

EMPOWERED for Life



Equipping
children to deal
with everyday
conflict and
bullying

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*Dedicated to every parent and teacher
on the journey of empowering the next generation
to achieve a healthier and more fulfilled future.*

One person can make a difference.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jocelyne is passionate about seeing children succeed in one of the most important areas in life – their ability to successfully negotiate life socially and emotionally. She knows the best way to do this is through education and the collaborative efforts of teachers and parents.

With 30 years of broad teaching experience in all primary school years in two states and the Northern Territory in Australia, Jocelyne is keen to provide programs that are engaging, fun and relevant.

She uses data consistently to identify what skills are most needed and to show evidence of the effectiveness of the program.

Recently she completed a research Masters investigating ways to support teachers with conflict in the classroom.

Jocelyne has also spent seven years working in a behavioural advisory program in South East Queensland.

Jocelyne takes her effective programs into rural and city schools to help enable each child to be equipped with an understanding of how to be resilient and how to resolve day-to-day conflicts. Jocelyne is regularly invited to speak at conferences and in whole school communities, and acts in an advisory role to school principals.

Jocelyne is the founder of EMPOWERING Life Skills and the creator of the BRIDGE BUILDERS program.

TESTIMONIALS

BRIDGE BUILDERS is the most successful peer-support process we have implemented in our school. The effects on both the Bridge Builders and the younger students who are supported by them are considerable. Teachers comment regularly about how effective this program is in both developing the leadership skills of the older students who are the Bridge Builders and creating a supportive system for the students who need that extra help to manage relationships at school. This program will be a regular feature of our school for well into the future.

Chris Ling, Principal, Cannon Hill State School

Parents found the workshop extremely helpful in gaining a clearer understanding of the differences between conflict and bullying. A range of parenting strategies were covered that will enable parents to better assist their children to deal with everyday conflicts. We received 100 per cent positive feedback from all parents in attendance!

Mark J., Principal, St Helens, Maryborough

As an educator, I have found BRIDGE BUILDERS to be a proactive program that provides a common, respectful language for children to draw from during situations of conflict resolution. It teaches students active, effective listening and how to pay attention to a person's non-verbals to aid in the Bridge Building process.

*Colette Kleiman, Acting Deputy Principal,
Loganholme State School*

Jocelyne has delivered the BRIDGE BUILDERS program in two capacities at Cannon Hill Anglican College. Her work with teachers and support staff at the beginning of the year has proved invaluable in setting up a shared understanding of the conflict-resolution strategies that, as a College, we wish to put in place in assisting the development of a culture that is centred on the theme 'Building shared value in and beyond our community'.

The intensive study Jocelyne then led with a selected group of students, who demonstrated a keen willingness to serve and lead in the capacity of BRIDGE BUILDERS, has meant that peer mediation has become commonplace in our Early Years Precinct.

Our students are developing the skills of conflict resolution through instruction within the classroom, modelling in the playground and acting as mentors for younger students. Parents have commented favourably on the effectiveness of this program that has extended beyond the school and into homes. For example:

'This has not just been good for our daughter's understanding of conflict, but has impacted on our whole family as she shares her skills with us at home' (parent of CHAC Year 6 student).

We have found that Jocelyne's work with both staff and students promotes the central ideas that support our College's Strategic Direction: Growing Intellectual Capacity, Building Character and Nurturing Dispositions.

We look forward to a continuing relationship with Jocelyne as we work to develop these lifelong skills and strategies in and for our students.

*Mrs Elizabeth Chaplin Dip.T, B.Ed., M. Innov. Learn.,
Director of Primary, Cannon Hill Anglican College*

The skills children learn through the BRIDGE BUILDERS program will support them to not only navigate the complexities of relationships coloured by conflict and bullying, but to also develop essential protective behaviours.

Self-awareness around physical and emotional responses to threatening people or situations can support children to identify when they may be at risk, as well as how to communicate and seek help.

BRIDGE BUILDERS promotes resilience and self-worth, which encourages children to challenge bullying behaviour and develop expectations around what positive and safe relationships look like. These life skills can be applied not only in the school environment, but also within the home, community and beyond.

Selina Kelly, social worker and parent

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Conclusion

Journeying to a healthier future

We build too many walls and not enough bridges.

Isaac Newton

Life is a journey founded on relationships. Teaching children how to be bridge builders can be an effective way of developing lifelong resilience. Whether we intentionally try to teach them or absently assume they know how to make friends and deal with conflict and bullying, they will adopt a means that works for them, even if it's destructive. When children are not effectively taught how to build bridges, they ultimately build invisible walls around themselves. These walls cut others off and block relationships, and create emotional stress, inhibit learning and isolate children from others. This causes destructive thinking, leading to poor resilience; inhibition to learning, causing reduced self-esteem;

and loneliness that potentially makes them more vulnerable to conflict and bullying.

Everyone's responsibility

When children are taught by parents and teachers to connect successfully with others around them, their self-confidence and self-worth can be positively affected. Healthy friendships increase a sense of belonging, broaden a child's thinking, boost their happiness, reduce stress and motivate learning and trying of new things. As part of life's journey, friendships will inevitably face obstacles. Throughout this book, we have explored seven principles to help children learn to be 'bridge builders':

1. Choices
2. Reactions
3. Calming body and mind
4. Resolving problems
5. How to get help
6. Letting it go
7. Moving on

The BRIDGE BUILDERS program provides the basic understanding of the why, what and how of behavioural choices, emotional resilience skills and powerful positive thinking that underpins successful relationships. It gives the tools of language and skills to build and repair relationships.

I am deeply saddened by stories detailing the impact of bullying and the cost of broken relationships on individuals. The

statistics of suicide, mental health problems, abuse and self-harming behaviours are alarming. I have been touched by these impacts in my own family. I don't pretend to have all the answers or the cure-all, but I do know that in the search for meaning and understanding, I have had the privileged position to observe, research and create programs that can make a difference. When teaching the BRIDGE BUILDERS program, the impact I have seen on families, schools and communities has been phenomenal. Schools become more cooperative and happier places where learning is accelerated and creativity blossoms.

Run over two half-days, BRIDGE BUILDERS is an intensive training course that skills older students in the process of helping younger students to mediate problems with others. Year 6 students are taught an understanding about the nature of conflict and bullying and given skills and language that help resolve it. On the second day, they learn the process of mediation to help younger children (from ages five to nine) to solve their own conflicts in the playground. This mediation involves students who aren't involved in the conflict helping younger students come to an agreement through a process of cooperative exploration of conflict-resolution options. The program focuses on positive relationships and helps in developing responsible learners who have ownership of their problem-solving. Mediation is well researched as an effective way to reduce bullying in schools. It is also a wonderful opportunity to create harmonious and empathic school communities where the older students in the school coach younger students to learn ways to resolve their problems by using the bridge-building skills shared in this book. Training for teachers, parents and for specific classes is also available.

Next steps

The most significant way to help children learn these skills is when schools invest in training the whole community in a universal approach to conflict resolution and dealing with bullying. When everyone, including parents, is reinforcing and modeling relationships that put the effort into building and repairing bridges, we empower our children for today and prepare a generation for a healthier future. The BRIDGE BUILDERS program provides a whole-school strategic framework of skills, language and understanding. Whether we are a parent, teacher, educator, coach or just know children, we all are impacting on the next generation. You too can be part of the solution of equipping them and empowering them by learning skills to resolve your conflict and reduce bullying. The BRIDGE BUILDERS program provides practical tools to change the culture of the school community from surviving to thriving.

This is not the end and perhaps it is just the beginning. Perhaps you can even identify elements of this book that you know you too need to work on more. Conflict is inevitable; therefore, the better equipped we all are to be building bridges with others, the greater chance we have of journeying into a healthier future.

FURTHER SUPPORT

The BRIDGE BUILDERS program offers student workshops that teach knowledge in a variety of skills, using simple language that empowers children and builds resilience and confidence. Additionally, older students are trained in a specific mediation program to support younger students by mediating with them in the playground. BRIDGE BUILDER Mediators in the playground reduce by 80 per cent the minor incidences that formerly would have been referred to the teacher.

Teacher, staff and parent training is also available. Teacher stress is reduced through a three-hour interactive seminar that provides an understanding of conflict and reinforces the consistent language and skills proven to be successful in a whole-school context. A range of class posters are offered that provide points of reference to reinforce skills, methodologies and language. Training can also be provided for after-school centre staff to reinforce these skills and ensure they flow into all school programs. A specific support meeting is available for principals and deputies who deal with regular high-level conflict or bullying behaviour, and this incorporates the implementation of the bridge-building skills and language as well as mediation skills. Parents are offered a two-hour workshop where they can learn simple and practical skills to implement at home. Posters are also available to help families remember and apply the skills and language.

Principals find that having a whole-school approach creates overall consistency and means everyone is empowered with a sense of responsibility to resolve the issue, rather than adopting a blaming and 'you fix it' attitude. The whole community is empowered with valuable life skills to resolve conflict constructively and to be more tolerant, creative, peaceful and productive. To complete the process, data is collected and used to drive implementation and identify best practices for success. Time and cost savings for schools are huge.

This program changes the culture of a school from surviving to thriving. This is the *start* of dealing with bullying. It is *not* addressing some of the bigger issues in bullying – that is another program called 'Be the Change'. I believe though before a school implements specific bullying programs it needs a strategic whole-school culture of building bridges.

For more information about the BRIDGE BUILDERS program, go to EmpoweringLifeSkills.com.au or contact me via EmpoweringLife@bigpond.com.

I wish you all the best as you empower children for life.

Do you have children who struggle with conflict or bullying?

Conflict is a part of everyday life. Conflict is often unpleasant, and when unresolved or resolved poorly can be harmful or lead to bullying. How conflict affects your primary school children largely depends on how they respond to it. Few of us have been equipped in how to handle conflict well. This book provides tools so teachers and parents can play a pivotal role in teaching, modelling, encouraging and reinforcing positive responses to conflict, and in reducing bullying.

In *Empowered for Life*, Jocelyne Chirnside uses her 30 years of teaching experience and almost 20 years as a Social Emotional Learning consultant in over 70 state, private and Catholic schools to share expert insight in:

- the difference between conflict and bullying
- how to empower children to be resilient
- practical and easy-to-use skills to resolve conflict
- how to create positive, productive school and home environments.

This valuable and informative book helps schools and parents ensure children have the emotional resilience and skills to cope with a rapidly changing society, and are better positioned to be positive, contributing and fulfilled citizens.



Jocelyne Chirnside is an author, researcher, speaker, consultant, teacher and parent. She is passionate about seeing children succeed in the most important areas in life: their ability to successfully negotiate life socially and emotionally. She knows the best way to do this is through education and the collaborative efforts of teachers and parents. Jocelyne regularly acts in an advisory role to school principals. Jocelyne is the founder of *EMPOWERING Life Skills* and the creator of the *BRIDGE BUILDERS* program.



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