The Traditional Disciplinary Approach

According to surveys of teachers and counsellors across many countries including the US, Australia, Canada, Germany, Norway and Finland, the disciplinary approach is seen by about 75% of school staff as the most appropriate way of dealing with most, if not all, forms of bullying (Bauman, 2008; Rigby, 2010). Essentially, it seeks to prevent bullying from continuing by imposing sanctions on the pupils(s) who were engaged in bullying behaviour. Sanctions imposed may include verbal reprimands, meetings with parents, temporary removal from class, withdrawal of privileges, school community service, detention, internal school suspension, short-term external suspension, and permanent exclusion from school.

Parents often favour this approach also, especially if their children are being bullied at school, because it is perceived as giving a message to other pupils about what will happen to them if they engage in bullying. The approach is often viewed as straightforward: the rules of behaviour established by the school are invoked, cases are investigated, and the transgressors duly punished. This apparent simplicity is contrasted with other more complex approaches in which counselling approaches are employed. By stating the consequences of different forms of bullying behaviour in advance, the school can represent the outcome for the pupils who engage in bullying as being brought about by their own actions.

Although this approach may deter some pupils from bullying, it can also result in pupils continuing to bully in more covert and less detectable ways that are at least equally hurtful to those they bully especially if the pupil who engages in bullying believes that the sanction imposed was unjust. This can result in a strong degree of resentment and a desire to continue the bullying, often in ways that are difficult to detect. The approach requires a high degree of surveillance, which is often impossible or difficult to maintain. However, in cases of very violent or criminal behaviour, or in cases for which counselling approaches prove unsuccessful, sanctions are generally required.

Critics of the traditional disciplinary approach argue the there is an assumption that when pupils are deterred from acting anti-socially they will be open to engaging in pro-social behaviour, especially if they are rewarded or praised afterwards for doing so. Rigby (pp. 43-44, 2010) makes ten recommendations to schools to support the traditional disciplinary approach:

1. Make it as clear as possible to the staff and to the pupils what bullying is, the forms it takes and especially the harm it does.

2. Carry out classroom discussions with pupils on the issue of bullying and especially on the kinds of rules that ought to govern relations between pupils in the school. Have the class compile a list of reasonable guidelines for pupil behaviour.

3. As far as possible gain acceptance from the pupils that some ‘consequences’ are justified in cases of bullying. When more pupils are involved in the formulation and development of an anti-bullying policy, acceptance will be more widespread.

4. Intervene as soon as possible after an act of bullying has been identified so that the memory of the nature of the offence is present in the mind of the pupil(s) engaged in bullying behaviour.
5. Where possible, apply sanctions that are appropriate to the behaviour; for example, sanctions requiring recompense and restorative action to be undertaken rather than largely unrelated impositions such as writing ‘lines’.

6. Apply positive reinforcements whenever the pupil acts constructively or helpfully towards another pupil, thus setting up habits that are incompatible with bullying.

7. Engage in ‘serious’ talks with the pupil to be punished (and if appropriate the parents too), giving the reasons for the actions being taken by the school.

8. Maintain a practice of rigorous surveillance of pupils’ interpersonal behaviour in the classroom and playground. Punishment is more likely to work if behaviour is being carefully monitored.

9. Do whatever is possible to ensure that the authority of the school and teachers is justified and respected. This is particularly important among older pupils who are generally more distrustful of institutional authority than younger pupils.

10. Recognise that any action taken by teachers at the school that is widely seen as unfair or arbitrary will increase the distrust and disrespect felt by pupils, and result in disciplinary action taken in cases of bullying being less than effective.

According to research over 90 per cent of schools use the traditional disciplinary approach in the majority of bullying cases (Rigby, K., 2014).
Strengthening the Victim

This approach to dealing with cases of bullying aims at assisting the pupil who is bullied to cope more effectively in interactions with pupils engaged in bullying behaviour. To this end, pupils who are being targeted are advised or trained to become less vulnerable, for example, by learning to act more assertively. The self-esteem of the pupil who is bullied rises and the school need not take action to discipline the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour, thereby avoiding any negative consequences associated with the use of sanctions.

The decision to use this approach will depend in part on an assessment of the situation and on the views of teachers as regards the suitability of the approach for individual pupils. Can the pupil acquire the necessary capability to resist effectively?

In an online survey conducted by Bauman et al. (2008) of 736 teachers and counsellors in the US, 36% of respondents thought that they would ‘tell the victim to stand up to the bully’; 40% thought they would not; and 24 per cent were uncertain. Some teachers believe that there is a large imbalance of power between a pupil who is bullied and a pupil engaged in bullying and they are concerned that this will affect any efforts that the pupil who is bullied can make. Sometimes teachers consider that the pupil who is bullied is doing his best and if he could resist, he would. Still others believe that there are ways in which the pupil who is bullied can be helped to act in order to improve the situation Strategies for strengthening the victim

If this approach is adopted a school needs to consider the following strategies:

1. Building student confidence

   Class, small group and individual programmes (depending on the age and ability level of students) on building student self-esteem need to be prioritised to organise for the explicit teaching of self-esteem and communication skills in named subject areas. A cross-curricular approach is then required to transfer the teaching and learning of these skills across the curriculum for the pupils.

2. Fogging

   This is an assertiveness technique that can be taught to pupils who are being targeted to assist them in coping with insults and putdowns (MacNeill, 2009; Rigby, 2010). The technique has two stages:

   1. This involves the pupil who is being bullied openly acknowledging that the pupil engaged in bullying may actually believe the negative things he/she is saying and refusing to be disturbed or intimidated by the comments (e.g. ‘That’s your opinion’; ‘You might think so’). It can be effective in some cases of one-to-one bullying but is limited to bullying that is verbal. The technique avoids directly challenging the pupil who is engaged in bullying so he/she gets little or no reaction. The pupil who is bullied reacts unemotionally so the intended insults are dissipated as in a dense fog. In cases of mild bullying this is a useful and practical technique and can result in a be-escalation of a conflict.

   However, reacting to the pupil who is engaged in bullying in this way can be difficult for a pupil who is bullied and some training and rehearsing is generally needed before this technique can be confidently and effectively employed. Instead of competing with the pupil who is engaged in bullying
behaviour in being offensive, the pupil who is bullied responds in a nonchalant way, acknowledging that what is said may be how the other pupil actually sees things. By focusing on the perceptions of the pupil who is engaged in bullying, the sting is taken out of what the pupil (engaged in bullying) is actually saying. The words used by the pupil who is bullied must be words that he/she is comfortable in using.

2. This stage involves arranging a meeting between the pupil who is bullied and the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour. The pupil engaged in bullying behaviour is asked to explain his/her behaviour thus requiring him/her to think about why such comments were made. It is crucial that the pupil who is bullied is both comfortable that the meeting takes place and prepared for the meeting. He/she may decide to ask a close friend of a similar age to attend as a peer support. The pupil who is bullied should rehearse what he/she intends to say to the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour before the meeting. If the teacher running the meeting gives too much direction, the pupil may respond in an unnatural way. It is advised that useful responses be worked out before the meeting.

Strengthening the victim approach as a response to bullying behaviour is best used in tandem with other school approaches. In deciding to adopt this approach, school staffs need to take into account both the vulnerability of the pupil who is bullied and the capacity of staff to upskill the pupil in assertiveness training. It is crucial that the adoption of such a technique does not expose pupils to more persistent forms of bullying (e.g. responding in an offensive or super-smart way that could antagonise the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour). Considerable care is needed in matching the mode of strengthening the victim with the capability of the pupil who is bullied.

Strengthening the victim approach can, however, be used in a complementary way to other interventions. For instance, sanctions may be applied to deter further bullying and strengthening the victim may be important in those cases where the traditional disciplinary approach is not entirely effective. Techniques that build up the confidence and social skills, especially the social intelligence of pupils who are bullied can be very helpful. When taught carefully, techniques such as ‘fogging’ can benefit many pupils in a school.
Mediation

Mediation is an attempt to bring about a peaceful settlement or compromise between pupils through the intervention of a neutral party. Mediation is different from arbitration, which is sometimes carried out in schools when pupils in conflict accept the verdict of a third party (e.g. a teacher, Deputy Principal, Principal) as to how a conflict is to be resolved. With mediation the pupil who is bullied and the pupil who is engaged in bullying enter into negotiation with each other freely and are assisted by a trained mediator to reach an agreed and peaceful solution. The mediator may be a trained member of staff or a student who has received relevant mediation training. The latter are known as peer mediators. There are advantages in training pupils as mediators. Pupils do not generally come across as authority figures and are less likely than teachers to impose their will on the proceedings. In addition, pupils are more likely to understand the situation in which other pupils find themselves.

Typically, mediation involves the following stages:

1. Identify pupils who are in conflict and are ready to negotiate, with the help of a mediator, to resolve their differences peaceably. Without this initial commitment mediation cannot proceed.

2. Arrange a meeting with the pupils who are in conflict. This is best organised when tempers have cooled. Generally, a private place is found where there are no interruptions.

3. All pupils are required to agree to certain rules that make the process of mediation predictable. This includes a requirement that only one pupil talks at a time while the other pupil listens without interrupting and each stays to hear each other out.

4. The mediator asks each pupil to describe in turn what has been happening. Each participant must repeat what has been said without making any judgements or comment. The mediator may prompt, if necessary, to seek more information and clarify what is being said. Importantly, at this stage there is to be no discussion or point scoring.

5. While the pupils describe what they see as having happened, the mediator must listen carefully and then summarise what has been said to the satisfaction of those involved.

6. Having established what happened according to the pupils, the next stage is to enable the pupils to share their feelings about each other’s actions. Again, each of the pupils is expected to say how they felt without being interrupted and the other pupil reflects back what has been said – without making any comment. Again, the mediator summarises what has been said.

7. Next, the mediator invites the pupils to make suggestions about what could be done to improve matters and these are listed. 8. Having a list of options before them, the pupils are then invited to choose a solution to the conflict that is most acceptable to them. This may involve the pupils in finding a win-win course of action that effectively solves the problem or they agree a compromise. It is not up to the mediator to say which solution is best.

9. The mediator records the actions that the pupils have agreed to carry out, using their own words and each pupil signs a document to indicate that he/she will abide by the agreement.
10. Subsequently, the behaviour of the pupils is monitored and, if necessary, further meetings may be held. In practice, there may be variation in how mediation is carried out. For instance, some schools have sought to mediate between pupils AFTER the pupil who is bullying has been sanctioned. Other schools give pupils who have bullied others the option of being sanctioned or accepting mediation. While other schools hold the threat of sanctions over the pupils who engages in bullying behaviour if they do not cooperate with mediation. These three variations are inconsistent with the general ethos of mediation, which requires that those in dispute are treated impartially, non-judgementally and helped to reach a solution that is in no way forced or part of a process that implies coercion or manipulation.

It is generally accepted that mediation is difficult in the following situations:

• If there is an imbalance of power between the pupil who is bullied and those that engage in bullying behaviour especially if the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour is admired by other pupils. For the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour there may be little or nothing to be gained from ending the bullying. The role of the mediator is to help bring about an agreed solution between all parties and in this situation the mediator may find it difficult to take a neutral stance

• If the bullying is severe and the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour is highly culpable. It may be difficult to find staff to mediate in such circumstances.

• Sometimes pupils may distrust the mediation process fearing that they would be ridiculed if they asked mediators for help. They also fear that confidentiality would not be respected.

• In certain cases, perceived norms are such that pupils feel obliged to fight and in these cases, mediation is rejected as a soft option. This suggests that changes in the school climate or ethos may sometimes need to be made before teacher or peer mediation is considered as one of the school’s responses to addressing bullying behaviour. Once cases of conflict and bullying are dealt with successfully through mediation, the school ethos itself begins to change.

• When teacher or pupil mediators are poorly trained and/or time and resources for monitoring and supervising the mediation process is limited. A school environment that provides strong support for the mediation process is crucial to the success of the approach.

Mediation can not only effectively address certain forms of bullying behaviour but can also help to create a school ethos in which bullying is less likely to thrive. In a study of fifteen Year 5 mediators in a school in England, it was reported that all of the peer mediators had conducted at least one successful intervention and eight of them had been ‘frequently successful’ (Cremin, 2002). According to research, teachers however are divided evenly about the acceptability of this approach.
Restorative Practice

Restorative Practice (RP) is based on the concepts and principles of Restorative Justice. RP places relationships at the core of all problem solving. Bullying is viewed as a violation of people, property, and relationships. The practice involves getting the pupil who engages in bullying behaviour to reflect upon his/her unacceptable behaviour, experience a sense of remorse, and act to restore a damaged relationship with both the pupil who is bullied and the class and/or school community.

RP can be used to resolve problems of bullying involving two individuals, a small group or a class group. It can also be used at school community level (as a community conference) and can be attended by those involved in the bullying plus significant others such as parents.

Necessary elements include the prior existence - or subsequent emergence - of remorse on the part of the pupil who engages in bullying behaviour and the readiness of the pupil who is bullied and others to accept the apology and restorative action of the pupil who bullied. The application of RP has become increasingly popular in schools over the past 15 years, especially in Great Britain, Australia, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. Like Mediation, Restorative Practice is often seen as a reaction against the traditional disciplinary approach that does not necessarily work to repair relationships, although both approaches are concerned with justice and seek to bring about a desired change in the pupil who engages in bullying behaviour.

The essence of RP is to bring about good or tolerable relationships when things have gone wrong. It seeks to heal the hurt that has occurred; to put it behind both the pupil who is bullied and the pupil who engaged in bullying behaviour. It puts repairing harm done to relationships over and above the need to assign blame and dispense sanctions.

RP may take many forms but all forms exist within an explicit framework of Fair Process, which allows everyone to understand the rationale for their actions. This Fair Process builds trust and commitment and involves three elements:

1. **Engagement** – include all pupils/adults who are involved in the bullying behaviour.
2. **Explanation** – adopt a shared understanding of the situation by all involved.
3. **Clarity** – involve all in a vision for the future.

Restorative Practice is not one action; rather it is a continuum involving the following:

- Restorative dialogue
- Restorative class meeting or group conference
- Mediation
- Restorative school/community conference and problem-solving circle.

Irrespective of the stages decided on for a resolution of the bullying behaviour the following key questions are utilized to ensure a fair process for all concerned:
• Questions for the pupil(s) engaged in bullying behaviour
  
  o What happened?
  o What were you thinking about at the time?
  o What have your thoughts been since?
  o Who has been affected by what you did?
  o In what way have they been affected?
  o What do you think needs to happen next?

• Questions for pupil(s) who is bullied:
  
  o What happened?
  o What were your thoughts at the time?
  o What have your thoughts been since?
  o How has this affected you and others?
  o What has been the hardest thing for you?
  o What do you think needs to happen next to make things right?

Restorative continuum for schools

For all stages of the continuum, it is crucial that the facilitator has been trained in Restorative Practices and before any RP meeting commences a set of ground rules are agreed by all present. Class/group meetings and school/community conferences require very careful planning. Stages of the RP continuum are as follows:

• Restorative dialogue – A restorative dialogue is a meeting between the pupil who is bullied and the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour. A member of school staff who is trained in RP (class teacher, resource teacher, Principal Etc.) facilitates the dialogue. This can be done on the spot in response to a report by the pupil who is bullied or a member of staff who has witnessed repeated incidents viewed as not of a serious nature (e.g. a put-down or nasty comment, property borrowed without permission, a pupil being pushed). Time is given to both the pupil who is bullied and the pupil engaged in bullying to explain not only what happened but also how they felt about the behaviour. After a restorative action has been suggested, undertaken, and (importantly) accepted by the pupil who is bullied, the case may be concluded and the situation may continue to be monitored. Teachers often appreciate such a detailed script as it provides clear guidance and structure in dealing with cases of bullying behaviour. Depending on the age and cognitive ability of the pupils, an RP facilitator may give more detailed direction e.g. post agreement the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour may be explicitly taught how to make an appropriate apology and the pupil who is bullied may be explicitly taught how to respond positively to such an apology. Incidents of a more serious nature require a more formal dialogue at a designated time.
• **Class meeting or group conference** - In some cases it is considered appropriate to apply restorative practices in a class or group situation, for example, when the issue is of a more serious nature and is one in which a full class or group is implicated and their views are relevant to a successful resolution of the problem. In such a case, a meeting is held involving all the pupils in a class/group, including those who have not participated in the bullying in any way. The RP principles and set of questions remain the same. A class/group meeting requires careful planning, preparation and cooperation around timetable issues and may involve several teachers. The pupil who is bullied and the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour are encouraged to speak and explain how they have felt about their experiences. How the other pupils respond is of crucial importance. The expectation is that the reactions and views of the other pupils will exert pressure on the pupil who is engaged in bullying behaviour to feel remorseful and act restoratively. This class/group meeting is not a trial by pupils. Its purpose is to give a message to pupils who engage in bullying behaviour that their behaviour is reprehensible and that restorative action is desirable. If this happens, it will meet with the approval of the wider group. Parents are usually notified before and/or after the meeting or conference. They also receive a copy of the agreement including plans for monitoring and follow-up.

• **Community conference** – According to the National Centre for Restorative in Education a community conference is a formal process which ‘seeks to repair the harm done to relationships within a community by allowing everyone involved to meet and gain a better understanding from each other of the impact of a particular incident (s), the reasons for it and the preferred outcomes. The process usually involves the pupil who is bullied and his/her parents and/or supporters and the pupil who engaged in bullying and his/her supporters as well as key school personnel and behaviour/resource support staff, where applicable’. The intention of such a conference is to promote a comprehensive understanding of what has happened on the part of everyone present – the pupil who is bullied, the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour and all interested parties – in order to restore peace and harmony. The effectiveness of such a meeting depends in part on the work done ‘behind the scenes’ by the RP facilitator in contacting and preparing the participants for the conference. After both set of pupils (pupil who is bullied and pupil who is engaged in bullying) are given an opportunity to be heard, the role of those present is to consider and accept whatever apologies and restorative acts are forthcoming. Only a trained RP facilitator should conduct this meeting.

In preparing for the introduction of Restorative Practice, some schools initially introduce a restorative approach to their current practices. This allows all members of the school community to gain a clear understanding of RP from the staff members who received training. It also ensures that all staff are included in the change process to RP practices.
The Support Group Method  
(formerly the No Blame Approach)

Psychologists Barbara Maines and George Robinson devised the Support Group Method in 1991. It was originally called the No Blame Approach. This is a non-punitive approach and, as with Restorative Practice, the emphasis is on

• getting the pupil involved in bullying behaviour to appreciate the suffering they have inflicted on the pupil who is bullied

• providing a solution to the problem rather than providing retribution for wrongdoing.

There are however, important differences to the Restorative Practice approach such as the fact that the Support Group Method does not assume that remorse on the part of the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour is a necessary precondition for a positive change in the behaviour of a pupil engaged in bullying behaviour. The focus is on moving the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour from one who behaves hurtfully to one who is motivated through empathic feelings to give help.

There are seven steps in the Support Group Method, beginning with an interview with the pupil who is bullied; then holding a meeting with a group of pupils including the pupil who is engaged in bullying behaviour; and ending with meetings with the pupils who have been part of the application of the method.

Step 1 – Talking with the pupil who is bullied

The teacher meets with the pupil who is bullied to establish the impact that the bullying has had on the pupil. The pupil is not asked to describe particular incidents but is encouraged to provide a detailed and graphic account of the distress that he/she has experienced. This can take the form of a verbal account or alternatively a piece of writing or drawing that expresses how the pupil has been affected by the bullying. The pupil is then asked to identify the names of the pupil(s) engaged in the bullying behaviour and to suggest the names of other pupils who will form a group to help solve the problem.

Step 2 – Convening a group meeting

This meeting includes the pupil who has been identified as having been engaging in bullying behaviour, and some other students who are selected by the teacher because they are expected to be helpful in bringing about a positive outcome. The pupil who is bullied is not required to be present. Generally, the size of the group is around six to eight.

Step 3 – Explaining the problem

The teacher draws attention to the problem and especially to the distress that the pupil who is bullied is experiencing, using evidence provided by the pupil himself/herself. Specific incidents are not described and no accusations are made.
Step 4 – Promoting Shared Responsibility

This meeting makes it clear that no one is going to be punished. A group has been convened to help solve the problem and everyone has a responsibility to improve the situation.

Step 5 – Asking for Ideas

The teacher asks for suggestions about how things can be made better for the pupil who is bullied. Each pupil present is asked to make a personal statement on what he/she will do to help.

Step 6 – Leaving it up to them

Having explained the situation, the teacher passes responsibility for the problem over to the group, thanks them for their support, and indicates that there will be further meetings with the each of the pupils to see how things are going.

Step 7 – Final meetings

A week or so later the teacher meets with members of the group individually to discuss progress. The pupil who is bullied is also interviewed as part of the monitoring process.

Although no one is blamed for the bullying, the Support Group Method approach is quite confrontational and insists that all pupils in the group share joint responsibility to improve the situation for the pupil who is bullied. If the bullying behaviour is of a very serious nature (e.g. physical assault or serious cyber bullying incident), a disciplinary approach is seen as more appropriate.

An important assumption of the approach is that pupils who have bullied someone can be motivated to respond empathically to the plight of the pupil who is bullied. This assumption is one of a number of objections to this approach by some prominent educationalists, politicians, and anti-bullying organisations over the years who object to the philosophy underlying the method. This philosophy states that blaming individuals for their involvement in bullying incidents is not helpful in bringing about a successful resolution to a bullying problem.

The approach, however has received support from teachers, especially in England who view the approach as an effective way of dealing with some forms of bullying behaviour because the pupil who engages in bullying must take equal responsibility with the other pupils in the group for a resolution of the bullying. They have a responsibility to take action to improve matters for the pupil who is bullied. Care must be taken, however in applying this method to ensure, as far as possible, that actions taken by the group are what the pupils choose to do and were not forced to do by a teacher.

The Support Group Method is seen as appropriate for non-violent, non-criminal forms of bullying. However, it does not take into account any provocation that may have occurred to precipitate the bullying and the need, in some cases, for changes in behaviour on the part of both parties.
The Method of Shared Concern

The Method of Shared Concern originated in Sweden in the 1980 (published in 1989) through the work of Anatol Pikas, a Swedish psychologist who adopted a solution focused approach to resolving issues of bullying. It is a non-punitive method of dealing with bully/victim incidents aimed at empowering pupils who have contributed to bullying behaviour, or who have become aware of bullying to act to resolve the problem. Although the method involves a non-blaming approach, it does not in any way seek to excuse or condone bullying. It is direct and strongly invites and expects a responsible response.

The method involves a multi-stage process, beginning with separate one-to-one interviews with pupils suspected of bullying, and with pupils who are bullied leading on to group meetings with both sets of pupils. As the process develops, it is assumed that the bullying is strongly influenced by the relationships the pupils have with each other. According to Pikas, this intervention process can cause a shift in the group dynamics, and provide an environment in which the pupils may engage in a negotiation process to bring about a peaceful and sustainable outcome. The method involves the following stages:-

1. Individuals involved in a bully/victim problem are identified.

Information about what has been happening is ideally obtained through observations and/or receiving reports rather than through someone talking directly with the pupil who is bullied. The risk of the pupil being bullied further is reduced when it is clear to all concerned that no punishment is intended.

2. A number of pupils are identified as likely to have taken part in bullying behaviour, or to have supported it in some way and are interviewed by a trained interviewer (teacher).

Each pupil is seen in turn, starting (if known) with the likely ringleader. Under certain circumstances, if desired, other pupils aware of the problem, e.g. bystanders, may be included as they may sometimes play an important role in influencing the bullying. It has become customary to differentiate between the different roles bystanders may play.

The interviews take place in private and without interruptions. Each interview begins with the teacher inviting the pupil to sit in a chair opposite (without an intervening desk). The teacher waits for eye contact before the interaction begins. At these meetings with individual pupils, it is important that no accusations are made.

The teacher first explains his/her role, to help pupils feel safe at school, then points out that it has been noticed that a particular pupil has been having a hard time at school with other pupils. The teacher describes what has been discovered about the plight of the pupil e.g. being upset, isolated, or staying away from school. Once the concerns of the teacher have been clearly and sincerely conveyed, the pupil is asked to say what he or she has noticed or knows about the situation.

As soon as the pupil has acknowledged some awareness (not guilt) relating to what has been happening, he/she is asked directly what can be done to help improve the situation.
Commonly, suggestions are made about what can be done by the pupil. But if they are not, the teacher may make suggestions. It is important that the suggestions are not difficult to carry out. Strong approval is expressed for any constructive proposals; then another meeting (at an agreed time) is arranged to see how things have gone. Importantly, at this meeting no threats are made nor any warnings given. The remaining pupils in the group are seen, again individually, and the procedure repeated.

3. The pupil who is bullied is interviewed.

The pupil who is bullied is seen after all the suspected pupils engaged in bullying behaviour have been interviewed. The teacher begins by explaining his/her role and support over what has been happening. It is important that a trusting relationship is developed. However, questions need to be asked to find out whether the pupil has been doing something to bring on the bullying e.g. by acting as a provocative victim. Importantly, no blame is directed at the pupil. This line of questioning is done sensitively. Often the pupil is wholly innocent. The teacher discloses that they have actually talked with the pupil suspected of engaging in bullying behaviour and the pupil has given an undertaking to carry out some actions to improve the situation. The pupil who is bullied is asked to look out for signs of change. The teacher arranges to meet again with the pupil to see how things develop.

4. Several days later, follow-up meetings are held with the pupil engaged in bullying behaviour, as previously arranged.

The aim here is to ascertain whether the suspected pupil has carried out the actions, as promised, to improve the situation. Only when the teacher is satisfied that progress is being made can a meeting be convened with the suspected pupil or whole group of pupils suspected of being involved in bullying behaviour.

5. At the group meeting of Suspected Pupils engaged in Bullying Behaviour, each member is asked to say what they have done to try to improve the situation.

Prior to this meeting the teacher meets separately with the pupil who is bullied and the pupil suspected of engaged in bullying behaviour to clarify any issues remaining. The group meeting commonly has the effect of promoting further positive social interactions with the pupil who is bullied.

6. A brief meeting with the pupil who is bullied.

He/she is invited to join a meeting with the pupil suspected of engagement in bullying behaviour for a final meeting, with assurances that progress can be made at the meeting. If the pupil who is bullied does not wish to attend, his/her decision is respected.

7. When progress has been made, a meeting is held with the pupil(s) suspected of engaged in bullying behaviour to plan how the problem might be resolved.

If agreeable, the pupil who is bullied joins the meeting and an agreed solution is negotiated. Although this approach can be time-consuming, outcomes are overwhelmingly positive. The method has been found to be uniquely appropriate for dealing with cases of group bullying in
which the pupil who is bullied has behaved provocatively. This occurs in about 20 per cent of cases. Good planning and preparation is essential for this meeting. In this final stage, the teacher will need to act the part of mediator.

Pikas, the originator of the method, has argued that the method is best suited to problems involving older, secondary pupils, because a greater level of cognitive maturity is sometimes required on the part of the pupils. This view is consistent with reports from Stevens, de Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost (2000) in Belgium. The method has been found to be particularly effective in cases where the pupil who is bullied is behaving in a provocative manner. However, Duncan (1996) reported that successful interventions were obtained using the method with children in the second and third years of primary school in Scotland. Unlike other methods, including the Traditional Disciplinary Approach, Restorative Practices, and the Support Group Method, this method does not assume that the pupil who is bullied is wholly innocent.

The Method of Shared Concern differs radically from the Traditional Disciplinary Approach because it seeks to resolve cases of bullying without the use of sanctions. In this regard, it is similar to Restorative Practices and the Support Group Method. It however differs crucially from Restorative Practices in not seeking to induce or take advantage of a sense of remorse in the assumed pupil engaged in bullying as a step towards getting the ‘wrongdoer’ to act in a restorative manner and bring about a satisfactory relationship with the pupil who has been targeted. In place of ‘remorse’, it seeks to cultivate a sense of ‘empathy’ with the pupil who is bullied. It differs also in emphasising that enduring solutions to the problem of bullying can best be accompanied using group meetings involving those pupils who have participated in bully/victim incidents.

The Method of Shared Concern also differs from the Support Group Method in that it firstly begins work with each individual suspected of bullying behaviour rather than engaging in discussions immediately with a group of pupils among who are suspected pupils who are engaged in bullying behaviour. The method assumes that this strategy is the most practical and effective way of proceeding. Violent or criminal behaviour is normally not handled using this approach.