

# Schoolyard or workplace - what makes a bully?

Anthea Simcock, CEO of Child Matters, New Zealand's specialist child abuse prevention organisation says:  
 "Schoolyard bullying has effects way beyond childhood and the schoolyard."

## By RACHEL MCGUIRE

**B**ullying is a far broader social problem than most people realise."

Bullying has been a hot topic in the last month. There have been a number of high profile schoolyard bullying cases coming to the attention of the media and causing debate among the education sector and general public.

This has highlighted the fact that, in the same way that many of our children are subjected to this harmful abuse of power, so too are many adults in their personal and work environments. Workplace bullying is increasingly an issue we hear about.

Last month in the Waikato Business News Management and HR column, Diane Halifax wrote about what you can do as a manager to address the problem of workplace bullying.

Let's take a few steps further back and discuss how these people may have become the bullies they are today. And for that matter, how many of the victims of bullying can fall into the role of a 'victim'.

In doing this we can often better understand what these people have come from and be in an even better position to manage and coach them to deal with these issues.

## The Bullies

Bullying is a learned behaviour. Any workplace bullying issues you strike as an employer are likely to be rooted in issues that go back well beyond the job and in fact are likely to come from issues of the employee's childhood.

A Norwegian, Olweus, has been studying bullying for decades and is seen as one of the most influential researchers in the world on the subject. He has found some direct links with bullying behaviour and childhood abuse:

- Bullies often come from homes that are neglectful and hostile and use harsh punishment.
- Bullying may be learned by observing high levels of conflict between parents. Care needs to be given so that they do not model bullying for their children.
- Olweus has also made some interesting links with bullying behaviour as a child and adult criminal behaviour.
- Bullies identified by age eight are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by age 24 and five times more likely than non-bullies to end up with serious criminal records by age 30
- 60% of students characterised as bullies by grade 6-9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24

## CHILD MATTERS - speaking up for children

Child Matters, New Zealand's specialist child abuse prevention organisation

and 40% had three or more arrests.

- Bullies grow up and often abuse their spouse, children and co-workers.

## The Victims

Much international research has confirmed that bullying causes long-lasting harmful emotional effects on the victims (Olweus, 1993; McMaster, Connolly). In fact, one study (Hawker and Boulton, 2000) found that 30% of youth suicides are the result of bullying.

Bullying has been linked to eating disorders, low self-

esteem, withdrawal, depression, anxiety disorders and to children running away.

Research has also shown that bullied children often have behavioral problems after the bullying and those problems get worse as they get older (Schwartz, McFayden-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit and Bates, 1998). In fact some victims of bullying become bullies themselves as a result.

"Bullying, like many other issues of violence, is largely the result of a cycle affecting both the victims and the bullies", says Mrs Simcock.

Interestingly, children who bully others; children who are victimised; and children who both bully and are bullied; share a number of common characteristics.

Further, they are all likely to suffer negative long-term consequences. Important factors appear to be family and peer relationships.

As a manager, a parent or just a concerned bystander, it is important to know that bullying behaviour doesn't happen just by chance. It is likely to have developed in response to other life events. Both those who are doing the bullying, and their victims, may be dealing with childhood issues that affect their ability to function positively in society, at work, at school or otherwise.

Tackling bullying in the workplace is hugely important. By preventing and acting on workplace bullying, employers may be able to influence

far more than just the behaviours they are dealing with in the work environment.

These actions could affect a much wider cycle, including bullying in the home. Ultimately influencing the role models on whom bullies base their actions.

So next time you are having to deal with a situation of bullying, it may pay to think about what is behind these behaviours.

Don't try to deal with everything yourself - seek advice, training or counselling to support those who are dealing with these types of issues.

## About Child Matters

Every child deserves to flourish in an environment safe from all abuse. Child Matters is determined to ensure that this happens.

Child Matters is New Zealand's specialist child abuse prevention organisation. We are a national charitable trust based in Hamilton.

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