

The Holyoake DRUMBEAT Program - Addressing Bullying in schools

Bullying has always been an issue of concern for educators and parents, and the new realm of cyberbullying has highlighted how detrimental this practice can be to young people victimised through it. Bullying is a repeated pattern of harmful behaviour, (and can be physical, verbal and social) that involves an abuse of power – that power can be utilised through physical superiority, social standing, weight of numbers or verbal dexterity. Cyberbullying extends that same behaviour to the internet and other mobile devices.

Bullying behaviour is often covert in nature and often includes isolating individuals through social exclusion. Because of its hidden nature, covert bullying is often more difficult to discern and may go on longer than the more obvious forms of bullying such as physical intimidation. Covert bullying often involves rumour and innuendo and damages people's reputation, social standing and self-esteem. Covert bullying is particularly prevalent in the cyberbullying sphere.

The Holyoake DRUMBEAT program is a behavioural intervention that explores a wide range of relationship issues that impact on healthy lives. The program has a strong evidence base with outcomes including reductions in anti-social behaviour and increased levels of mental health well-being. Among the different relationship themes tackled by the program are several that directly confront bullying and assist students implement strategies to reduce its prevalence in the schoolyard and through cyberspace.

These include:

- Session 1 - Rhythm discussion – Can look at the ease at which we can fall into patterns of negativity towards others and how to move out of those patterns
- Session 2 - The Echo – which explores rumour and innuendo and the consequences of these on victims, as well as how to respond to these types of assertions, both on and off line.
- The Rhythm Detective – which can be used to prompt students to be alert for signs from victims of bullying in order to offer support.
- Session 3 - The Peer Pressure Challenge – which can explore the way young people can resist being drawn into bullying behaviour by others
- Session 3 - Communication Praise & Blame – which directly explores the underlying cause of bullying and reduces the power of the bully
- Session 4 – One Drum at a Time & The Tolerance Rhythm – exploring the importance of tolerance and acceptance of difference.
- Session 5 - The Feeling Game – A Personal Perspective; which can be utilised to explore the feelings evoked by bullying and how we manage these
- Values exercises – these explore the values that support healthy relationships and can be focussed on examining those behaviours, such as bullying, that compromise our values.
- Session 6 – It takes two – Pairing bullies and victims to work together and find a common rhythm – breaking down barriers between individuals that increase bullying behaviour.
- Empathy exercises – that can be used to focus on the suffering of victims of bullies, and potentially the bully themselves who is often a victim in another setting.
- Teamwork theme – which can be used to discuss the way people can stand up to bullying

Funding for Bullying Prevention Initiatives such as DRUMBEAT is available from both government and private foundations. Some of the questions these grants seek to answer from applicants are:

1. Demonstrate a commitment to developing and implementing ongoing, school-led bullying and cyberbullying prevention initiatives.

The Holyoake DRUMBEAT program assists schools target both victims and perpetrators of bullying, through a group process that prompts self-reflection on both the causes of, and responses to, bullying behaviour. The DRUMBEAT intervention empowers students to lead themselves and take responsibility for acting on these issues which establishes a peer led anti-bullying movement. The program should be incorporated into a school wide campaign that acknowledges that certain students can be identified as needing increased levels of support and education.

2. Improve awareness among teachers, students and parents that bullying and cyberbullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

The Holyoake DRUMBEAT program increases awareness through a range of exercises that assist young people openly discuss the complex issues that underlie bullying behaviour and the challenges of confronting it. These are often difficult discussions to have, particularly with bullies themselves and require a strong degree of trust amongst participants. The DRUMBEAT program facilitates these conversations through the safety of games and exercises linked to musical expression, which reduces defensiveness and increases participation.

3. Develop students' understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour both online and offline.

The Holyoake DRUMBEAT Facilitator Training program trains educators and other professionals implementing the program to discuss appropriate responses to bullying behaviour, including cyber bullying, with a strong emphasis on the 'best practice' guideline espoused by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre. Additionally the DRUMBEAT program explores closely the discrepancy between student values and bullying behaviour, understanding the correlation between an awareness of one's core values and the alignment of these to behaviour.

4. Build on current school-based approaches in an innovative and creative manner.

The DRUMBEAT program is used across Australia and internationally to work with young people to explore a range of social and emotional issues that influence behaviour and impact on relationships. The program is innovative in its approach, using analogies drawn from hand drumming to open up discussion and prompt self-reflection. This experiential format reduces self-consciousness and has proven to increase feelings of belonging and acceptance, which leads to increased levels of participation and improved learning outcomes.