



# The 6 Methods of Intervention

The **traditional** approach of dealing with bullying is to apply sanctions to students who have engaged in such behaviour.

This approach typically involves the development and communication of clear rules about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and reasonable consequences for breaking the rules. These consequences generally involve punishment of the student who is considered responsible for the bullying behaviour.

## Rationale

The rationale behind this approach is that applying sanctions or punishment will:

- Deter the student responsible for the bullying behaviour from continuing to behave in an unacceptable manner.
- Send a clear message to the rest of the student body that bullying is not acceptable and to deter them from bullying.
- Demonstrate to children who have bullied someone that they deserve to be punished (a traditional belief).



## Application

The traditional approach can be appropriately and most successfully implemented as follows:

1. Clear standards of behaviour are developed and communicated, including the consequences or punishment of unacceptable behaviour. This may include verbal reprimands, loss of privileges, detention, internal/external suspension and referral to the police.
2. Classroom discussions are held at which students discuss or identify the rules that should govern how they relate to others.
3. Criteria are established to define the grounds for which sanctions are justified, for example in cases of severe or criminal bullying, and following repeated non-compliance or when non-punitive approaches have proved unsuccessful.
4. The entire school community, students, staff and parents, are aware of the criteria and the grounds for applying sanctions and these are applied consistently and not in an arbitrary or vindictive manner.
5. The disciplinary action is taken in relation to the unacceptable behaviour of the perpetrators rather than any personal or social characteristics.

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6. Serious talks are undertaken with the student—and where warranted with the parent(s) or guardian(s)—explaining why the disciplinary action was taken.
7. Careful monitoring of the student's future behaviour is needed to ensure that the bullying has really stopped and has not merely become more subtle or covert.
8. Opportunity is sought to praise and reward any subsequent pro-social behaviour.

## Limitations

The traditional approach to addressing bullying has several limitations:

- The use of direct sanctions may produce compliance but not necessarily a change in an underlying attitude. In itself, it typically does not promote self-reflection or encourage a 'change of heart.'
- A high level of surveillance is required to ensure the target's safety and this can be difficult for a school to achieve.
- The threat of further punishment for non-compliance may not be as powerful as positive reinforcement provided by supporters of the bully or by the bully's own enjoyment in continuing to dominate a victim.
- Older children are less inclined to accept the authority of teachers and are less likely to be deterred by the threat of sanctions.
- If the punishment is perceived as vindictive or unfair the student may feel highly resentful and motivated to act antisocially.

## Conclusion

Despite the risks involved in applying sanctions in cases of bullying, this approach can be justified and effective. When sensible steps are taken to minimise the risk of unintended and counter-productive results. There is now clear evidence that this approach is still employed routinely in most cases of bullying in schools; however, it has **not** been reported as more effective in stopping bullying than the use of restorative practices and non-punitive strategies.

## References

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