Shared Responsibility is a proven, positive approach to beating bullying in Australian schools. At its core is the Shared Responsibility Meeting—a powerful and effective interviewing process that puts an immediate stop to bullying. The process appeals to empathy by putting a real person with real feelings in the place of the object victim. Shared Responsibility looks after the needs of victims, enabling students to cope and survive in a competitive school environment, teaching them how to be and feel safe. The whole school community is invited to share the responsibility for creating and maintaining an educational environment that is happy and safe for all students. The Shared Responsibility process has been trialed at a number of schools with highly positive results. It is simple, straightforward and can be managed by anyone who has basic people skills.

Praise for Shared Responsibility:

As a leading teacher I have seen students’ lives, both those of the victims and the bullies, turned around in ways that I have not seen before in my 30 years of teaching. Students who were helpless victims of cruel, unrelenting bullying are now safe and bullies have stopped bullying.

JENICE STOKES, LEADING TEACHER

In my capacity as Assistant Principal in a State Primary School I am required to deal with incidents of bullying as they arise. I found Shared Responsibility a common-sense, no fuss approach which gets to the heart of the bullying problem. This is a wonderful, inspiring approach that is adaptable and suitable for students of all ages, both primary and secondary.

JOHN COBURN, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Ian Findley has worked in secondary schools for 27 years as a teacher and co-ordinator, and, for the past 12 years, as a CCES accredited Chaplain. He has a BA in Religious Studies and Music and is known as a gifted story-teller, writer and teacher.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian is a family man with four grown-up children. He graduated from La Trobe University with a BA in Religious Studies and Music. Ian has worked in secondary schools for twenty-seven years as a teacher, a coordinator, and for the past twelve years as a CCES accredited Chaplain in state secondary schools.

Ian loves music, people and particularly working with teenagers. As a chaplain he has spent many hours pastorally caring for staff, students and their families. He is a keen observer of human behaviour and has identified ways of connecting and communicating with people of all ages. Ian’s insight and understanding of the issues relating to bullying has enabled him to see beyond the surface and to connect with those young people who have been the recipients of bullying as well as with those who engage in it.

Ian is a gifted storyteller, writer and teacher who uses story to capture and grip the reader while skilfully intertwining it with teaching the method.
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I would like to acknowledge some very special people who have encouraged and supported me in my research and writing of this book.

My Principal Avril Salter has allowed me the freedom to experiment within her school and develop a method that has proven very effective in beating bullying. Avril also took an active role in proofreading the material and getting the word out there so other schools can benefit from this method.

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In all the support I have had, there is one person who lies behind this book from its inception. This is my good friend and colleague Jenice Stokes without whom this book would have never been written. It was Jenice who noticed the power and effectiveness of the method in beating bullying and insisted that I write it down so other schools may benefit. It was Jenice who managed and set out the processes of the book's structure. It was Jenice who promoted and pushed forward to ensure that this book became a reality. It was Jenice who encouraged me to keep going when I was feeling that writing was not my thing. I dedicate this book to her and all the students who have found themselves on the receiving end of hurtful, cruel bullying. It is my prayer that what I have learnt and shared in this book will assist many to heal, and then rise above and beat bullying.
INTRODUCTION

I am writing this book because I need your help to solve a problem, a big problem, the problem of ‘bullying in schools’. It is my hope that after reading this book you will assist me by sharing the responsibility in combating this serious problem, a problem that has plagued schools since community schooling began.

I cannot do it alone, I need your help. If we work together I’m sure we will discover ways that will ensure the safety of the victims and put a stop to bullying.

As a teenager I was both a bully and a victim, so I know what it is like on both sides of the fence. In twenty-seven years of teaching and working in secondary schools, I have encountered and responded to many incidents of bullying, but it wasn’t until I became a School Chaplain in 1993 that the seriousness of bullying really hit home to me. As a chaplain I got to hear many of the usually untold stories that lie behind the sad, sometimes helpless eyes of the victims. I became privy to the pain of those who had been subjected to cruel, hurtful, sometimes spirit-breaking acts of bullying.

Over the years schools have struggled to know how to ensure both the safety and a feeling of safety for the students who have been the unfortunate recipients of bullying. Schools have been largely ineffective in changing the behaviour of those who bully others. In addition to this, schools have failed to provide effective support programs that assist the wounded students to recover, heal, and rise above bullying.

Schools have traditionally tried to overcome bullying with a ‘fix the bully’ type mentality. Since the rise in awareness of the impact of bullying in our schools, governments have required all schools to have a ‘bullying policy’ in place. Schools now boast of policies that do not tolerate bullying. Some are even bold enough to make claims of having a ‘bully free’ school. No schools are ‘bully free’. Bullying is a social phenomenon. It occurs when people are grouped together and battle for recognition, power and social position. The policy is not what is important. What is important is the procedure: the method the school uses to respond to and deal with bullying incidents. It is the procedure that gives life, power and meaning to the policy. It is the procedure that either succeeds or fails.

Schools aim to provide a learning environment where students are safe and feel safe, and where bullying incidents are dealt with efficiently and effectively.

*Shared responsibility* is a practical procedure that makes it possible to achieve this aim.
The aim is threefold and ensures:
- students are safe,
- students feel safe,
- bullying is stopped.

This book is the product of twelve years research, twenty-seven years experience in secondary schools and much heart wrenching experimentation. The motivation for writing this book is compassion for the weak and the hurting as well as a desire to share what I have found to be effective with others. It has been written in, and for, Australian schools. I acknowledge the influence of the writing and work of Barbara Maines and George Robinson who developed the ‘No Blame Approach’ to overcoming bullying in England.¹

In writing this book, I have integrated theory and practice into story. As a teacher and a preacher, I am a storyteller. I have experienced considerable success communicating using this genre and it is my hope that I can connect with you through the stories in this book. The stories in this book are real stories about real people, but the names and some of the details have been changed for privacy reasons.

What is shared responsibility?

*Shared responsibility* is putting a stop to bullying. It has as the core component the Shared Responsibility Meeting. This is a powerful and effective interviewing process that puts an immediate stop to bullying. The process appeals to empathy by putting a real person with real feelings in the place of the object victim.

*Shared responsibility* is looking after the needs of victims. It facilitates healing, assists recovery and develops the needed confidence and skills that enable students to cope and survive in a competitive school environment. It teaches students how to be, and feel, safe.

*Shared responsibility* is a proven, positive, powerful, effective approach to beating bullying in schools.

*Shared responsibility* is a proactive, whole school approach to beating bullying in Australian schools.

*Shared responsibility* is inviting the whole school community to share the responsibility for creating and maintaining an educational environment that is happy and safe for all students.

¹ Barbara Maines and George Robinson developed and published the ‘No Blame Approach’ in dealing with bullying in England. It was published in the UK by Lucky Duck Press Ltd www.luckyduck.com.uk It was later published with permission in Australia by Inyahead Press www.inyahead.com.au
Shared responsibility is built on concepts of welfare, education and discipline.

- **Welfare:**
  - takes into account the needs of all students
  - supports all students
  - treats all students with equal respect

- **Education:**
  - teaches responsibility, values and life skills
  - teaches an understanding of bullying
  - teaches the potential impact of bullying
  - teaches school policy and procedures

- **Discipline:**
  - fosters self-discipline and self-control
  - incorporates consequence for actions

 Shared responsibility is simple, straightforward, and can be managed by anyone who has basic people skills.

 Shared responsibility empowers students to act.

Ian Findley
Melbourne
Shared Responsibility
CHAPTER ONE
THE IMPACT OF BULLYING

Bullying has more victims than just the initial target.

It is 9:20 on Monday morning, 26 February 1993. I am sitting in my office at my new school planning the activities of the day when there is a knock at my door. I look up, the door opens, and in walks a woman who I have never met before. She greets me with a question. ‘Are you the new Chaplain?’ She looks nervous, upset and a little panicky. Her eyes are sad and I can see she is fighting hard to hold back the tears that are welling up within them. Closing the door, I invite her to sit down. She cannot contain her tears any longer and begins to sob uncontrollably. From amid the tears and sobs I hear, ‘Why? Why did he do it? Why did he do this to me?’

Slowly she began to tell her story.

It was two years ago now, on a Friday night. We all had our different things to do on Fridays so we generally looked after ourselves and got our own tea. Friday was my night off. Bill had been down at the radio station, Jeremy was out with his mates and Liam had been for his usual run, come home, made a sandwich, left his usual mess on the bench and gone to his room. It was just after eleven when I decided to go to bed and noticed the light still on in Liam’s room. This was unusual because he usually had his music playing if he was still up. Everything was strangely quiet. I thought that he might have fallen asleep and forgotten about the light. I opened the door to find him hanging naked, above an overturned chair. Why? Why did he do it? Why did he do this to me?

Grace’s teenage son had killed himself and she came to me to ask ‘why’. The more Grace enquired about Liam and searched for answers the more everything pointed to
that fact that Liam had been traumatised by bullying. The discovery that Liam had suffered alone and in silence for nearly two years, added to Grace’s pain, guilt and sense of failure as a parent. ‘Why didn’t he tell me? I’m his mother. I love him. I could have helped him.’

No one knew of Liam’s suffering and pain until it was too late. When Liam was 14 he loved athletics. He had no time for girls because he was too busy. A few boys started teasing him because he didn’t have a girlfriend and he showed no interest in having one. It started as a joke trying to match Liam up with any and every girl they could think of. After a while the group decided he must be gay, and this became the focus of their fun. The fun turned into hostility as the rumours spread and more students became involved. Liam’s depression and loneliness grew with every act of rejection, torment and innuendo.

Liam’s suicide was not a spur of the moment thing. He had planned it very carefully. Liam had taken a saw from the shed and cut a very neat hole in the plaster ceiling exposing one of the beams. He had purchased a rope and gone to the trouble of learning how to make the perfect noose. He had made himself a banana sandwich which was found on his bedside table with one bite taken out of it. He chose a time when he knew his brother would be out, as he would be the one most likely to disturb him.

This heart-wrenching incident moved me deeply and set me on a mission of study, research and experimentation. I was determined to find ways to address the serious problems associated with bullying.

Liam’s story is not an isolated one. In the 1990s a student in Sydney stood up in front of his class, looked every kid in the eye then shot himself in front of them. Why did he choose that class, those students, that time? What was he saying to those present?

Bullying has more victims than just the initial target. Some of the school shootings in America have been connected with acts of school bullying. At a recent training day we were informed that 70 young people commit suicide every year in Britain as a direct result of being bullied at school.²

People who have been seriously affected by bullying either turn inward on themselves, or lash out at others and the world. It has been reported that some perpetrators of horrific crimes have themselves been victims of bullying while at school. No one can ever truly know the impact that bullying may have had on the emotional and mental development of such people. However, we cannot ignore it or dismiss it lightly.

² Data supplied 2004 Babara Maines. I have been unable to obtain similar data relating to Australian schools.
An illustration of this ongoing effect was brought to my attention one morning. I was called out of a meeting at school to speak with a parent who had informed the office staff that I was needed urgently. This mother had driven nearly all the way to her place of employment that morning when she turned around and came directly to the school because of her concern for the safety and wellbeing of her daughter. Her daughter was going through some difficult experiences within her peer group, a situation that I was aware of. The girl’s mother was distressed that her daughter was being bullied and might be unable to cope. As this mother spoke her emotional state deteriorated. ‘I don’t want my daughter to go through what I went through. I was bullied at school and I know how bad it can get.’

Her daughter was not being bullied at all.

There was definitely conflict between peers, but her daughter displayed all the social skills and confidence that she needed to keep her from becoming a victim. Unfortunately, this mother’s own demons were being resurrected. What she believed may be happening to her daughter had re-opened old wounds that were hidden deep within herself. This mother was reliving the emotion, the fears and pain that had caused her so many traumas when she was at school many years ago. She was still a victim.

As part of my research, I undertook surveys with students and parents. The purpose of these surveys was to find out what people thought and felt, as well as gain an insight into what was really happening in our school. The surveys were anonymous and allowed the participants to speak up without fear of retribution. The response from parents, in particular, was overwhelming.

The stories they told of their children, as well as their own personal stories—some from 15–20 years ago—flowed forward as if they were experiencing them today. I occasionally thought I could see the stains of their tears on the paper. Many of these stories moved me greatly.

As a School Chaplain I found myself working more and more with students who were:

• experiencing social isolation,
• displaying signs of poor self-esteem,
• refusing to attend school,
• having regular outbursts of anger,
• displaying behaviour concerns,
• experiencing difficulties in making and keeping friends,
• unhappy or depressed.

Many of these students were suffering as a result of bullying. I was surprised at the extent to which bullying was the underlying cause for many of these problems.
Bullying is a serious problem and its impact can be severe. We need to re-visit the fundamental questions that schools, so far, have failed to address adequately.

- What is bullying?
- Why do students bully?
- Why are some people bullied while others are not?
- What can be done to assist those students who seem to be a target for every would-be bully around?
- What can be done to help those who, like Liam, suffer torment and pain silently every day?
- What can be done to combat bullying?
- What methods are more useful and effective in bringing about positive change in the behaviour of those who bully?
- What can be done to uncover what really is going on in our schools?
CHAPTER TWO
WHAT IS BULLYING?

If you can’t hurt me, you can’t bully me.

A colleague of mine, knowing of my interest in bullying, light-heartedly bumped into me in the staff room one morning.

‘I’m going to bully you today,’ he said standing in an aggressive manner.

‘No you’re not.’

‘Yes I am.’

‘No you’re not.’

‘Just watch me.’

‘You can’t bully me.’

‘Why can’t I?’

‘Because bullying is about power and you don’t have any power over me, so give it your best shot.’

I stood strongly with my head up looking him firmly in the eye.

‘Well, I’ll just have to find someone else to bully then,’ he said, as he backed down and walked away.

This light-hearted, non-serious banter provides insight into understanding bullying. If schools are going to make inroads into beating bullying, it is important to have an understanding of what bullying is. Bullying is about power, it is the abuse of power. Students who are unable to hang on to or protect their power become victims.

Much can be achieved by teaching students how to use their power responsibly, and how to retain it when challenged. Having the ability to assertively respond to bullying behaviours determines whether a student will be a victim or not.

It is important to distinguish that ‘bullying’ and ‘bullying behaviours’ are different. Put simply, when the behaviours are hurtful and damaging, it is bullying. When they are not, it is not bullying. Bullying behaviour includes behaviour that does not constitute bullying. Bullying behaviour embraces both ‘fun’ and ‘conflict’.

Most people would list the following behaviours as bullying:

• name calling