

Aggressively Reactive Child or a Bully?

Bullying Conference

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Purpose

- To broaden our understanding of what triggers bullying behavior.
- To understand the link between brain development and “aggressively-reactive” behaviors.
- To offer potential interventions based on body-work to help the aggressively-reactive child behave differently.

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



Key Take-Aways

- Bullying should be understood as a behavior that employs an “immature system of psychological defense”.
- Bullying behavior can be seen as a learned and triggered behavior, suggesting that it can be “unlearned”.
- Interventions need to occur immediately when bullying behavior arises and the intervention focus should include body work.
- Comprehensive response to aggressively-reactive children should include family, schools and the community.

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



The Bully-Victim

- Every bully can also be a victim and every victim can also react as a bully (Holt, Finkelhor & Kantor, 2007)

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



A Child Adaptation to Trauma

- “The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with a formidable task of adaptation. She must finda control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness. Unable to care for or protect herself, she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses”. (Judith Herman)



How can we perceive the bully's behavior?

- “An immature system of psychological defenses”. (Judith Herman)
 - The defense used is “identification with an aggressor”
 - Defending against:
 - Perceptions and feelings of vulnerability
 - A sense that they lack protection

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



How Can We Perceive the Bully's Behavior? (cont')

- A way to get needs met:
 - Those needs could be recognition, attention, love, admiration.
- They find that using power is effective
 - A more accurate characterization is that the “Misuse of power can be a means to get needs met” (Melina, Kevorkian & D’Antona. 2008)

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



“Aggressively Reactive Child”

- Bullies can also be seen as “Aggressively Reactive Children”
- Bullying behaviors are learned (Berger, 2007)
- Experiences of a violent, abusive environment as well as a lack of protection and empathy to their needs can lead to bullying behavior

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



Why is all this important?

Recognizing the bullying behaviors as triggered behavior- it is not a behavior that comes out of no-where

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



Recognizing Bullying behaviors as triggered behavior can:

- Assist in devising interventions that target these behaviors as soon as they appear so that behaviors do not become ingrained.
- Help break the stigma and introduce empathy to bullies as victims themselves.
- Break isolation and help recognize it's effects on behavior, emotions and overall functioning so that interventions can target the whole person.

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



Recognizing Bullying behaviors (cont')

- Help develop strategies to strengthen abilities and in particular the ability for empathy (that is often lacking)
- Help develop strategies to regulate emotions when triggered so that kids who bully can use more appropriate skills to deal with what triggers them.

Where do we start?

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



“The Body Keeps the Score”

(Besel van der Kolk)

- The body remembers what has traumatized it.
- The body also remembers what triggered it.
- To effectively help a traumatized person (in our case the aggressively reactive child) we need to have a combinations of methods that will focus on **all domains of functioning**.
- **Body work** is critical to regulating emotions and should be the focus of an intervention strategy.

What does body work have to do with aggressive-reactive behaviors?

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



The Brain is the Link

- Understanding what happens in a traumatized and triggered person's brain can help us find ways to intervene

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



“The Triune Brain:”

One Mind, Three Brains [McLean, 1967]

(Fisher, 2003; Ogden, 2006)

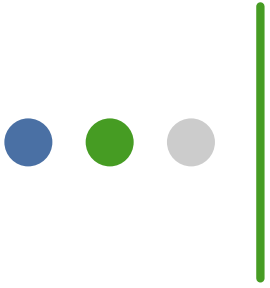


The Brain Develops from the Bottom Up

(Fisher, 2003; Ogden, 2006)



Survival Requires “Animal Brain” Responses (Fisher, 2003)



**Aggressively reactive child can
be see as a “limbic system
mediated” individual at times of
bullying.**



What are we talking about?

- The Relaxation Response. Dr. Herbert Benson
- Dr. Marylyn Weilcher's work in the Needham High School using the relaxation response to reduce anxiety, increase self esteem and help reduce levels of violence.
- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction by Dr. Jon Kabat Zinn is widely practiced in many schools across the country and the research shows decrease in anxiety, and social conflict among other things.
- (See work by Steve Reidman using meditation in Tulca Lake elementary school in LA)
- Physical activity, Yoga and Qi-Gong

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



Summary Points

- We need to identify the triggers for the behaviors of the **aggressively reactive child** that propels him or her to behave violently and in a bullying way towards others

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



Summary Points

- We need to use the myriad of many available **body work** activities such as **relaxation, meditation, MBSR, Yoga. Qi Gong** to work with aggressively reactive children and help them regulate their emotions, calm their bodies and thus change their behaviors

(Armani-Cohen 2010)



Summary Points

- We need to find ways to include **family members, teachers and the community** to help the aggressively reactive child ASAP before it comes to a point of no return and a heavy price is paid.

(Armani-Cohen 2010)

