



Getting more for less effort: whole-school actions to improve learning and reduce bullying

Abstract:

This keynote presentation will help participants to systematically assess the strengths, needs and opportunities associated with their school's bullying prevention, early intervention and targeted practices. It will help participants to review current school strategies and determine the most efficient model for the sustained implementation of effective social and emotional development and positive behaviour approaches for students, and to reduce bullying behaviour.

Keynote points

- The impact of poor social relationships need to be treated as seriously as other learning and considered a risk factors that can affect gene expression and mortality.
- Children have a fundamental need to belong. When this is interrupted, healthy functioning decreases.
- Establish social norms, normative expectations about positive social behaviours.
- Use a strategic framework for student wellbeing that maps a collaborative, coordinated, whole-school approach using evidence-informed strategies.
- Use local school data and context to select proactive positive evidence-based strategies over a timeframe of 4 to 7 years.
- Adopt a systematic implementation process that builds specific staff capacity and organisational support – start with staff wellbeing.
- Make student wellbeing and behaviour support an integral part of the school executive role.
- Adopt student behaviour support or wellbeing activities that facilitate cross-year group relationships with a designated location in the school where all students can easily access support such as a “breathe easy” room.

How bystanders respond when witnessing bullying has important implications for the prevalence of bullying problems at the classroom as well as for the well-being of victimised students. In other words, in classrooms where students tend to support and/or defend their victimised peers, rather than reinforce the bullies' behaviours, bullying is less frequent and the targeted students are better adjusted.

The presentation provides an overview of research findings on bystanders' influence on bullying, along with practical recommendations for educators on how to change bystander responses and make them more constructive.

Key messages:

1. Effective anti-bullying work should include efforts to influence bystander responses to bullying.
2. Raising empathy for victimised peers is not enough; students need to be provided with constructive and safe strategies to support these peers.