual mechanisms related to engagement in different roles (perpetrator, victim, perpetrator-victim and different types of witnesses).
 - b. They must know the definitions of bullying and ways to diagnose it.
 - c. They must know specific preventive and intervention solutions.
-

It was probably not easy to choose the right answer here – not surprisingly, as **all answers (a, b, c)** are correct. Each competence is necessary to effectively cope with the peer violence problem. And they are all worth learning if we want to tackle this kind of problems in school.

Let us then have a look at the key issues in each of the three areas. Such an overview may provide a map to anyone seeking knowledge on peer violence, its effects, considerations and preventive and intervention solutions.

Answer **a** presents something of a theoretical approach. Many might say that such theory is of little use in coping with peer violence in everyday school life. This, however, would be a highly misleading take on the issue. Without knowing the mechanisms and considerations, one may apply known practical solutions, even very good ones, but do so inappropriately. If we want to implement a solution without knowing the specifics of when and how to do it, not only will this be ineffective, but it may even result in an opposite outcome (Pyżalski, 2012; 2018).

Let us refer to a specific example here. If we know the mechanisms of peer violence, even at a rudimentary level (we describe them in the third chapter of this module), we know that

at each stage of its growth, the attitude of the perpetrators changes (escalates), as does their behaviour towards the young person affected by the violence. Knowing the stage things are at, we can know which solutions can be applied. For example, if it is the confrontation stage, all we need to do when isolated cases of abuse occur is to react appropriately, firmly but in a moderate manner, and remain consistent in the communication of principles etc. If, however, things have moved on to further stages of stigmatisation and the violence has grown, it is indispensable to begin targeted individual work with the person affected and the perpetrators. Some of the effective solutions – e.g. shuffling students between desks, so that everyone gets to sit with everyone else – work great in classes where violence is absent and reduce its future risk. Unfortunately, if we apply them in a class in which advanced violence towards a person exists, we will harm such a person, because when shuffling places everyone will try not to be seated with that person. They will also ridicule whoever is seated with them. Therefore, unless we know what are the characteristics of bullying and recognise that bullying is what we are dealing with (i.e. that it is a late stage of growth of violence), even an otherwise (at other times) excellent solution may result in some major damage.

These issues encroach on the scope of the second response option **(b)** for the introductory question in this chapter. It is very important here to recognise and determine if the case at hand involves “ordinary” conflict and unavoidable disagreements among the kids, or else, serious peer violence, which often ensues with long-term detrimental effects. If we are wrong in this, we will either be “taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut” or ignoring something very grave and threatening. Hence, knowledge of ways to diagnose peer violence is indispensable. Before we begin to explore the methods and solutions pertaining to peer pressure, it is a good idea to read some literature discussing the phenomenon itself, its types, mechanisms and considerations. Publications recommended in this module can be a good start (Plichta, 2016).

Finally, the last answer **(c)** is about the solutions we apply to prevent peer violence or react when it happens. What is the difficulty? Why do some solutions described in textbooks not work in practice? Most of all: it’s in the details. A lot of the time, whether a solution will be successful or not depends on minutiae, little things that are ignored in generalised descriptions. Therefore, it is a good idea, when planning different solutions, to refer to the experiences of people who have implemented them in different contexts. That is exactly what we are doing in further project materials, where teachers talk about their specific experiences. In choosing a solution, we should think again about what previously worked, and what did not. That allows us to plan, do things better, differently, working in a specific context (e.g. in a particular class). Flexibility is of the essence here.

If the issues described in the text are of particular interest to you, or if you are facing a similar problem in your school, we encourage you to read the following materials.

References

Plichta P. (2016). *Przemoc rówieśnicza i uczniowie ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi – uwarunkowania i propozycje rozwiązań profilaktycznych*, "Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka", No. 15 (1), pp. 27–52.

Pyżalski J. (2012). *Agresja elektroniczna i cyberbullying jako nowe ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”

Pyżalski J. (2018). *Przeciwdziałanie przemocy rówieśniczej w szkole – krytyczny przegląd stosowanych rozwiązań*. "Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka", No. 17 (1), pp. 30–45.



Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



SCHEME - PHILOSOPHY

Activities promoting student wellbeing (regardless of the area addressed in our project) should be implemented in a logical and coherent way involving the whole school community. What follows is a clear description of a strategic way of thinking about a specific area, important for young people's wellbeing and mental health. We show how it can be holistically addressed in the school. In order to make the strategy as practical as possible, its different stages are presented in blocks, together with questions that the school management and teaching staff need to answer at each respective stage.

Such an analysis should help the management to see whether the activities in a particular area carried out in the school follow a model that has a good chance of being effective. The analysis can provide basis for a decision about what to improve and how. Teachers can assess how appropriate in terms of the subject matter are the activities conducted in school and consider how to coordinate their individual work with them. Even the best teacher initiatives, in which a lot of time and energy is invested, are often not very effective if they are not coherent with the activities of others in the school and with a shared philosophy. Of course, it is clear that the quality of activities aimed at young people's wellbeing and the awareness of important issues in this area differ from one school to another. However, it is always worth starting where we are, with the potential we have at our disposal. It is useful to know the goal we are aiming for, namely system-wide action at a level of the school as a whole.

For each of the six thematic areas, we have prepared an extensive list of activities that can be carried out within it, with a brief description of each.

STRATEGIES

1. Is this area related to the wellbeing of pupils important in our school?

Baseline – the problem	Baseline – actions	Baseline – support and training
Have there been any major events that have made the given issue important in our school?	What activities in a particular area (effective and well-received by the community) are already being carried out by our school?	What is our knowledge of the issue in question? What training have we attended? What is our competence in the area concerned?
What data do we have from diagnostic studies (e.g. surveys of the problem at school)?	How are the activities in this area carried out by our school so far evaluated by: pupils, parents, teachers?	What knowledge and support do we lack?
Have learners, parents, teachers or anyone else reported that there are any problems/gaps in the area?	Which activities carried out by our school in this area are ineffective or have very little effect?	What support do we as a school use in a particular area? Which experts, professionals and institutions are helping us?
	Which activities carried out by our school have proven to be effective, producing good or very good results?	How do we evaluate the support we already use?
	Are the activities related to this area coordinated in our school?	Are there any establishments, professionals carrying out activities in this area that are worth following or implementing?
	What actions are missing in this area?	What are the costs of the measures we want to implement, and do we have or can we get the funds for them?
		Are there entities or institutions that can provide support to our school at no cost?

STRATEGIES

2. Are we acting in this area according to a common philosophy and together?

Philosophy of action	Joint actions
Do we all define an area in the school in a similar way? (This includes learners, teachers, parents as well as other school staff).	When planning activities, do we include everyone (learners and teachers, parents, other school employees) in the discussions and decision-making processes, and how?
Do we have a school-wide document that defines the area and describes what the school does within the area?	When implementing solutions in an area, do we listen to and take into account everyone's voices about the actions being implemented (both positive and critical)?
Do we define the area not only negatively (e.g. anti-violence), but also positively (e.g. fostering positive peer relationships)?	Do we constructively resolve conflicts at school when differences of opinion arise about what to do and how to run a particular programme?
What professional literature do we use to define an area?	How do we take into account the special needs of certain students (or groups of students), e.g. those with specific disabilities, in programmes in the area?

3. Are our activities in a specific area logically planned for the long term?

Activity structure – planning phase	Structure of measures – implementation phase	Structure of activities – evaluation phase
When planning activities, do we discuss the results of the diagnosis or carry out additional diagnostic activities?	Are the tasks in the area being implemented according to the agreed plan?	Do we continuously review the effects of the area's activities and the implementation process itself?
Are we using good quality methodological and scientific studies when planning solutions?	Do we document the introduction of activities in the area?	Are we using ongoing lessons learned to modify and improve operations?

STRATEGIES

3. Are our activities in a specific area logically planned for the long term?

Activity structure – planning phase	Structure of measures – implementation phase	Structure of activities – evaluation phase
Do we review and consult solutions with external experts before implementing them?	Does the team responsible for implementing the activities discuss implementation difficulties on an ongoing basis and seek ways to deal with those?	Is an evaluation conducted after each major (pre-defined) period of programme implementation?
Is there a clearly defined, leader-led team working on action planning in the area, in which – at least to some extent – all important groups in the school are represented?	Do we have good quality internal and external communication about what the school is doing in the area?	Are the results of the evaluation discussed and the conclusions used in further implementation of the solutions?
Does the team set for themselves tasks to be completed within a certain timeframe and check that they have been completed? na środku nic, a po prawej: Are the results of the evaluation communicated (at least to some extent) internally and externally? How? To whom are they communicated?		

Attribution - ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



PEER VIOLENCE

Jacek Pyżalski

As we have highlighted in the presented model, peer violence prevention activities should be implemented following a shared philosophy and understanding of the problem, based of the following assumptions:

- an approach geared not only to preventing violence, but also to building a positive social climate in the school;
- involving all relevant groups in prevention and intervention activities, i.e. learners and educators, parents, school staff and external experts;
- focusing on all types of peer violence: physical, verbal, cyberviolence and relational violence (exclusion) – it is important not to focus only on selected types of violence;
- prioritising prevention (community building) over intervention – acting before violent situations arise that need to be addressed;
- rapid and thoughtful response to acts of aggression and minor forms of violence so that the problem does not escalate;
- clear procedures for responding to, reporting and obtaining support for serious incidents of peer violence;
- attention to groups particularly vulnerable to victimisation (e.g. children with special educational needs or children with experience of migration, who, according to research, are more likely to be victims of violence).

STRATEGIES

The implementation of such a philosophy in the area of peer violence prevention includes the following list of solutions, which should be implemented as components of the coherent school strategy discussed above:

- Formulation and dissemination of a clear institutional policy on peer violence (official document).
- Establishing clear procedures for determining which manifestations of peer violence are of a serious nature and what actions (related to reporting the matter and obtaining professional external support) are carried out when such violence occurs.
- Providing teachers with high-quality training on the mechanisms of peer violence, prevention and intervention.
- Providing teachers with high-quality training on methods of integrating the class, building class community and resolving conflicts.
- Implementing group integration measures (e.g. encouraging young people to work together) and conflict resolution measures (e.g. strengthening peer relationships).
- Discussing the quality of implementation (the outcomes) of solutions that integrate class teams in school.
- Well-prepared, brief educational materials for all staff in the organisation. They should include: the assumptions for a common understanding of the problem and basic information on the causes, types and consequences of peer violence.
- Professional educational (and in certain cases therapeutic) work with young people experiencing, using and witnessing violence.
- Providing teaching staff with superintendent support in more serious cases of peer violence.
- Ongoing discussion of cases of peer violence and intervention and prevention activities, including their effectiveness.
- Ongoing reporting of serious cases of peer violence to relevant institutions (mainly the police and the family court).

STRATEGIES

- Meetings on peer violence for all staff in the organisation as well as parents, pupils and students – information on the problems of peer violence and its consequences, and why this issue is important for the institution.
- Meetings on peer violence for parents and carers - informing about the school's philosophy and specific solutions in this area.
- Well-prepared short educational materials for parents, carers and guardians - informing about actions to be taken when peer violence occurs.
- Targeted educational activities for the students on violence and its mechanisms, as well as how to react when witnessing it.
- Involving young people in educational (peer learning) and e.g. artistic activities related to peer violence.
- Collecting information on an ongoing basis from all actors in the school about problems with peer violence.
- Evaluation activities that cover both the problem of peer violence (e.g. anonymous surveys) and the perception of the implemented solutions (e.g. collection of anonymous feedback). A similar evaluation of the quality of peer relations in the school (as part of the social climate of the organisation). The results of the evaluation should be discussed and the conclusions put into practice.

Attribution – ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:



PEER VIOLENCE

SCENARIOS AND SHORT ACTIVITIES

Izabela Podsiadło-Dacewicz

CURIOSITY GLASSES

Invite the children to put on their curiosity glasses for a while. You can ask them to make them as part of their homework. Tell the class to look through them for a moment at the world, their surroundings, objects, other people – as if they were seeing them for the first time. Then have the children look with curiosity at themselves. Let them ask themselves:

- “How am I?”
- “What’s the news with me?”
- “What is important to me now?”
- “What do I miss?”

Invite pupils to walk around the classroom. When you say ‘stop’, have them stop at the person closest to them and ask curiously:

- “How are you doing?”
- “How do you feel?”
- “What do you need?”

Briefly summarise the curiosity glasses walk with the children. Ask what the glasses helped with. What did the pupils and students learn about themselves and about each other?

THE SPIDER WEB – WHAT DO WE HAVE IN COMMON?

Objective

Integration of the class team, getting to know each other, developing empathy and understanding for others.

Materials

- A ball of string or yarn
- Strips of paper with unfinished sentences, hidden in an envelope (examples of sentences can be found at the end of the scenario)
- A board with the caption: "...and me, we are similar/similar in that....".

Steps

Sit together with the children in a circle. Start the exercise with the ball of string in your hand. Draw a strip, put the text on the strip in place of the dots at the beginning of the sentence on the board and complete the sentence. Throw the ball to the child of your choice. Now it is he or she who draws the strip with the sentence he or she finishes and throws the orb further away. And so on. The card with the unfinished sentence is only drawn by the person when the ball goes to them. Not before, as it is important that the children listen to each other.

This way a spider web is made, which symbolises the fact that almost all people are connected by, for example, similar feelings, although we do not think about this on a daily basis and it is difficult to notice. The web can be kept and placed in a prominent place in the classroom as a symbol of the bond between people.

Modification

Children can throw the ball of string to each other without drawing the sentences, saying: "Me and ... [name of the child to whom the orb goes] are similar/similar in that ... [indicating similarity]".

Looking for similarities with people who may be different from us requires stopping and reflecting. It can be a form of both integration of the class team and a preventive action to protect against exclusion and violence.

Suggested examples of unfinished sentences

1. A girl who looks very sad....
2. The boy who has a new model of iPad on which he plays all the time...
3. The boy who has a severe visual impairment and very bad sight,...
4. A girl who is very overweight....
5. A boy who is escorted to school every day by his mother wearing a hijab....
6. A boy who has three younger siblings and has to look after them after school....
7. A girl of Roma origin...
8. A boy who walks on crutches....
9. A girl whose dad gets around with the help of a wheelchair....
10. A boy of Vietnamese nationality...
11. A boy with a visible scar on his cheek....
12. A girl without hair or eyebrows....
13. A boy who has a much too big jacket and too long trousers, worn-out shoes and no mobile phone....

14. A girl who lives in an orphanage...
15. A boy in tracksuit bottoms, with a basketball....

THE MAGIC NINE

Draw the number 6 on the floor with chalk or make it with painter's tape. Divide the children into two teams. One should stand on top of the number and the other on the bottom. Ask the children what they see.

Ask the groups to swap places.

Then ask: **what does what they see depend on? Who is telling the truth? What can they do to see other people's point of view?**

Summarise the experience – emphasise that each person has a unique way of seeing the world. Having witnessed the same events, each of us will experience them in our own unique way. Each person is entitled to their own perspective. By being together, we learn each other's perspectives and can thus open up and expand our field of vision.

Ask the children **what it takes to see the other person's perspective.**

In order to notice other people's perspectives, there needs to be movement towards them, an attempt to see the world from where they are, absence of judgement, an acknowledgement that someone may have a different perspective to me.

TRUE OR FALSE – SOME MYTHS ABOUT VIOLENCE

Preparation

Divide the space in the room into two parts – stick a line of paper tape in the middle of the floor. On opposite walls, on two sides of the line, hang pieces of paper with words: "True" on one and "False" on the other one. Inform the children that the line that divides the room marks the boundary between the "True" part and the "False" part, and that the line itself is the neutral zone.

Steps

Inform the children that you are about to read out different statements. After each one, the participants should individually, in silence, decide whether they agree or disagree with it, and then take their places corresponding to their positions – move to the appropriate side of the room. Each person should take a position. If they are unsure of their opinion, they can stand on or just beside the paper line. Those who are sure of their position should stand as close as possible to the 'True' or 'False' sign. The distance they stand from the wall or paper line will reflect the degree of clarity of opinion or the dilemmas that prevent them from taking a firm position.

Once the children have taken their seats, ask them to explain their decisions. If, during the presentation, someone feels convinced by the arguments presented by others, they can change their position.

If you notice that some statements are controversial, you can carry out an exercise to try to reach agreement. Choose controversial sentences and together try to rephrase them so that everyone agrees with the wording.

Proposed statements (with brief justification for the facilitator)

1. Only boys use violence.

False. Both boys and girls use violence.

2. Repeated backbiting and gossiping are forms of violence.

True. In addition to the physical form, there are many other forms of violence, e.g. name-calling, ridicule, backbiting, gossiping, pushing someone away from the group, etc. Backbiting and gossip are forms of violence because they tarnish someone's good name and affect that person's dignity.

3. Physical violence is worse than relational violence.

False. It all depends on the situation. Often relational violence is much worse and lasts longer. The suffering associated with exclusion or rejection can be just as great as physical, only it is less visible because 'blood isn't shed' and sufferers often hide it.

4. If you see a group of students bullying a fellow student, you should help that person and stand up for them.

True. It is important to help. Responding to violence and standing up for those who experience violence is difficult and takes a lot of courage. Often you have to stand up to peers. It is worth remembering that it is possible to ask for help from colleagues, parents, a teacher.

5. If someone experiences violence at school and tells a teacher or a female teacher about it, they will be an informer.

False. Speaking up about violence is seeking help, not snitching. The person affected, but also one who witnesses violence, should tell someone from the teaching staff. In this way they can get support.

6. The best defence against being mocked and ridiculed is also mocking and ridiculing.

False. There are many non-violent ways to defend oneself against bullying and ridicule. The "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" method often ends badly for both the aggressor and the receiver of aggression. It is better to defend oneself by being clever and intelligent.

7. Joking and fooling around – this is not violence.

False. If the jokes hurt someone, it is violence.

Completion of the exercise

Male and female students share their impressions and observations of the exercise:

- “During the exercise I learned that ...”.
- “The most interesting thing for me was...”.

NEAR-FAR

The class stands in a circle. Each child mentally chooses one person from the group – this will be person A. At your clap, everyone starts walking around the room and their task is to be as close as possible to person A.

At the next clap, the children stand in a circle again and each chooses another person – B – in their mind. They then all walk around the room again and their task is to stay as close as possible to person A and at the same time as far as possible from person B.

This exercise is designed to draw the students’ attention to everyone in the class.

You can also use them to divide into smaller groups for a task.

Jacek Pyżalski

HOW NOT TO BECOME AN UNINTENTIONAL PERPETRATOR OF ONLINE VIOLENCE?

Objective

This activity is designed to demonstrate that it is easier to hurt someone in an online environment.

Duration

About 45 minutes

Steps

1. Emphasise that online communication, although widely used, is different from traditional (offline) communication and that another person can be more easily hurt in such contact. Ask students if they know of any cases where someone has unknowingly, impulsively treated another person badly online. Ask young people’s opinions: why is this the case?
2. After the discussion, it is worth talking with the class about issues such as anonymity online and – in the case of written communication online – the lack of the kinds of information we

derive from non-verbal communication (e.g. facial expressions). This often means that we do not recognise other people's emotions, that we do not notice harm being done online, etc.

3. Based on these considerations, you can formulate together a code of action to reduce the risk of becoming a perpetrator of online violence, e.g.:
- When someone upsets you online, step away from the screen/put down the phone and think about what you want to write before you reply.
 - Consider if it is perhaps better to send your reply privately rather than publicly.

Anna Kawalska i Dominika Cieřlikowska

ROPES*

Approximate time for completion of the activity:

15 min (part A) + 15 min (part B) + 5 min (part C)

The activity enables reflection on which behaviours foster good relationships and cooperation in the classroom and which may hinder this. It encourages pupils to seek constructive solutions to conflict and other interpersonal difficulties and to ask for adult support when needed.

Preparation:

- One-metre pieces of string, rope or ribbon – one per pair
- Sentences which facilitate or hinder building good relationships (translated to the languages used by people in the class, displayed on slides)
- A4 sheets of paper and pens or markers
- post-it notes

Steps:

PART A

- Scatter the strings on the floor and ask each person to grab one end. This way, pairs will be formed.
- Ask the children in pairs to stand facing each other, holding the string taut between them.
- Tell them that in a moment you are going to read the statements displayed on the board, which describe different behaviours.
- Ask the pupils to take a step forward if they feel that it is a behaviour that brings them closer to contact with the other person, shortens the distance and builds rapport. If, on the other hand, they recognise that the behaviour discourages contact, increases distance, reduces trust or causes different difficult emotions – they take a step backwards. If they recognise that the behaviour could lead to a break in the relationship with the other person, they indicate this with a gesture that mimics cutting the rope with scissors.

- Present the example in pairs with one person from the class so that pupils and students understand the instructions thoroughly. Ask the individuals to pay attention to where they themselves are standing and where the other person is standing while doing the task.
- Read the sentences one by one and point to them, or ask the class to read them (one person reads the sentence in his/her own language and the others read it in a language they understand).

PART B

- Ask the young people to sit in their seats. Take one string in your hand and cut it. Ask the class to recall some behaviours that they may have found particularly difficult, or that led to conflict or even a broken relationship.
- Tie the two pieces of cut string together. Together look for ways in which the conflict can be resolved, trust can be rebuilt, the situation can be put right. Distribute post-it notes and ask each person to write down their suggestions in CAPITAL LETTERS in a language they know. Stick the post-it notes on the board. Ask the class to approach it and read the suggestions.
- Use translation apps on phones if necessary (e.g. you can take a picture of the board and translate all the words using <https://translate.yandex.com/>. Note: the app is not able to translate handwritten letters, only printed ones).

PART C

- Say that sometimes in a situation of conflict in the classroom it is useful to ask for help from third parties, including adults (from the school and from outside, including from different institutions).
- Have a brainstorming session about who such people might be. Encourage the pupils to have a moment of individual reflection. You can also search for information on the web. Then collect the answers on a poster. This could include, for example: a friend, a colleague from your own or another class, a teacher, an intercultural assistant, a school counsellor, a school psychologist or counselling service, parents, older siblings, the child and youth helpline 116 111 (on-call in different languages), people from NGOs.

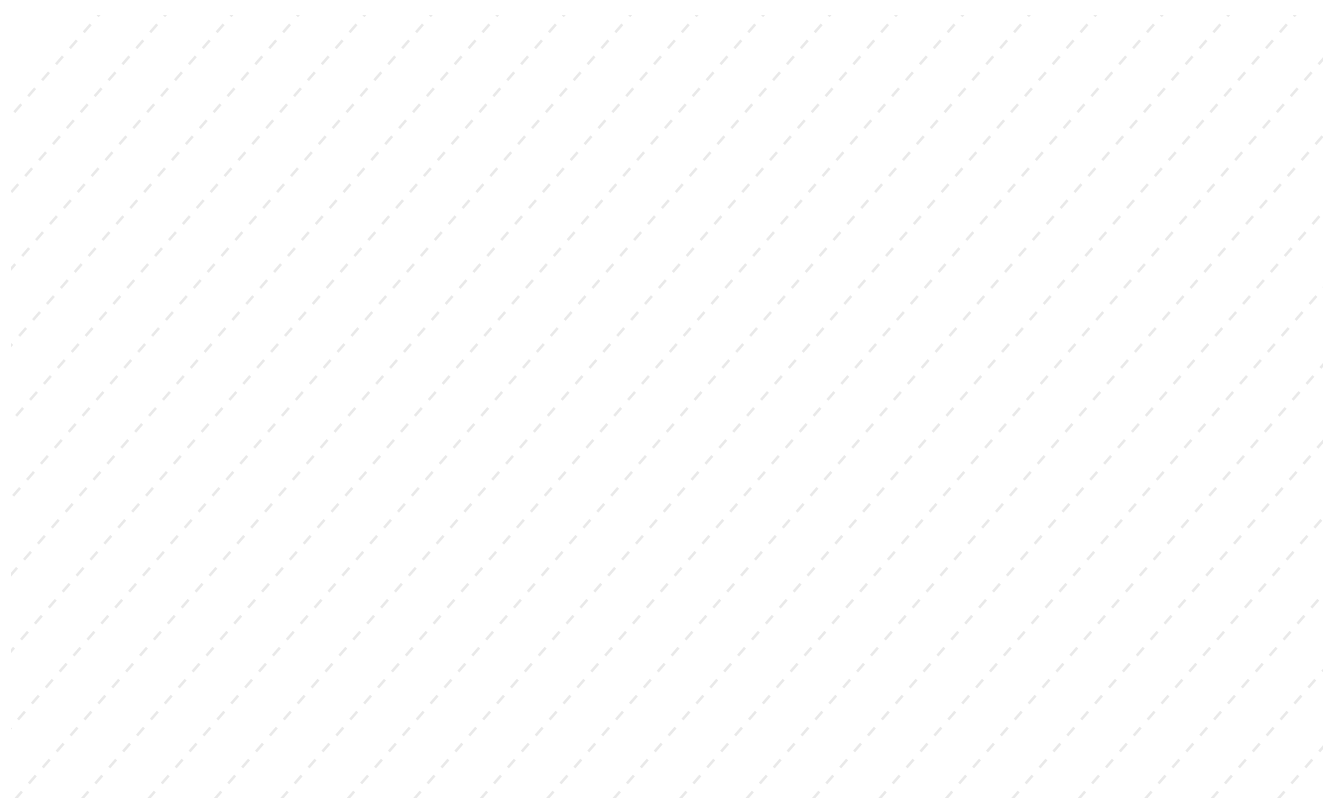
Ask each person to trace his or her hand on a piece of paper and write down five people or organisations that might be helpful to him or her in difficult situations.

The list of sentences with behaviours which support or hinder building relations:

- Someone smiles at you and asks how you are doing today.
- Someone judges you (e.g. says: You are stupid/you are rude).
- Someone tells you how they feel about your behaviour (e.g. When you say to me... I feel bad).
- Someone feels bad about your behaviour but pretends that nothing has happened.
- The other person wants to have the upper hand in the discussion.

- Both people say what idea for a solution they have.
- The person interrupts you when you say something that is important to you.
- A person listens to you carefully.
- Someone shouts at you.
- Someone is backbiting you.
- Someone sends out mocking memes about you.
- Someone lies to you.
- You ask a third party for help when the two of you can't get along.

* The activity comes from the publication "Guide for schools. How to work in an intercultural class at the stage of preparation, integration and further relationship building?" created as part of the program Together in Class implemented by the School with Class Foundation and Plan International



Attribution – ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0).

The School of Wellbeing project benefits from EUR 127,000 in funding from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants. The aim of the project is to create a pedagogical innovation that will raise awareness of the role of the school in strengthening the mental health of students.

The project is co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation.

Program Leader:



Partner:



Funding:

