

Michal Kolář is a child behavioral psychotherapist. He engaged to the Bullying problems and solutions about 25 years ago and he also created the original special theory and methodology of diagnosis and treatment of school bullying. He is the author of books *Hidden World of Bullying in Schools* and *Bullying Pain*. He publishes in professional and popular journals and lectures the issue of school violence and bullying at universities. He also cooperates with the International and European Observatory of school violence. He met the topic of bullying for the first time in 1975 shortly after his graduation of the faculty while he was working in the educational institute as an etoped-diagnosticsian. He started to register the initial discrete forms of bullying around him and of course also in the schools. He learned to see beneath the surface which allowed him to get to the depth of the reality and also into the hidden, unknown world of bullying. Soon he recognized that the sense of his life is seeking the ways how to help a lot of suffering beings. It was very tough work all the more that it was before the velvet revolution (1989), when socialism was in power and a lot of steps were taken to hide these problems, so that our country couldn't be discredited in the eyes of the world public.



During more than thirty years he has uncovered, examined and dealt with hundreds cases of bullying at all types of schools. He has treated more than six hundred groups over a long period.

He has collaborated with various institutions: the Czech School Inspection, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, the Office of the Ombudsman, Amnesty International, Helsinki Committee, and the European Observatory of School Violence.

He has been publishing articles in periodical journals and he is also the author of numerous books with the theme of bullying (*Hidden World of Bullying*, *Bullying Pain*, *New Way to Treat Bullying*). He gives lectures about the problems of school violence and bullying at universities. He is the author of a so-called "Project of a school programme against bullying", where he used a new method. The achievements of this programme rank among the best in the world.

HOW TO PREVENT BULLYING AT SCHOOLS **on-line interview with Paed.Dr. Michal Kolář**

It's been discussed lately that the aggressivity of children is increasing, violence is increasing and so is the bullying. Is it true?

I think, that it is difficult to say, if there is more bullying or if the situation is more or less stabilized. What is for sure is that it is not getting better. Based on my experience I'd say that the violence is worse and it's displays are more serious. On the other hand, this issue is being more discussed nowadays, so it may seem like the situation is getting worse than it actually is, because earlier a lot of things were hidden. In the Czech Republic no long-time survey was made to enable us to qualify some development of the bullying. According to the first and last country-wide surveys in 2001 approximatly 41% of children were victims of bullying. I don't think it really matters if it is 5% more or less in this moment or if the situation is or isn't getting worse. It is obvious that there is this problem and that it involves more children than just that 41% because bullying doesn't damage just victims, but also agressors, even witnesses of this cruel drama. It is clear that this problem isn't being dealt with and primarily that teachers are not prepared to deal with it.

What do you mean by “teachers aren’t prepared“?

They don't know how to create an environment in which the bullying cannot grow, how to identify the bullying and how to behave when they meet it. This is bad prevention and it may have disastrous consequences. When they are trying to solve it. Every teacher should be about these above – mentioned problems on the enlightened should read professional books and go to some training courses targeted on the first help during bullying. At the same time, there should be at least one pedagogue at every school who is systematically educated in this area so he can react properly in these situations. For example, there may be class violence when the victim cannot wait for some specialist to have free time.

Can you introduce some examples of the mistakes caused by teachers?

Teachers have problems to distinguish between the initial and the late stages of bullying. This creates difficulties to solve them, since different stages need different approach. They often choose sound methods which are not helpful. The favorite method is the confrontation between the victims and the aggressors that leads to the absurd situation when the confident aggressors convincingly indicate the initiator of all evil is the insecure victim. When the parents of the aggressors and their children meet with the school leadership, the usual outcome is that the parents fight against “the false” accusation and they dominantly attack the teachers. The unfortunate situation is when the director invites the alleged victim, the alleged aggressors and their parents, some unprepared teachers and attempts to solve the situation with all of them together. While dealing with bullying, the approach has to be extremely cautious. All steps must be coherent like in a chess game and we have to think about the tactics with alternative steps.

Are there any elements that directly facilitate the development of bullying in the Czech educational system?

The Czech educational system is very authoritative. This environment, in terms of bullying, is more risky than the democratic one. However, the truth is that the problems with bullying are present in all systems and I do not believe that there is a school, which has sufficiently managed to solve this problem. On the other hand, there are some good elements in, for example, the Nordic educational systems, which can help us.

How can schools prevent bullying?

It is important for the school to admit that the problem exists, since this is not always obvious. I still meet many directors who claim that they do not have any problems with bullying at their schools, or either that they cannot do anything with that, or they are not responsible for it. They blame the parents and their children. Each school has a current or potential problem with bullying and each of them should take preventive actions and measures. The environment full of reliance and partnerships based on the mutual respect is very important. Each school, which wants children to come to the lessons with no fear or anxiety, keeps trying to do its best to prevent bullying. The ideal situation is when the relationships among the teachers are good and when they are able to give a sort of feedback to one another, when they can handle the rivalry and when they can get over the crisis in the relationship but, unfortunately, it is a rare and difficult occurrence.

Do you believe that there is a way how to eliminate bullying?

I do not think so. I have experienced that even though a good climate is important for the prevention, it is not enough to reduce bullying behavior. I have seen in many schools that although they were capable to create good relationships and very positive learning environment, bullying still persists. In a positive environment children are often more sensitive to bullying occurrence, however at a certain stage we can, in paradox, feel that the bullying occurs more often. In addition, open relationships allow us to learn about bullying earlier and we are able to solve it more effectively. Even the best democratic community cannot completely prevent bullying and that is why every school should have a special program focused to this continuous problem.

You have recently come up with a school program, which helps to get rid of bullying and you have successfully tested this program at one the schools in Hradec Kralove. What was it like?

The important thing is that this is a special program involving the whole school. It is based on thirteen key

steps. Some of them include training of teachers and supervision in dealing with specific cases of bullying and also regular preventive work within the classroom hours. The important part is to develop scenarios on how to proceed in dealing with bullying. The project developed two types of scenarios. The first type involves situations that can be handled by the school itself. Practically this means familiarity with emergency procedures during the initial stages of bullying. The second type of scenario was concerned with a situation, where you need a help of school professionals, including the police. The initial stages handled by school are those which have not taken class standards for their bullying. Tragically, when violence becomes a norm and it is adopted by all members of the group and bullying has become generic, the student body is divided into two groups, one that has all rights and other, which does not have any.

What was included in the staff training?

There was a ten people application team, thoroughly familiar with all the issues that introduced the program to the whole school. This staff then went through the training consisting of four modules. The first module gets familiar with the basic information about bullying, its occurrences and what the healthy and the diseased group should look like and how to recognize bullying. Further it gets familiar with a basic diagnostic procedures and procedures for providing first aid. Here is for example very important that teachers learn to recognize what stage is the case of bullying at. This procedure is necessary to adapt the unveiling of bullying and its solution. The content of other modules as actual program against bullying, special methods of diagnosis and treatment of bullying, supervisory activities in which teachers, for example, acquire feedback on their actual work in the classroom.

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Was the main point of the project only prevention or did it include solution of some particular cases of bullying?

The most common was work with the beginning stage of bullying in the group. Nevertheless four cases of developed bullying were solved, one of which was also investigated by the police. Part of the project was to begin cooperation with so called "service organizations" – centre of educational treatment, custodians/curators, the police and non-governmental organisations. At one of the first supervision meetings, cooperation on the project was arranged. It was a coordinated process which improved the help for schools. I consider to be of vital importance that school knows when to ask these organisations for help and how to cooperate with them. Of course, these organisations must be fully informed about the problem.

How did you assess the success rate of the programme?

I made a diagnoses of the school at the beginning of the project and after it was finished and the same I did at the tested school which had similar characteristics as the experimental school but there was no bullying programme running. Meanwhile at the testing school the situation of bullying did not change, at the experimental school it fell 42,5% down. The results are very encouraging. They can be compared with the results of worldknown Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. As I have already mentioned, we dealt with four cases of advanced bullying. When we made the final diagnosis, these cases did not appear there, which means we managed to completely solve them. This I consider to be a great success.

Were you inspired by your colleagues abroad or did you use your own ideas and experience?

First fo all I used my special theory, differential diagnosis methodology and alternative treatment which I worked out in my book “The Pain of Bullying.” In many respects my approach is identical with those of my foreign colleagues. Specific primary prevention is almost the same everywhere. The main difference between the Czech program and Olweus Bullying Prevention Program and other foreign programs I see in dealing with bullying cases which already exist.

Are you going to try your Project of Hradecká škola extend in that way that it can be used for more schools?

Yes. I have been cooperating with civic association AISIS on a three year programme “Minimalisation of Bullying” which was initiated and supported by Eurotel Foundation. It differs from “Hradecký programme” not only by larger number of schools involved but also in bigger focus on friendly environment at schools and creating good relationships. The aim of the project is to create a network of qualified lecturers and consultants able to educate in this field who should be able to help and support introducing the program against bullying to schools.

**RAISING PROBLEM OF CYBERBULLYING
on-line interview with Paed.Dr. Michal Kolář****What do you think of cyberbullying? These days media talk mostly about it. Other forms of bullying seem to fade away.**

In most cases it is a part of school bullying, equally serious.

This form of bullying takes shape through social networks which students are very interested in.

Does it mean that media exaggerate theme of cyberbullying at the expense of traditional school bullying?

As a matter of a fact cyberbullying is not as frequent as school bullying. Media don't talk about this fact very often and it can cause that some cases of cyberbullying happen to be really serious. But the biggest problem is that most of views on this subject are superficial. Even some of enthusiasts concerned in the issue of cyberbullying don't know much about it.

If you want to cope with cyberbullying you need to handle school bullying. And there are several serious reasons.

Which reasons do you mean?

All participants and even the victims prevent the revelation of bullying from different reasons. The victim denied cyberbullying etc.

Teachers, parents and specialists solve bullying technically right, however without proper methodology they often more hurt than help.

The special chapter are social networks which help to expand cyberbullying.

Indeed! Let's look at this serious case: During the time when a girl was dating with a boy they took intimate photographs. After they broke up the boy put some of these photographs on Facebook for everybody to see to take his revenge.

The girl begged him to delete them or she would jump from a bridge but the boy didn't do so and the girl really jumped. She died right after that.

If it is obvious that aggressor wants to harm their victim it is definitely cyberbullying.

In case of physical bullying the headmasters have to contend with a problem in which they have to decide whether it is contained in school's remit or not. What about bounds of cyberspace and school?

When cyberbullying harms our pupils in our school we need to act immediately. Specially trained teacher decide if they can handle this case or if it's necessary to call in a specialist. It depends on school's staff if they use disciplinary sanctions index

If this cyberbullying doesn't take place during the school hours and/or on the school property than we don't address it directly. It's almost impossible to catch the cyber-aggressor. If we are thinking about punishing the aggressor we need to consult it with a lawyer. We give our students advice how to protect themselves and how to provide evidences of being cyberbullied and who they can contact.

What is the actual situation with schools' and Ministry of Education's fighting against bullying? In recent years we have been discussing the fact that although bullying still exist practically everywhere, schools don't ignore it anymore and they try to act.

The improvement is that in school's region are many activities aimed on the issue of bullying. But the breaking point hasn't come yet. Most of teachers aren't prepared to handle with bullying. One of the main problems is, that there is no systematic education provided yet.

There is a new law passed now. How this act can help schools?

I think that this act can be very important for all teachers and staff.

Not only the headmaster and teacher responsible for school-based prevention but also the school employers should help with building up this anti-bullying project.

What in your opinion is the biggest mistake in solving cases concerned with bullying?

Teachers still have a huge problem with the identification of bullying. Another serious mistake is, that schools often solve the initial and late forms of bullying the same way.

Like every stage of cancer has its own kind of therapy, bullying can't be solved with just one method. New established law should help in finding new ways how to solve each form or stages of bullying effectively.