

# Addressing Bullying

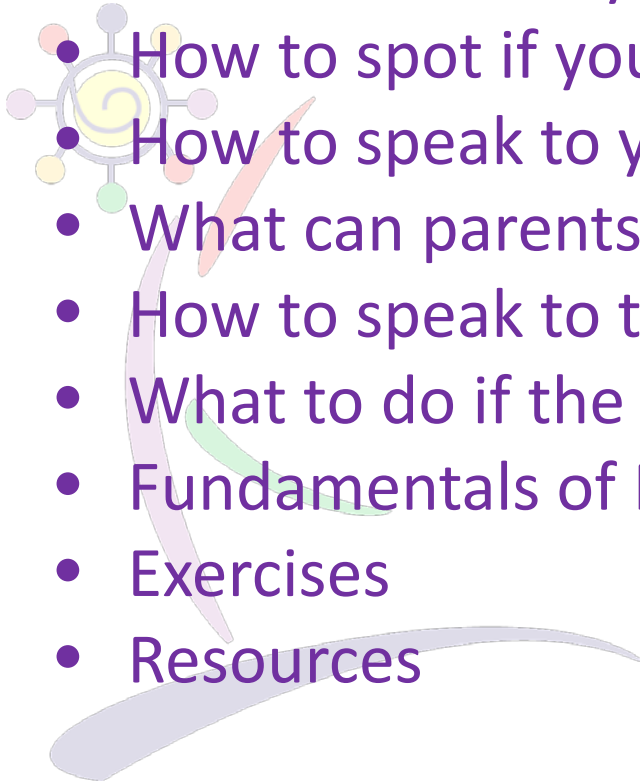
Potential Plus  
Big Family Weekend  
17th February 2013

Dr Shoshana Garfield, PhD  
Dr Sasha Mitrofanov, PhD



# Presentation Plan

- Introduction
- Who we are
- What is bullying?
- Grounds for bullying
- How to spot if your child is being bullied?
- How to speak to your child about being bullied
- What can parents do to get bullying to stop
- How to speak to the school about bullying
- What to do if the school doesn't cooperate
- Fundamentals of Psychological resilience
- Exercises
- Resources



# Who we are



- Potential Plus Members since 2011
- Parents of 8 y.o. daughter, Aliyah
- Private psychologists recently contracted to revamp our child's school wellbeing policy



# Introduction

- What is bullying?
- What are the possible impacts of bullying?
- How are your children affected by bullying right now?
- Whose responsibility is it if your child is being bullied?
- What are the limits to what you, as parent, can do?
- Should your child hit back if he/she is being physically abused or threatened with violence? (Or, more, should he/she hit first??)
- How important is it that bullying ceases completely? (And what's the worst thing that might happen if it doesn't?)



# What is bullying?

- Bullying behaviour is:
  - Deliberately hurtful
  - Premeditated, planned assault as opposed to a sudden or occasional flare up and fight
  - Repeated, often over a period of time
  - Often difficult for victims to defend themselves against.
- Main forms of bullying
  - Physical: hitting, kicking, taking another's belongings
  - Verbal: name calling, insulting, making offensive remarks
  - Social: spreading nasty stories about someone, exclusion from social groups, being made the subject of malicious rumours, sending malicious emails, tweets, etc.



# 'Grounds' for bullying

- Being different AND vulnerable
- Specific excuses for bullying:
  - Belonging to a different ethnicity / faith (racial and religious harassment)
  - Pupils' sexual orientation or perceived orientation
  - Bullying of pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities
  - Being smarter, or more talented, than others
  - Not being able to stand up for oneself emotionally and/or physically



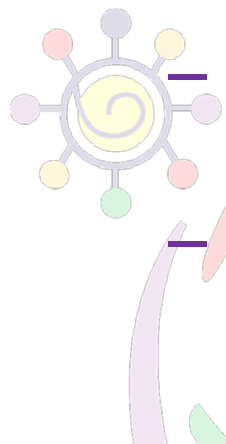
# How to spot if your child is being bullied

- Any changes in your child's behaviour (e.g. being unusually quiet, irritable or aggressive)
- Deterioration in the quality of your child's school work
- A reluctance to go to school
- No friends at school
- Not being invited to birthday parties
- Truancing
- Falling out with previously good friends
- Big changes in your child's relationship with the teacher, e.g. clinging, downtalking, or avoiding
- They tell you! (Sometimes in code!)



# What are the first things you do?

- Keep breathing
- Be aware of your own feelings and thoughts –
  - Were you bullied at school or work yourself?
  - Check in with your feelings – Angry? Distressed? Helpless? Sad? Afraid?
  - Take 100% responsibility for your feelings – *you will be the best champion for your child when you are composed, calm, and assertive...*





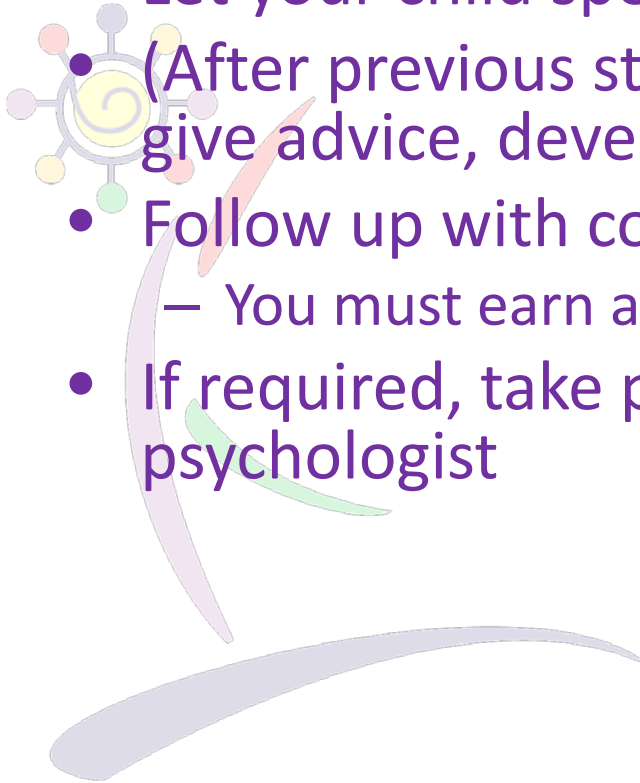
# What can parents do to get bullying to stop?

- Speak to your child about what is happening
- Devise a plan of action TOGETHER with your child
- Speak to the teacher (and school head if necessary and agree on a course of action)
- Follow up with your child and the school until bullying has been stopped completely
- Continue to develop rapport with your children to promote them sharing with you and to process the experience healthily



# How to talk to your child when he/she is being bullied

- Don't launch into lecturing, giving advice, or criticising your child
- Listen for their feelings
- Let your child speak and come up with their own ideas
- (After previous steps!) Make suggestions as appropriate, give advice, develop a plan of action
- Follow up with consistent and persistent action
  - You must earn and keep your child's trust on this issue
- If required, take professional advice from a child psychologist



# How to speak to school about your child being bullied

- Reserve judgement and anger
- Assume school is there to cooperate and do what is best for your child (even if they are not)
- Find out the teacher's (or TA's) perspective on what is going on
- Devise a plan of action together with the school
- Read and use the school's anti-bullying policy to support your argument (or critique to same end)
- Agree on school's responsibility and timeline
- Agree on accountability and progress checking
- Insist on developmental, not just behavioural approach (bully needs support too; happy kids don't bully)



# Pre-emptive actions within the family to prevent bullying

- Educate your child about personal responsibility for actions AND feelings, and lead by YOUR example
- Eradicate victim position in your family / your life
- Take immediate action to prevent potential bullying when you hear any hints of your child being mistreated by his/her peers
- Promote your child's self-esteem / confidence (e.g. through self-defence, sports, writing, or other activities)
- Foster your child's psychological resilience
- Learn and use EFT with your child



# What is 'Psychological Resilience'?

- “Bouncing back” from emotional distress
  - Taking responsibility for one’s emotions (lack of drama)
  - Knowing one can DO something about one’s emotional state
  - Ability to remain focused under pressure (e.g. In test conditions)
  - Safety net of a deep sense of ‘OK-ness’ no matter what
  - The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses
- Resilience involves behaviours, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed.
- Emotional pain is unavoidable – life is a contact sport. In fact, Building resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.



(So is not building resilience!!!)

# Dealing with defensive school responses (examples) 1



- “It is not bullying, it is just children teasing each other and being children”
  - Answer: I agree, sometimes that is exactly what it is. So please help me understand when you think that turns into bullying so I can understand your criteria for bullying. I’m sure we have common ground.
- “Let the children sort it out between each other”
  - Answer: Yes, I get that it is very important for children to develop the skills they need to resolve difficulties with their peers. Those are life skills, like brushing their teeth properly. And I think that is what you are saying you want, yes? (--) And, if someone at work were to up and hit me, it wouldn’t be on me to resolve it all, I would expect my firm to get constructively involved. You agree with that, yes? (etc.)




# Dealing with defensive school responses (examples) 2

- “We cannot control everything children do outside classes”
  - Answer: That’s a very reasonable position. Now, back to this bullying issue...
- “We spoke to [the bully / bully’s parents] so not much else we can do”
  - Answer: I hear that you’re doing all you can think of, and it sounds like you’ve run out of ideas for now. That doesn’t change the situation and this situation is not OK to leave as it is. So, what would it be like for us to think about a constructive next step?



# How to escalate confrontation with an uncooperative school

- Talk with other parents to see if they have had any issues
- Talk with the school governor
-  GIVE more – e.g. Join the PTA and open your mouth
- Get a petition going – unaddressed bullying impacts ALL kids at the school
- Suggest a concrete, alternative anti-bullying policy
- Report to OFSTED / other authorities





# What to do if the school still doesn't do their part

- Take action within best interests of your child even if it is difficult.
- Ask yourself if it has come to this choice –
  - What is more important: my child staying at that school or their emotional wellbeing?
- Examples of action:
  - Change school (even relocate if necessary!)
  - Home-school your children



# Resources

- Developing Resiliency, Helping your child to be happy, effective parenting techniques:  
[www.wellbeingforschools.com/freevideos](http://www.wellbeingforschools.com/freevideos)
- Department for Children, School and Family Guidance document, Safe to Learn, and an Example of a good school Anti-bullying policy:  
[www.wellbeingforschools.com/documents](http://www.wellbeingforschools.com/documents)
- National Healthy Schools Programme, Emotional health and Wellbeing theme  
<http://www.education.gov.uk/a0075278/healthy-schools>



# Role play

- Break down into groups of 3 and 4 and take turns role playing – teacher/Head, parent, observer

- Observer gives feedback:

- What was said that was effective?
- What was said that was less effective?
- What could be done better?
- What else did you notice? (voice tone, gestures, language, etc.)



21 – 6 ½ each (if 3)  
– 5 each (if 4)

# The End

