

Introduction

In recent years bullying has hit the headlines with startling regularity, publicizing shocking stories of student violence, school chaos and emotional distress. While the media contest that bullying has reached epidemic proportions in our schools and communities, it is largely unclear whether the numbers of incidents are rising, or our young people are finding new, more sensational ways in which to hurt, harass and intimidate others.

Whether bullying is rising as citizenship declines, or society is simply more aware of the problem and impact, the issues remain the same: schools and communities are breeding a culture of disrespect, isolation, fear, aggression, indifference and separation. Bullying is unique in its cross-culture influence, knowing no boundaries in terms of location, class, race, gender, age and beliefs. Bullying is as much a problem in the rural school as the inner city workplace.

We now seem to understand bullying far better than ever before, with countless research papers and books published on the subject each year. It is evident that far more schools than ever before are committing time and resources to tackling the issue, with government support. UK schools must have an anti-bullying policy by law, and many US states have introduced anti-bullying legislation, defining bullying in state law and outlining prevention policies for public schools. Despite these advances and the many bullying prevention and emotional literacy programmes introduced to schools, students and parents still complain of victimization, staff report that behaviour management is one of their most time-consuming activities, and an all too-high percentage of students truant and ultimately disengage from school before they were due to leave.

In our work as anti-bullying officers in the UK, we supported countless victims and perpetrators of bullying, their parents and the schools to understand and resolve issues of bullying. We heard numerous stories of aggression, fear, powerlessness, confusion, exasperation and frustration from all parties. As we strived to train school staff, develop policies and resources, and respond to individual cases, we began to acknowledge that issues referred to us where females were both perpetrators and victims accounted for the majority of our face-to-face work with students. Confounding this deluge of need was the complexity of the work: rarely cases could be solved with simple intervention, and often it was difficult to determine whether incidents were to be categorized as bullying or conflict, and therefore be able to identify a victim and perpetrator with certainty. Bullying is defined as *repeated, deliberate behaviour; where a sense of powerlessness can make it difficult for someone to defend themselves.*

While this definition helps us to clarify the nature of bullying and highlights the main facets of it being *deliberate* and *repeated* behaviour, in the real world discerning bullying from conflict – an argument, friendship fallout, or even a physical altercation – can be much more difficult. As we were discovering, particularly with girl bullying, identifying the victim and perpetrator wasn't as clear cut as first appeared, as girls would often become embroiled in retaliation and taking sides. However, this is not to say there weren't many incidents where it was clear someone was on the receiving end

of often vicious, distressing and harmful behaviour, which should be classed as a bullying incident and dealt with as such.

On a daily basis we heard the frustration and uncertainty of staff feeling overwhelmed by low-level incidents that consumed their time and rarely seemed to be resolved despite intervention and support. These incidents involved both girls and boys of all ages, on a spectrum from minor disagreements to physical fights resulting in hospitalization. However, the issue requiring the most time and effort to resolve was relationship problems within friendship groups of girls, where girls would destroy friendships with startling regularity, complain of rumour spreading, damage reputations, make verbal comments and put-downs, emotionally blackmail, and exchange 'dirty looks', to name but a few female tactics. The cycle and exchange of roles from perpetrator to victim left teachers struggling to identify any one action as bullying; however, it seemed apparent that these kinds of behaviours were a subset of bullying, and overall, created a climate of fear, distrust, disconnection and cliques throughout the school.

This book and the activities included here were written for the teacher, counsellor, teaching aide, behaviour specialist or educational psychologist who has experienced the demoralizing rollercoaster of trying to help girls make and maintain friendships and avoid relationship issues escalating to bullying.

Our approach and activities are designed to support the overall well-being of girls, address their social and emotional needs, and help to improve behaviour, relationships and learning across the school. As the title suggests, *Surviving Girlhood* aims to help young women navigate their way through what has always been a challenging time, as childhood gives way to adolescence. At a time when young people are subjected to huge pressures, temptations and external stresses, life can feel more like survival. As caring adults we want the best for our children and to see them relish life. Our hope is that adolescence is a time of growth, maturity, learning and fun that builds a strong foundation for the future.

This book has been written to help tackle girl bullying and relationship problems by preventing such issues from occurring in the first place. *Surviving Girlhood* will upskill our young people with tools, strategies and, most importantly, awareness. The five key themes to *Surviving Girlhood* start from the 'inside-out', reflecting a philosophy of understanding and connecting with ourselves, to better understand and connect with others.

The five key themes to *Surviving Girlhood*

- Theme 1: Being Me
- Theme 2: Influences
- Theme 3: Respect, Responsibilities, Relationships
- Theme 4: Managing Relationships
- Theme 5: Conflict Resolution

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- Resources required:** *Large sheets of paper*
Marker pens
Copies of Worksheet 1: Maslow's Triangle – one per group
- Learning objectives:** *To understand the different levels of need, and to explore what happens when needs are not met*

Draw a triangle on the board to represent Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and introduce the idea of having many different types of needs, starting with essential needs at the bottom of the triangle. Share the titles of the different levels of need as you write them into the triangle:

- essential human needs
- safety
- love and belonging
- self-esteem
- purpose and meaning to life.

As a whole group, brainstorm some needs which may fit into each category, e.g.:

- Essential human needs – water, food, shelter.
- Safety – physical safety, safe place to live and work, feeling confident and secure.
- Love and belonging – family, friendship, relationships.
- Self-esteem – feeling confident, self-respect, looking and feeling good.
- Purpose and meaning to life – through career, work, music, religion, being adventurous.

Split students into groups of five or six and give each group a large sheet of paper and some marker pens. Ask students to re-create the triangle on the board with five different levels (you may wish to have this prepared ahead of time). On their sheet of paper, ask students to work together to write in the different levels of the triangle as many different needs as they can think of, reminding them to consider both physical and emotional needs. Once completed, give feedback and share some ideas of each group.

Give each group another large sheet of paper and ask them to repeat the exercise, this time writing in each level of the triangle what might happen when those needs are *not met*. Provide students with an example, such as what happens when people don't get their need for safety met: they feel frightened, they cannot concentrate, and they become stressed. Share the answers and discuss some examples of situations that might leave people without their needs being met, such as the person being bullied not having his need for safety met when in school.

Facilitator notes

- This can be a difficult idea for some students to comprehend, so provide plenty of examples, and provide the groups with a copy of Maslow's Triangle (Worksheet 1) as necessary.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Triangle

