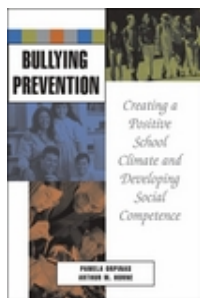




Describing an Elephant by Touching Its Trunk

A review of the video



Bullying Prevention

with Arthur M. Horne

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005. American Psychological Association Psychotherapy Videotape Series VII, Item No. 4310647. \$99.95

Reviewed by

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▮ The video *Bullying Prevention* is intended for mental health professionals with the written caveat that “the particular approach...is not meant to be adopted...without further knowledge and professional consultation.” This is an important caveat because the bullying literature emphasizes a social ecological approach to reduce levels of bullying in a school, that is, bullying in a school can only be reduced if interventions are made on the individual, peer group, school, and family levels.

▮ The primary focus of this video involves a single counseling session of a male adolescent victim of school-based bullying and his mother. Horne, the therapist and designated bullying expert in the video, frequently reminds the viewer that a single session represents only a beginning in the therapeutic treatment process and that this sort of treatment must be supplemented with school- and classroom-based interventions, as well as informal and formal social supports such as mentoring and adult and peer support.

Information About Bullying

▮ Although individual treatment is the centerpiece of this video (the mother is present at the session, but the adolescent boy is clearly the client), background information about bullying is interspersed throughout the video. Horne states that the definitional components of bullying include a power imbalance between the bully and the victim, that the act is repeated, and that the act is intentional. Horne does not include the important modifier that the bully intends to harm or cause distress in the victim. He suggests and presents sound arguments that group treatment is an ineffective bullying treatment modality, yet he does not add that mediation is also ineffective because of the power imbalance and potential for retaliatory action. This is important to add because of the popularity of using peer mediation for all forms of student misconduct. Horne also describes the various forms of bullying (verbal, physical, direct, and indirect), although he fails to mention electronic forms of bullying (cyber bullying). This, again, is a significant exclusion because of the rapid increase and widespread impact of this form of bullying.

▮ Horne accurately describes the age or grade trend that bullying begins in the early school years, peaks in the middle school years, and subsides during the high school years—providing a reasonable explanation for this phenomenon. He briefly discusses the risk factors at individual, family, and school levels, adding that the most important factor in reducing bullying is the establishment of a school climate characterized by respect. Nevertheless, he neither describes nor mentions the Olweus Bullying Prevention program, the single evidence-based climate change program. Rather, he describes a three-stage strategy in working with schools to reduce bullying: Define and increase consciousness about bullying, explore with children and youth why a bully bullies, and suggest ways in which bullies can achieve

their goals (e.g., gaining status) without resorting to bullying.

▬ The dynamic role of bystanders in bullying—a key factor in any effort to reduce bullying in schools—is not mentioned at all. This is particularly troublesome given the suggestion by Horne that victims usually have some role in provoking or sustaining the bullying, an exaggeration at best and a “blame-the-victim” attitude at worst. Indeed, bullying is often described as unprovoked aggression.

The Therapeutic Session

▬ The focus of the video is a 45-minute taped session with a 15-year-old 10th grader who has been the victim of bullying for several years. The viewer is not provided any information about the circumstances by which this particular student was recruited or selected, whether he has any siblings, or whether a father or father figure is present in the household. Nor is any information provided about what the student was told about the video. Given the emphasis by Horne on contextual factors related to bullying, this background context would have been helpful to the viewer. Moreover, in conducting a consultation of this sort, a therapist usually reviews all available background information. We are left uninformed about whether Horne has done this or even whether he advises that this be done.

▬ Horne frames the therapeutic session by describing a four-stage sequencing process: Establish a safe relationship, probe and understand the circumstances, figure out strategies to reduce the bullying, and try to create a sense of optimism or hope that the bullying will stop. For the most part, this sequence is followed in the session. He starts by asking the client, F., a general probing question about whether F. has experienced any problems in school and focuses in on specific problems F. is experiencing with his classmates. F. describes being the victim of verbal bullying by all or most of the students in his alternative school classroom. In response to questions from Horne, F. describes his prior bullying victimization history. F.'s mother adds that she had initially encouraged him to ignore the bullying, but because this was not effective she eventually encouraged F. to fight back. This backfired, resulting in suspensions and police interventions, a point that Horne repeatedly and effectively underscores.

▬ After securing this background information, Horne introduces a psychoeducational technique with the acronym SCIDDLE: Stop, Calm down, Identify what the bullies are trying to do, Decide what to do, Do it, Look around to see what's happening, and Evaluate whether it works. After F. states that he cannot think of what to do, Horne suggests that F. might want to just look at the bullies, smile at them, and go back to work. Basically, he tries to get F. thinking about ways to surprise the bullies and convey that the bullying is not getting to him.

▬ The 45-minute session is included in its entirety. Afterward, Horne discusses seven segments of the video, explicating what he was trying to do and why he did what he did. He acknowledges that F. was a “reluctant” client and that one session is only a beginning and likely will result in no tangible results. He also acknowledges it is unlikely that F. will use the SCIDDLE technique, even with the written explanation that Horne promises to provide. Horne also tries, unsuccessfully, to get F. to identify friends with whom he can secure social support. This leaves F. and his mother to fend for themselves, with suggestions for the mother to monitor the situation, to speak to the school about the bullying (which she agrees to do), and to try to find a mentor for F.

Strengths, Limitations, and Conclusions

▬ The primary strength of the video is the presentation and discussion of a real-life and unrehearsed session with a student who has been bullied. The stages of such a session are clearly specified, illustrated, and discussed. Basic information about bullying is presented, and a caveat is given that the illustrated technique should not be initiated without professional consultation.

▬ At the same time, the very structure of this video is its primary limiting factor as an educational endeavor. Nearly one and a half hours are devoted to viewing a single therapeutic session, a session that even Horne acknowledges will have little impact on the client. This result may well be discouraging to viewers. Furthermore, although a focus on an individual client can, and in this case does, lead to discussion about general principles, a good deal of the discussion around this case is particular to this client or at least to adolescent male victims of bullying. This is problematic given the greater prevalence and different issues that are raised among students in the

elementary and middle grades. Moreover, the video does not easily generalize to what should and can be done in therapeutic sessions with bullies.

☞ Aside from these structural limitations, the question of how to integrate such therapeutic work with a school-based intervention is given short shrift. Horne indicates that if he had continued with F., he would have gone with him (with F.'s permission) to speak to F.'s teacher. He also states that when he works with schools, he provide several interactive sessions on the SCIDDLE technique. Still, no clear guidance is given about how to integrate the individual and family work with the schoolwork. This video could certainly be beneficially supplemented by a video that focuses on the school as the target of intervention.

☞ Finally, a brief written statement is provided following the conclusion of the video that references and indicates that further information about bullying can be found at a specific American Psychological Association Web site. These follow-up materials, which certainly would be helpful and are needed, were not included on the Web site when I examined it in early January 2006. Also, no written materials accompanied the video. Such materials would be helpful in light of the limitations described above.

☞ Given the nature and extent of the limitations described above, I cannot wholeheartedly recommend this video as an educational product that can aid the student or professional in working with victims of bullying or with students who bully others.