

THE STRAITS TIMES

Untangling the issues underlying bullying

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There are three things we need to understand about bullying: the emotional, psychological and physical aspects ("Don't let 'get tough on bullying' be mere slogan" by Mr Ng Qi Siang, and "Creating a bully-free school a responsibility for all" by Professor Ho Lai Yun of the Singapore Children's Society; both published on Sept 24).

If we truly want to prevent bullying, we need to address all three aspects. As parents and educators, we lose the vantage point if we only respond after the fact.

- Increase empathy, find healthy ways to release angst

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 n educate at-risk individuals and show them healthy ways to release our students' emotional empathy, by asking them: How would I feel if they were bullying others? How would my friends being bullied?
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 and anger. We can help if they were being bullied if they saw their

By helping our students gain greater control and awareness over their emotions, we can potentially address the emotional cause of bullying before any bullying takes place.

- Give students the mental tools for positivity and strength

We need to coach students in psychological areas, such as positive self-talk, confidence-building and asserting their boundaries.

Positive mental techniques give them tools to cope with the problems of life. When young people know that they have a right to protect themselves, this helps them to build up psychological defences against verbal abuse and emotional bullying.

- Give young people the tools to protect themselves

Lastly, if the measures above fail to stop a persistent bully who resorts to physical abuse, students should be taught how to safely disengage from the situation with minimal violence.

Some might fear that this means teaching students how to be violent. But we should also consider that failure to teach proper self-defence techniques could result in out-of-control brawls that cause even more harm.

If physical confrontations cannot be avoided, then it might be more prudent to teach students how to manage their responses calmly and effectively than to leave them to their own devices.

These emotional, psychological and physical elements are connected and require much attention to untangle.

When we look at the issue this way, bullying does not just involve "culprits" or "victims". Understanding is not enough, we need to act, so no child becomes either the bully, or the bullied.

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