

What doesn't work?

Two interventions are unlikely to work except as part of a comprehensive intervention:

1. Asking the victim to solve the problem:

Just as in our social reaction to other forms of abuse, we have all tried to get the victims of bullying to act differently to solve the problem. We have trained victims to:

- be assertive
- blend in
- ignore bullying
- pretend they are not bothered by bullying ("Sticks and stones...")

The problem with these approaches used in isolation, no matter how good our intentions in using them, is that they displace responsibility for stopping bullying from us to the victims. If these approaches do not work (and I believe they rarely do), the victim is left with a sense of failure. These interventions can, I believe, be effective only if they are part of a comprehensive intervention.

2. Whole-population education

There are a number of curriculum approaches to reducing aggressive behavior. Most of them teach alternatives to aggression and work to build empathy. The people whose behavior we want to change often ignore these approaches, like sensitivity training as a preventive to workplace sexual harassment. Bullies tend to either deny their behavior or see it as justified. As we watch bullies in an educational discussion of bullying we see one of two reactions:

- boredom ("Man, this is stupid")
- or outrage directed at others, with no realization that the presentation is about them ("I can't believe bullies do that.").

This kind of educational presentation will not, I believe, change bullies' behavior or attitudes unless it is part of a comprehensive intervention

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Contact information:

Stan Davis
PO Box 67
Wayne, ME 04284
207-685-9639
Email: stan@magicwithmeaning.com