

Part One

Introduction

The Support Group Method, at the time known as the No Blame Approach, was first used in 1990 in response to a request from a teacher colleague who faced a complaint from parents about very painful bullying which had been going on, unknown to school staff, for many years. Based on our established work on behaviour management which was:

- non-punitive
- problem solving
- self-esteem building.

we advised the teacher to try a simple seven-step procedure that she found successful. During the following 15 years the work was developed, published (Maines and Robinson 1992, Robinson and Maines 1995) and evaluated and met with widespread support from colleagues in the UK and around the world. The work also attracted constant criticism from Kidscape, amounting to persistent personal and professional attacks on us.

The campaign, lead by Kidscape, and supported by Dan Norris MP, culminated in a direction in November 2002 from the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, that all bullies should be punished. We subsequently lost our posts as regional coordinators for the Anti-Bullying Alliance and during December that year, all references to the work were erased from the DfES website. For those interested a fuller account of the development of the work, the research and the political events is published in (Robinson and Maines 2008). A summary is available in Appendix 3.

We assume that if you are reading this your are one of the many thousands of supporters who want to know more about how the method actually works and are seeking some resources to support your own training sessions. We hope that you will find useful material.

Our own training programme has been very popular including several thousand participants but it is now time to put it into the hands of others as we approach retirement. The need for restorative approaches has not gone away. At the time of writing, the four UK Children's Commissioners are presenting to the United Nations a distressing report on the plight of young people in the UK who are shown on a wide range of measures to be most at risk and unhappier than all their European counterparts.

We offer some of our resources and our arguments for you to use as you wish. The work is not 'cast in stone' and will develop in the future. In spite of the controversy we are confident that, with the extensive support here and overseas, it will continue to be a useful and effective intervention far beyond our contribution.

What is in the book

Our own training days have followed a particular pattern and we set out the sessions with the arguments we make. Some are accompanied by video clips, some depend on other published resources and others on discussion activities and feedback. Often we offer a strong challenge to commonly held perceptions and we will explain these at the appropriate points.

The guide offers the numbered points that we make as we progress through the work and it seems very prescriptive. We do not apologise for providing our well rehearsed scripts and leave it to the reader to use whatever is helpful.

On the CD-ROM as a printable resource you will find:

- A PowerPoint file
- PowerPoint notes of the teaching points and information
- Transcripts of the video clips
- Activity pages and handouts

On the DVD disc you will find:

Video clips (all files are MPEGs)

- Girls in classroom – no sound
- Girls in classroom – with sound
- Staircase scene – no sound
- Staircase scene – with sound
- The Seven Steps
- Mark – a reformed bully