

# Dr Bob Jacobs on Anti-bullying

*Contributed by Dr Bob Jacobs from The Parenting Centre.*

As a clinical psychologist, child advocate, and parent, I have had many opportunities to talk to schools about bullying. Staff are usually very concerned and well meaning, but they don't know what to do. School bullying is usually addressed in three ways (disciplining the bully, increasing supervision, or lecturing the students), and history teaches us that none of them work.

So what is the essence of bullying? Bullying is when a stronger person intimidates a weaker person. So what would be a real, meaningful approach to bullying? My work with parents often focuses on their power as role models. Parents can just be the people they want their children to be. Children will do what you do, rather than what you say. Similarly, the adults at school have a golden opportunity every day to role model behaviour for children.

So what behaviour is modelled by the adults at school? Much of what happens at school is about controlling children. Getting them to behave, comply, conform, etc. And how is this accomplished? Teachers and staff threaten students ("do what I say or you'll stay in at lunch" or "you'll get a red card" or "I'll call your parents") and they also raise their voices, stand over students, and sometimes even call them names. They are role

modelling being bullies. And then they tell students bullying is wrong. It's exactly like a parent smoking a cigarette while lecturing a teenager on the dangers of smoking. The teenager will believe what the parent is doing is right, regardless of what the parent is saying. And educators can tell students bullying is wrong until they are blue in the face. Bullying won't stop as long as students are bullied by adults at school.

It is much easier to blame someone else for whatever is going on, than to look at ourselves, and accept responsibility. But if school administrators and teachers can embrace this idea, they are in a very powerful position to teach children how not to bully. The adults at school are being role models every day, whether they like it or not. There is a beautiful opportunity to role model, treating children respectfully, and to help children learn that we cannot control others, and how we can handle it without bullying and violence when someone does something we don't like. It's an opportunity to teach young people, who are relatively powerless, that when you are powerful it makes it all the more important to not use that power to get your way.

This meaningful and powerful anti-bullying opportunity exists for schools right now. It's up to them to have the courage and



responsibility to embrace it.

Dr. Bob is happy to volunteer his time to talk with schools about specific steps to implement this anti-bullying program. Contact The Parenting Centre on 5435 2504 or e-mail [info@theparentingcentre.com.au](mailto:info@theparentingcentre.com.au).