FACT SHEET
Rhythmic Interventions for Addressing Bullying

Standing up against Bullying – the Bystander Effect

Probably the most important information to come out of the recent research in this area is on the role of the bystander and how that can be harnessed to reduce bullying. Peers are present as bystanders during most bullying episodes and play a pivotal role in either the prevention or the promotion of bullying (Storey & Slaby, 2008).

Witnessing bullying incidents can produce feelings of anger, fear, guilt, and sadness in observers, similar to the victimized individuals themselves. When bystanders do intervene, almost 50% of bullying incidents finish within 10 seconds (Salmivalli, 1999). Rhythmic interventions can be used to build self-confidence and empower people to stand up to bullying. Individual rhythmic exercises have been designed to allow people to role play confronting bullies and stimulate discussion on this area, with a particular focus on reinforcing personal and community values.

Other exercises explore courage and the challenges of facing up to fear, and the intimidation of the bully.

Peer Pressure

People tend to form friendships and spend time with those who are similar to them in certain key ways. Students tend to hang out with others who bully at the same frequency, and among these bully-prone groups, bullying frequency increases over time. If other students and adults disapprove of bullying, and this disapproval is reflected not only in the school rules but also in the established classroom climate, students may suffer a "social cost" when they bully, and may be less likely to do so (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001). There are a wide number of fun rhythmic exercises that actively examine the benefits and costs of peer pressure, and the strategies that can be employed to avoid those situations that are unhealthy or contradict your values.

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Reducing Bullying Through Social & Emotional Learning

For school age children, and right across the lifespan, bullying is a leading cause of violence against individuals.

Research in schools across Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia has shown close to 25% of young people experience some form of bullying on a regular basis. This harassment can often lead to social isolation and significant mental health issues including stress, anxiety, depression (Cross et al, 2009).

Research shows that multifaceted, whole-school, approaches against bullying are more successful than single programs and that within these, classroom strategies that build social and emotional awareness and understanding (SEL) are vital. These SEL programs address some of the underlying contributing social, emotional, and environmental factors that can lead to bullying (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009).

Rhythmic interventions can be designed to focus on a wide range of social and emotional themes, utilising analogies drawn from the musical activities to build awareness and understanding of a relevant topic. These programs engage individuals in inter-personal communication and collaboration, breaking down barriers that isolate people from each other and actively emphasising the benefits of social support and acceptance.

There is evidence also on the susceptibility of emotionally vulnerable individuals to bullying (Analitis et al, 2009). Almost 50% of victims respond in an emotionally reactive way. Social and emotional learning helps people manage their emotions, and react calmly to provocation, thus reducing the rewards for the bully and avoiding further victimisation for themselves. Students with greater social and emotional competency are less likely to be aggressors, victims or passive bystanders.

Healthy Relationships

Rhythmic based activities offer a perfect entry point for relationship focused interventions as harmonious communal music making employs many of the skills necessary for healthy relationships and can be utilised safely to develop key skills and awareness. Many victims of bullying are socially isolated, lacking in social confidence, and unable to call on peer support in the face of bullying. They often associate with other victims and lack the skills to broaden their social circle (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003). A focus on relational skills, and particularly communication, can assist young people develop healthier friendship networks and reduce their propensity for victimisation while at the same time increasing the likelihood of others standing up for them when they are attacked.