



## Why student bullying behaviour shouldn't be treated as only a discipline problem

### Abstract:

This workshop will discuss protective factors that appear to divert children from aggressive trajectories, related to their development of social skills and social goals, social information processing, and their capacity for emotion recognition and close relationships with peers or teachers.

These protective factors are findings particularly from the Childhood Aggression Prevention Intervention trial and the Beyond Bullying Friendly Schools Plus research involving students from Pre-Primary to Year 10 students.

Child-focused activities that aim to build emotional understanding and regulation, as well as improved social skills and social understanding, to enhance the social experiences of all the students will be discussed.

### Key messages:

- Punishment for poor behaviour may only suppress not stop this behaviour. Bullying behaviour may be meeting some of the social goals and emotional needs of young people.
- Sanctions for poor behaviour may buy the students' respect amongst some of their peers, or may increase resentment and resistance in students.
- Motivational Interviewing interventions can be seen as an alternative response - a middle way – allowing the school to demonstrate that bullying will not be tolerated, but also actively trying to support the student doing the bullying to improve their behaviour. Motivation is required to learn to value self-control.
- Students need guidance to learn to regulate difficult emotions and behaviours – they need teachers to treat behaviour problems as a skills lag or health problem not only a discipline problem by working *with the student*, not work *on them*.
- Students who begin formal schooling with high levels of aggressive behaviour but who manage to develop a close relationship with their teacher show the greatest decline in problem behaviour over the next three years. Students need firm but caring support to learn positive behaviour change.
- Relationships can get 'stuck' in patterns that are hard to break out of; the Good Times Bank activity helps teachers change a 'stuck' relationship with a student.
- Follow the FONLD Plan to invest in students "Good Times Bank".
  - Follow the child's lead
  - Observe the child
  - Narrate what the child is doing
  - Label the child's emotions
  - Develop and communicate relational themes through core messages.