

WHY ARE WE ALWAYS PICKING ON EACH OTHER?

A Special Curriculum
To Help Young People Understand Global Conflict

Ages 9-14



by
Dr. Terrence Webster Doyle
with Adryan Russ

based on the
Education for Peace Series books
by Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle

Personal Note to the Teacher From Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle

Bullying started a long time ago — many, many years before we were born. Bullying means to get something you want by force either physically or mentally or both. Bullying has continued on for all these years because people didn't really know how to deal with it in a way that worked. The way they did try to deal with it was through punishing people who bullied and rewarding people who didn't. But this didn't help people understand what caused bullying. That's what we are going to do in this program—help you understand what causes bullying, in yourself and in the world because bullying on the playground is the same as bullying on the battlefield.

Most everyone has been bullied at some time their lives. It usually starts on the playground at school but it can also be at home, and in your community. Some people get bullied worse than others. Some people suffer from it worse than others. Some people are so terribly bullied that they become bullies themselves and turn around and hurt others. And sometimes these people kill others as we have seen in schools where some kids who were bullied have out of rage shot the ones that bullied them. There are also kids who turn that hurt, hate and rage in at themselves and take their own lives because that self-hate and rage that gets stored up in them has no outlet. That's because most people, especially adults, don't know how to prevent bullying from happening; many adults and young people just pretend it's not happening and don't do anything to help the kids who have been bullied to let out that hurt, rage and hate in a safe and constructive way.

Now that you are taking this course on bullying, on resolving conflict peacefully, you are taking a big step towards helping yourself and others to understand the causes of bullying, the causes of conflict. It all starts in the way you have been “conditioned” to think and act. The word conditioning is very important in understanding why people bully. “Conditioning” means to do something automatically, like a computer program. A computer program is information that has been put into the computer and will act automatically when we push a certain button. Your brain, everyone's brain, is something like a computer. There is programmed into it certain information that helps us survive, like knowing where you live, calling 911, knowing what foods to eat and even how to protect yourself from harm.

Have you noticed when you are riding in a car that when the driver sees a red light that he or she automatically puts their foot on the brake. This is “positive conditioning” because it helps you survive. It is an automatic reaction that happens because it has been “programmed” into the brain of the driver. It is a habit. There is also “negative conditioning” that gets programmed into our brains that causes conflict and is harming our chances for survival. This “negative conditioning” can also be called “prejudice” and acts the same way “positive conditioning” does. “Negative conditioning” creates conflict because it puts into our brain information that, like a computer, acts automatically without understanding why it does this or what the effects it may have on yourself and other people.

Both “positive conditioning” and negative conditioning” is information or knowledge that gets programmed into the brain. The information is the disk and the brain is the system that operates the disk. Can you see just by this simple example that information (a “disk”) creates who we are? In other words, we are what we think. And what we think is also what we feel because thinking and feeling are connected in the brain by a bundle of nerves. And then what we are programmed to think and then feel creates they way we act. And this in turn triggers our hardwired, built in fight or flight system that reacts based on the message of fear sent to it so we feel that the threat is very real when it may only be an image, a frightening conditioned thought that was programmed into our brains at one time in our lives, a pre-judgment that when activated later on reacts like a “knee jerk” reflex. It just happens because it is apart of the programmed system of thought that we were conditioned into. So it is very important not only to see how this all works in the brain but to also see the information being put into the brain on the “disk.” so we can see what it is doing to us and others, especially when the “disk” contains a “virus” of “negative information” that can corrupt the system and cause a breakdown of it’s function.

The malfunctioning of the computer (the brain as the “system”) can cause a malfunction in our relationships. Prejudice, or “negative conditioning” is just that. It is information that has been programmed into our brain without us knowing that it causes conflict in relationship. If you study history you will see how prejudice (“negative conditioning”) has caused tremendous suffering and conflict as when a dictator like Adolph Hitler created his view of the perfect race and how he killed millions that did not fit this “program” or view. This “negative conditioning” has been programmed into us for thousands of years; old prejudices that have been carried over from past bullying experiences and have now programmed new generations with old tribal hates and revenges.

What I am trying to say and what I want to do with this course is to help you understand that we have been conditioned or programmed with hurtful and hateful information (and feelings) that keep the hurt and hate going on for years and years. The good news is that you can do something about this—for yourself and for others. And all it takes is a willingness to understand how we have all been programmed. And this means that you will have to understand the 3Es.

The 3Es stand for how you learn. The first “E” stands for “Explanation” like what I am doing here telling you about negative conditioned thinking. It is merely a definition, a description. It describes the problem but does not resolve it. The second “E” stands for “Example” like when you say, “Oh, I have done that. I remember when my negative conditioned thinking (prejudice) created conflict between that new kid at school when I thought he was weird just because he came from another country.” You went from just the general explanation or definition of negative conditioned thinking to seeing how it actually created conflict in your life sometime in the past. This is called “hindsight” which means remembering something that happened to you before. Both of the above “Es” are memory and therefore in the past. In order to understand what I am saying here about negative conditioned thinking you will have to have some knowledge of it. The same is true of the personal Example in your life of negative conditioned thinking (and feeling).

It is the last “E” of Experience, not the “past experience” but Experiencing the information that has been programmed into the brain as it reoccurs or re-happens in the moment that is the process that can free you from it. This is called “insight” and it is this insight that sees the conditioned thinking/feeling as it is happening and in that awareness of

it the conditioned thinking/feeling doesn't operate like it did in the past. Whereas before you didn't see the negative conditioning and it just automatically operated and caused conflict, now you are aware of the "programmed disk" and don't act out of it. This is where the conditioned thoughts/feelings end because they are seen for what they are—destructive negative information that was programmed (the "disk") into us (the "system" or brain). It's like turning on a light where in the past it was dark. Then you "see" the conditioning and you, in that moment, are free of it. And if you keep up this awareness, this "Experiencing" the program on the disk will eventually die out from lack of use. And this means that you have the opportunity not to take this "virus" of "negative conditioning" into your adult life where it can cause greater and greater conflict such as war. But remember, the word is NOT thing; the "thing" (conditioned thinking and feeling) has to be seen, observed for it to stop. The Explanation or the Example are only words and therefore cannot change your behavior, cannot stop the negative conditioned thinking that causes conflict.

So where do we start and what do we need to understand in order begin to prevent this bullying, these conflicts, from spreading like a computer virus?

Where did this information come from and how did it get programmed into our brains? In this course we will cover the six areas of bullying starting with What Causes Us to Bullying. From there we will go into how we beat ourselves up inside our head. This is called Why Am I Always Picking On Myself? The other areas are called Why Is Everybody Always Picking On Me?, which is bullying on the playground and then Why Do We Always Let the Bullies Pick On Them? The Bystander: Victor or Villain and then we go to Why Is Everybody Picking On Us?, which is group prejudice and the final area is called Why Are We Always Picking On Each Other? which is concerned with bullying on the battlefield or what we call war.

So we start with the causes of bullying and then the inner bully inside your head and move from there to the schoolyard bully, the bystander then on to group prejudice and then finally on to the battlefield bully. Please remember that all this bullying starts in the brain and if left unchecked it will go on to create bullying at school, in the community and the world. And remember too that all this bullying has the same mechanical structure, like a computer, and therefore if you understand the basic program in your brain that starts off the bullying then you will be able to understand all of it – you will then see that bullying that creates conflict, from the playground to the battlefield, is not "my problem" or "your problem" -- it is THE problem in the way the human brain has been conditioned to conflict and like a virus has infected the whole of the human race.

Like anything new you may have some difficulty with what is being said here in this course. If you ever need any help please feel free to contact me by email with your questions at map@aol.com or look at www.aatriumsoc.org and I will write you back. Remember to look at this simply like it is a mechanical devise, like a computer and you will see how really simple it is to understand negative conditioned thinking that causes bullying at it's basic foundation.

As someone once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."
I wish you well on this incredible journey in self-understanding, the greatest journey of all!

With care,

Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle

A Word or Two About “Cognitive Distortions”

One of our goals in creating the course on bullying and conditioned thinking is to help educate people, especially young people, about the basic factors that create conflict in their behavior. It is our hope that we can help students see — really SEE — these factors before their behavior becomes a serious problem.

Whether inside an individual or among a group, bullying on the playground or bullying on the battlefield, conflict begins with conditioned thoughts — thoughts we think on an ongoing basis every day — and thoughts that we simply never question. It is those initial conditioned thoughts that set off a chain reaction that instantly triggers fearful emotions — causing us to either want to fight or run away — which produces a powerful reaction of conflict. This conflict, which begins inside us, then develops into conflict outside us, creating struggles with others.

When we are exposed to this succession of conditioned reflexes in our brain, we can begin to become aware of the nature of our conflict at a primary prevention level. This awareness enables us to prevent conflict from happening in the first place — which is our greatest goal.

When an event occurs that disturbs us, automatic thoughts enter our minds. These mechanical thoughts happen so fast that we don't notice them! And if we don't notice them, we certainly won't question them. Still, these thoughts affect our attitude, our mood, our body and our ability to function clearly — and our relationships. These thoughts are often referred to as “cognitive distortions” and are the basis for what is called “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.” My approach to shedding new light on this conditioned way of thinking is to change the focus from a “therapy” which I consider a “reactive, remedial approach” (in other words, after the problem has occurred) to an “education” which is a “proactive, preventive approach” (in other words, preventing the problem that this type of thinking can create before it becomes a problem). I call this educational approach BioCognetics™ — Cognitive Emotive Bio-reactive Conditioning.

What this means is that when a conditioned thought gets “triggered” by an outside stimulus (such as a bully approaching you) it in turn triggers or stimulates our emotions (fear in this case) and then that thought and feeling combined trigger or stimulate the “Bio-reactive” fight or flight survival system in the old brain. In this educational way we can observe the total process of how a conditioned image (of a bully) can, like a row of dominos, set off a “chain reaction” in the brain to protect oneself. That is a necessary and helpful process if we are actually being threatened by a real bully and really need to defend ourselves.

But the problem occurs when this chain reaction is stimulated or triggered by an “image” of what may have been or might be a threatening situation. In this situation the threat is not imminent but the brain is reacting to it as if it were when in fact it only a supposed one. And this is where we get into trouble. If we are preparing ourselves to fight or flee from a supposed threat stimulated by an image of what represents to us a threat then we are unnecessarily reacting. This is what can be labeled a “cognitive distortion” in that it is based on a false perception of reality. This reacting to a supposed threat, on a false perception of reality, occurs not only in bullying situations but also in daily life with many “cognitive distortions” that cause us unnecessary conflict in our lives.



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Learning To Roleplay

Why Use It?

Young people have many of the same problems as adults, and have to deal with conflict situations just as trying as ours, but they are not as verbal or intellectual as adults. Just as we adults better understand concepts when we see examples, young people need examples even more. When they "play out" examples, they get the information more easily. When very young children are playing house, with mommy, daddy and dolls, it is not idle play. They are learning what it is like to *be* a mother or father; they are acting out roles — roleplaying parents.

Roleplaying is understood from age 6 up. The main objectives of roleplaying are:

- To create a safe, controlled and supportive atmosphere, where a young person can act out a threatening situation. This relieves the pressure and anxiety of conflict the young person has experienced.
- To give a young person the chance to create alternatives to their conflict encounters, thus creating a sense of power and mastery in similar threatening situations.
- To give the young person a chance to not only play out the role of the victim but also to play out the role of the aggressor. This gives the student the opportunity to "get into" the other person's shoes, so they can begin to understand why that person would want to be the bully. This helps relieve fear and promotes a more subjective, empathetic understanding of another person's plight.
- By creating, recreating or re-enacting a disruptive event, the young person may become more aware of his or her *own* contribution to the problem.
- To give the young person an opportunity to see how he or she could have prevented the situation from happening in the first place.

How Do I Do It?

Much has been written, especially in Humanistic Psychology, about roleplaying. You can find books in your local bookstores or library on roleplaying and psychodrama that will help you. Roleplaying and psychodrama can be very effective in helping people work out their fears. These are powerful tools and should be practiced carefully. Training from qualified teachers is recommended, and can be gotten from colleges, universities and other organizations.

Since our basic interest here is "kids fighting," the following are simple pointers to enable you to help them create alternatives to conflict situations.

There are two ways to do roleplaying:

1. **Made Up Or Mock Situations.** The advantage here is that you are less likely to get too deeply into emotional problems behind their conflict. The disadvantage is that it is only play-acting. There is no real feeling behind it, and so learning is more at the surface level.

2. **Real Life Situations.** You might uncover emotional trauma a young person has beneath the surface situation. If you sense that a person is "emotionally disturbed," you may want to use mock situations with this person. You may want to let the parents know if you see any behavior that might warrant more professional help.

The advantage here is that real life situations are more real, and the student will have strong emotions around it. This usually helps motivate a person in understanding and wanting to do something about the problem.

The Process

Most roleplays have a "bad guy" and a "good guy" -- the Bully and the Victim. Neither is truly solely good or bad, but when we start with a black and white situation, it helps us learn about the grays.

It's good to ask for volunteers. Kids usually love to ham it up. I tell them what the roleplay is about and sometimes hand out sheets that have roleplays already written out for them to read. Some include portions they read as if they were talking out loud to themselves, and some include only dialogue between two or more characters. To avoid confusion, it's advisable to give them an example of what you want, or to read a portion of the dialogue yourself to illustrate the kind of roleplaying you are looking for. Get a good roleplayer by modeling one.

You may want to act as facilitator of each roleplay situation or participate yourself. There will always be an audience for every roleplay and, as such, they give valuable feedback to the volunteer roleplayers. They can also boo or cheer, which adds to the dramatic effect, including everyone in the skit.

The roleplays offered in the Lesson Plans are for your convenience, to help students learn the lesson being taught. You are welcome, however, to create any roleplay situation you think might help. For example, you might divide the students into two groups: The Bully Group and the Victim Group. Then, ask one volunteer to act or play out the role of a Bully or Antagonist. He or she comes up to the Victim and starts picking on him or her. The Bully goads the Victim on by pushing, shoving, grabbing (ask students to not get too physical). Try to keep the participants from moving too far away from the center of the group. At this point, the Victim can try out his or her nonviolent alternative. Tell the Bully ahead of time, on the side, not to give up too easily, but to give up at some point, so the Victim can learn how to win. There must be enough time to let the situation be real enough so that the Victim has to work at his/her role. This will create a more realistic situation. As the Victim ("good guy") is trying out an alternative, ask the Bully Group which one the Victim is using. This gets them involved in both sides of the situation.

When using real life situations, you will want more sensitivity. You don't want booing and yelling. It should be more thoughtful and serious. Ask for volunteers to raise their hands. Listen to several stories and pick the easiest or safest first. Potential problem situations are best referred to a professional.

In real life situations, ask for a volunteer to be the Antagonist. It is sometimes best to let the volunteer victim pick his or her antagonist, but not always. Be sensitive to this process. You may have to do it for them. In real life situations, it is advisable that you stay in control of the game -- be the "authority," gently supporting and guiding the process. Allow them to freely explore their feelings and situations independently, but also, and at the same time, be there for them if they need you.

On the following page are more techniques in roleplaying that you can use. Some are already used in the Lesson Plans, and some are not.

Additional Roleplay Techniques

- **Soliloquy.** The Victim speaks aloud about feelings he or she had before, during and after the conflict situation. This helps the student to identify his/her feelings as valid, and clarify those that everyone at one time or another feels. It is helpful if YOU are HONEST about your own feelings -- your fears, humiliations, sadness. I usually tell the group about my personal experiences with conflict I had at their age -- not as a lecturer, but as someone sharing with them that I know, from the inside, what they are going through.
- **Mirroring.** One person imitates a Victim's behavior. This is an effective way to give feedback and understanding to the Victim as to how others see and react to him or her. It can give the Victim a new viewpoint on the situation. Be very careful that this is done with sensitivity -- as a gift rather than a putdown. You might begin this technique by playing the role first yourself.
- **Alter Ego.** The Alter Ego is the Victim's own invisible, unexpressed self. The main purpose is to help the Victim express emotions. Another is to provide support, give empathy and dramatize unexpressed feelings. It can help interpret the Victim's resistances and defenses. For example, if you get behind the Victim while he or she is playing out his or her role and say, "I feel scared. I just want to run and hide and cry" -- this can help the Victim identify his or her own feelings. Again, care and sensitivity are very important.
- **Role Reversal.** The Victim literally takes the place of the Bully -- actively places him or herself in the other person's shoes, taking on *their* emotions, attitudes. The helps decrease anxiety and allows for greater empathy and understanding of the Bully.
- **Imaging.** One good imaging process ask students to imagine themselves as animals -- they pick one special animal they really like. Ask them to do some research on this animal: What are its habits? Where does it come from? How does it live? This works well for very young students. They imagine themselves as this animal -- move like it, feel what it's like to be this animal, from the inside. This fantasy gives them the chance to develop psychological power, a "spirit" that can give them strength. They can talk about their animals as an ongoing process. You might ask them to be their animal during basics and katas.

There are many more techniques -- too many to include here. I recommend you read *The Centering Book -- Awareness Activities For Children, Parents and Teachers* by Gay Hendricks and Russel Wills, for excellent exercises to do with your students to help them resolve conflict. They are easily adapted to your own or your students' situations.

**EXERCISES & ACTIVITIES
FOR CURRICULUM**

**WHY ARE WE ALWAYS
PICKING ON EACH OTHER?**

by
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with Adryan Russ

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