

# The Bully Strikes Back

## Teachers Notes

### Synopsis of the play

The Bully Strikes Back is the third and final play in the bullying trilogy.

- 1. Bully No More - Focus Emotions**
- 2. Return of the Bully- Focus Strategies**
- 3. The Bully Strikes Back - Focus Resilience**

The opening scene of The Bully Strikes Back shows Alex at home not being able to find any breakfast. His mother has been staying in bed all day and has not been capable of looking after her son. The scene dramatises an example of neglect which is a form of child abuse. Alex believes that the only solution is to steal money from his mother's purse to buy himself breakfast and what ever else he needs.

Alex sees Poppy in the playground at school and offers to share his chocolates with her. Poppy has been bullied in the past by Alex but has learned anti bullying strategies from her karate teacher Sansei. Since then Poppy is more confident around Alex and doesn't find him threatening. When she realises Alex is in trouble she goes back to Sansei to ask for his help. Sansei asks Poppy to become friends with Alex so that she may gain his trust to find out what is going on.

Poppy discovers that Alex is being neglected by his mother but while she has spent time with Alex she starts to like him and genuinely wants to become his friend. When Sansei finds out that it is a serious situation he teaches Poppy about resilience only to discover that Alex doesn't have any. The only hope that Alex has is his growing friendship with Poppy.

Poppy finally convinces Alex that he needs to ask for help and offers to support him no matter what happens. Poppy and Alex remain friends through the ups and downs of Alex's family troubles.

## What is Resilience?

The International Resilience Project came to the conclusion that the definition of resilience is:

*Resilience is a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging affects of adversity.*

The play The Bully Strikes Back has sourced inspiration from the work of Edith H. Grotheberg Ph. D of The International Resilience project and her guide for parents and teachers 'A Guide to Promoting Resilience in children: Strengthening the Human Spirit'

### Three sources of resilience

To overcome adversities, children draw from three sources of resilience features labelled: I HAVE, I AM, I CAN. What they draw from each of the three sources may be described as follows:

#### I HAVE

- People around me I trust and who love me, no matter what.
- People who set limits for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble.
- People who show me how to do things right by the way they do things.
- People who help me when I am sick, in danger or need to learn

#### I AM

- A person people can like and love
- Glad to do nice things for others and show my concern.
- Respectful of myself and others.
- Willing to be responsible for what I do.
- Sure things will be all right.

#### I CAN

- Talk to others about things that frighten me or bother me.
- Find ways to solve problems that I face
- Control myself when I feel like doing something not right or dangerous.
- Figure out when it is a good time to talk to someone or take action.
- Find someone to help me when I need it.

A resilient child does not need all these features to be resilient, but one is not enough. A child may be loved (I HAVE), but if he or she has no inner strength (I AM)

or social, interpersonal skills (I CAN), there can be no resilience. A child may have a great deal of self-esteem (I AM), but if he or she does not know how to communicate with others or solve problems (I CAN), and has no one to help him or her (I HAVE), the child is not resilient. A child may be very verbal and speak well (I CAN), but if he or she has no empathy (I AM) or does not learn from role models (I HAVE), there is no resilience. Resilience results from a combination of these features.

Children need to become resilient to overcome the many adversities they face in life including bullying at school and at home. They need the help of adults in their life who know how to promote resilience.

### **Questions about the Play**

- 1) In the opening scene of the play Alex's mother isn't looking after him properly. This is called neglect.
  - What do you think neglect is?
- 2) Neglect is a form of child abuse.
  - Why do you think that neglect is considered to be child abuse?
- 3) Alex decides to steal money from his mother's purse so that he can buy himself food.
  - What do you think about Alex's choice to take the money from his mother's purse?
- 4) Alex decides that since he is so hungry and has so much money to spend that he'll buy an entire chocolate cake to eat for breakfast.
  - What do you think about this choice?
  - What do you have for breakfast?
- 5) In the morning at the school there is a before school program that gives the children who attend breakfast. However when Alex turns up most mornings looking lonely and hungry the people who work there tell him to go away as he hasn't paid any fees.
  - What do you think about the workers turning Alex away?
  - What could the workers have done to be more helpful towards Alex?
  - If Alex was offered help in this situation do you think it would have improved his chances of achieving resilience?
- 6) Sansei and Poppy look at the examples of the I HAVE IAM and I CAN in resilience.
  - How does Alex score?
  - Why does Alex score so badly in the three sources of resilience?
  - How can Poppy help Alex?

- 7) At the end of the play the police come to the school to see Alex.
  - Why have they come to see Alex?
  - How does Alex feel about the police coming to the school?
  - What does Alex do to try to get away from them?
  - How does Poppy help Alex to face his problems?
- 8) Poppy tells us at the end of the play what happens to Alex and she says that initially Alex had to be separated from his mother.
  - How does this make Alex feel?
  - How does Alex cope?
- 9) What has Alex learned from Poppy about how to cope when bad things happen to you in life?
- 10) Does the situation in the play make you think about what you might do if you were in a situation that made you feel sad?

## **Improvisations**

### **Situation 1**

A child is being bullied on her way to school. She or he pretends to be sick so that they won't have to walk to school any more. Her mother takes her to the doctor only to discover that there is nothing wrong with her. The improvisation starts with the mother trying to find out from her child what is really going on.

#### *Responses that support resilience*

The mother would ask her child the real reason why she doesn't want to go to school and show that she cares. This will help the child to trust the mother to help and solve the problem together.

### **Situation 2**

There are two children playing handball in the school grounds when they see another child who is alone and very upset. One of the children wants to continue the game of handball while the other wants to help the troubled child.

#### *Responses that support resilience*

The child who assists would have the strength to stop the game and make sure that the upset child is receiving the help that they need.

### **Situation 3**

A child has left the house without telling their father. They have jumped out their bedroom window to meet their friends without telling anybody after the father has told them that they must stay at home that afternoon.

*Responses that support resilience.*

If the father shows anger and immediately punishes the child they will feel that they are bad and will probably repeat the behaviour. The father must find out the reason why the child left without telling anybody and discuss how they can prevent this ever happening in the future.

## **Trust Exercises**

During the play the characters talk about being able to tell your problems to some one that you trust. Through these drama exercises the children can explore what trust is and how it feels.

### **Exercise 1**

Break the class into groups of about six children. Have all the children stand in a tight circle with one child inside. The child inside can fall and then caught by the children in the circle. The child in the middle is then pushed gently from one student to the other around the circle keeping their feet central and their body straight but having no control over which direction they are pushed in.

### **Exercise 2**

The children can break up into pairs. One child can faint as the other catches them from close distance. Both children can have a turn at fainting and catching.

### **Exercise 3**

The children can be broken into pairs. One child can wear a blindfold and the other child can lead them from one end of the room to the other. The children can take turns and both have a go at leading and being blind folded.

*These exercises can be interpreted appropriately according to class size and the maturity of the children. For example on the first exercise just have one group at a time create the circle while it is supervised and watched by the rest of the class.*

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