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4. Intervention Methods

Anyone who sets out to come to terms with cyber attacks or full-scale (cyber)mobbing will naturally want to know, before beginning, which method is most likely to work. For years, the authors of this handbook have successfully applied the intervention instruments *Systemic Mobbing Intervention (SMI)* und *Systemic Brief Intervention (SBI)*. Cyber attacks and (cyber)mobbing generally present, at the outset, a complex and confusing constellation. The choice of method – SMI or SBI – depends on the nature of the problem.

Before the intervention instruments Systemic Mobbing Intervention SMI and Systemic Brief Intervention SKI are explained in detail, two other approaches will be presented briefly. Both offer procedural methods with which a case of mobbing can be handled: the No Blame Approach, which also takes recourse to systemic insights, and the Farsta method, by way of contrast.

In order to be able to apply intervention methods successfully, practitioners require thorough training that is available through continuing education. Successful mobbing intervention depends not only on the correct implementation of procedures, but also and essentially on the posture and presence of the person conducting the intervention – aspects which are systematically rehearsed in training (see also Chapter 7.1). Both the No Blame Approach and the Farsta method were originally developed to deal with analog mobbing.

The No Blame Approach

The No Blame Approach was developed in 1990 by Maines and Robinson in England and tested by Szaday in Switzerland (Schubart 2010, p. 153). It is a solution-oriented conception derived from Systemic Short Therapy as described by de Shazer. Here, mobbing is regarded from a systemic point of view. The interconnections determining a case of mobbing are seen as circular, meaning for example that the behavior of each individual student in a class results from the interaction of all the participants in that system/class (Blum/Beck 2010, p. 60). The orientation toward solution in this approach implies foregoing any detailed search for the causes and events of mobbing, and also avoiding such things as assignment of guilt or punitive measures. The perspective taken toward the problem focuses exclusively on overcoming the situation (Blum/Beck, in: Huber 2011, p. 19); the only things sought after are solutions. On the one hand, this saves those affected from having to reveal, in detail, the events that embarrassed them. On the other hand, those enacting the mobbing are relieved of any pressure to rectify their actions, and this gives them more leeway to contribute to solving the problem (Blum/Beck 2010, p. 65). Part of the basic stance in this approach is a positive image of human beings that assumes people are humanely and ethically motivated and that they act morally when given the opportunity to do so. Furthermore, this approach has faith in the willingness and ability of children and adolescents to take on responsibility and, as experts for their own school class, find suitable paths towards solving the problem (ibid., p. 64).

The No Blame Approach was evaluated, and the study's authors reported that the method led to significant improvements (Blum/Beck, in: Huber 2011, p. 20 f).

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The Farsta Method

The Farsta method is a confrontative approach to mobbing intervention, for acute cases of mobbing. It was developed by Karl Ljungström (Hoechner / Mahler- Kraus, in: Huber 2011, p. 50). At its center is the confrontation of the mobbing offenders with their actions (Schubart 2010, p. 154; Huber 2011, p. 49f.). The confrontation takes place in a meeting with a special work group, the “anti-mobbing group” consisting of two to five teachers and/or school social workers. The members of this group have to be persons trained in conversational techniques, since the talks with the offenders “make high demands on the communicative competence of the work group” (Schubart 2010, p. 154 f.).

There is hardly any data available on the effectivity of the Farsta method (Schubart 2010, p. 155). Hoechner and Mahler-Kraus, who have practiced it extensively for many years, consider it effective and its impact long-lasting (Hoechner / Mahler-Kraus, in: Huber 2011, p. 52).

4.1 The Foundation: Evoking Compassion

Effective methods release positive feelings in the educators who apply them. It is deeply satisfying when one is able to produce the desired results elegantly, thanks to having the proper tools. But tools and methods are not everything. They only become truly effective when backed by a certain posture – which is discussed at length in Chapter 7.

In addition to maintaining a clear-cut, consistent posture, it is also essential to have the goal of one’s professional activity in mind at all times. Both of the methods that will now be presented aim at promoting compassion and thereby fostering an intrinsic motivation in children and adolescents to behave pro-socially and to help others.

But cognitive empathy – that is, merely understanding what another person is feeling – is not sufficient to generate such motivation. Children and adolescents who readily take recourse to the use of force are not lacking in cognitive empathy. They rather understand very well what others are feeling. What they are lacking, however, is emotional empathy and the compassion that it generates. This is why it is important to foster their emotional or affective response to the inner experience of their counterpart, their sympathy with and compassion for the other.

The methods of Systemic Mobbing Intervention SMI and Systemic Brief Intervention SBI consist essentially in a careful confrontation with the consequences of one’s actions, coupled with techniques for adopting the perspective of the other and for undercutting justification strategies. A core aspect of the work consists in “jarring” the participants: only if children and adolescents are shaken or shocked about the consequences of dissocial behavior can emotional empathy advance and develop into compassion.

The methods described in the following – even when applied without other accompanying measures – are of themselves already part of Systemic Conflict Management. How they relate to the other elements of Systemic Conflict Management will then be discussed in the ensuing Chapter 5.

4.2 An Overview: Systemic Mobbing Intervention SMI and Systemic Brief Intervention SBI as realized by Konflikt-KULTUR

Systemic Mobbing Intervention SMI
(cf. Grüner / Hilt 2011)

- is the most effective instrument for dealing with (cyber)mobbing;
- is (nearly always) integrated into social training;
- requires a mandate conferred by the victim and his or her parents, as well as the consent of the school headmaster and the homeroom teacher;
- integrates, as a systemic method, the entire class group into the process; and
- produces sustained effects through social training.

The social training into which SMI is usually integrated extends over approximately two full morning sessions. If for particular reasons the SMI is conducted without social training, it will require about three or four class hours.

Although Systemic Mobbing Intervention SMI is the method of choice in cases of (cyber)mobbing, unfortunately it cannot always be applied. The following circumstances would speak against it:

- The endangerment or risk of escalation is so great that an immediate reaction is necessary.
- The victim is emotionally instable.
- The victim or his/her parents do not confer a mandate for an SMI.
- Since protection for the victim cannot be guaranteed, he or she must remain anonymous.
- There are extreme feelings of shame (as in cases of sexting) on the part of the victim.

If Systemic Mobbing Intervention is not feasible for any of the above reasons, *Systemic Brief Intervention* can be implemented instead. Its earmarks are:

- It is applied in cases where it is necessary to intervene immediately (high risk of escalation, or significant endangerment).
- It is not only suitable for dealing with (cyber)mobbing, but also with other conflict events that can trigger crises, such as cyber attacks.
- It can be realized without the consent of the victim and his/her parents, although it does have to be expressly requested by the homeroom teacher and the headmaster.
- It can be conducted without naming the victim(s).
- Like SMI, it involves the entire class group.

The process of Systemic Brief Intervention SBI can be carried out in two class hours.

In the great majority of cases, mobbing occurs simultaneously in analog and digital form – which is why this handbook generally refers to (cyber)mobbing, meaning both (see also Chapter 1.3 and 2). Drawing an artificial distinction between the two phenomena would contradict the everyday reality of children's and adolescents' lives. SMI as a method takes this reality into account, since it addresses both analog and digital mobbing.

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Excursus: Social Training

The aim in conducting social training is to establish, together with a school class, a peaceful and respectful manner of living together and working together (that is oriented toward the formal value framework of human rights, civil rights, and children’s rights). The training lasts 10 to 12 hours and takes place on 2 or 3 days. It serves to strengthen personal competencies (the courage of one’s convictions, self-control, respect, etc.) and communicative skills (giving feedback, expressing wishes, negotiating behavioral issues, etc.). All the students who belong to the class or group participate in the training. In an atmosphere of increasing openness and trust, the participants voice what “doesn’t suit” them in their own group. They agree on a few rules, in effect the basic tenets of universal human rights.

The social training can (or better: should) be conducted even when no acute conflict situation is at hand. When disturbances and conflicts do occur, they offer the facilitator welcome “material” for social training specifically aimed at the acute issues. A prerequisite is the cultivation of a well-structured and secure space in which those affected can come forward. There are no pre-formulated materials, such as handouts. The situational work with whatever the children and adolescents contribute demands great skill on the part of the facilitator, as well as concern and earnestness of the part of all participants.

Should it emerge in the course of social training that (cyber) mobbing is in fact underway in the group, then this is the right time to conduct Systemic Mobbing Intervention. The basis for it is given by the re-activated framework of values, the earnestness of the group, and the lucidity of the facilitator.

The intervention methods SMI and SBI concentrate on the *behavior* involved in harassment, not on the offender as a *person* or on identifying guilty parties – which greatly improves the level of acceptance among participants. Specific agreements are negotiated that are then, over a longer period of time, subject to discussion and peer supervision, and in this way contribute to sustained success.

If an SMI is embedded in social training (Grüner / Hilt / Tilp 2015, p.83 ff.), children and adolescents profit over and above the intervention itself by learning basic skills for their social dealings with one another.

They learn:

- to be honest;
- to express their own opinion (courage of their convictions) and to respect the opinions of others;
- to grasp the basic civil rights and human rights and to defend themselves without using force;
- to recognize and constructively criticize dissocial behavior on the part of classmates or group members and to acknowledge pro-social behavior;
- to overcome problematic behavioral patterns with the help of the class or group in small, realistic steps that can be observed (and deemed successful).

These abilities form the foundation for implementing Systemic Mobbing Intervention and simplify the process.

Systemic Brief Intervention SBI can only draw on some of these skills. For this reason, Systemic Mobbing Intervention that is embedded in social training is likely to have greater and more long-lasting effects. Whenever the indication allows for it (see above), SMI would therefore be preferable to SBI.

Who are the Participants?

In the context of SMI and SBI, insights gleaned from international research on bullying are incorporated. That implies, in particular, that all the students in a class are party to the intervention – along with the responsible teachers and the school administration, in their respective roles. (Cyber)mobbing must always be approached as a group-dynamic problem that not only affects offenders and victims, but rather all the members of a group, that is, in this case the school class. “Effective prevention and intervention strategies must therefore be applied on the class level and must encompass the entire group” (Scheithauer/Hayer/Bull 2007, p. 148).

Every Case is Different

Before the intervention begins, a careful analysis of the conflict is undertaken. It is essential that the potential for endangerment be quickly and correctly estimated, and that the persons bearing educational responsibility in the case form a team and plan how they will proceed. This is described in detail in Chapter 5.4.

Every case is different. To accommodate this fact, on the one hand both types of intervention are clearly structured and divided into seven individual steps, while on the other hand the process can be individualized significantly to adjust to the needs and demands of the participants and the dynamics in the group. The structure can be varied by changing the order in which steps are taken, or by omitting individual steps.

Imbedding, Transparency, and Sustainability

Each member of the team assumes responsibility in accord with his or her professional educational role and in keeping with legal mandates.

The intervention method that is chosen is explained fully to the victim and his/her parents. In advance of an SMI, the consent (the mandate) of the victim and parents is obtained. Before a two-day social training takes place, the parents of all the students are informed about its aims. The homeroom teacher is present for all of the work steps undertaken with the class group by the person conducting the intervention. Involving the homeroom teacher and the headmaster is a way of ensuring sustainability, even when the facilitator of the invention (a colleague or a school social worker) has withdrawn from the process after several weeks of follow-up.

Implementation by Professionals

It is imperative that an SMI be conducted by a trained professional. Certified continuing education programs for teachers and school social workers are offered across Germany by Konflikt-KULTUR.

The homeroom teacher is especially suitable for conducting an intervention due to his or her role as a constant guide with an established educational relationship to the class – provided that the teacher is explicitly qualified for interventions. Teacher trainees who are already qualified can also lead an intervention. In this case, the homeroom teacher is present as an observer and does not undertake active steps during the intervention.

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4.3 Systemic Mobbing Intervention

Dividing the process into seven steps allows for systematic procedure and helps to avoid overlooking important actions.

The 7 Steps in Systemic Mobbing Intervention

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Step 1 (preparation) | Identify the mobbing victim and motivate him or her to participate in the intervention The inclusion of the victim during SMI is sensible, but not absolutely imperative. | Aim: The Intervention is carefully prepared, and the victim has granted consent. |
| Step 2 | Act(s) of violence (against the mobbing victim) are brought to light The names of the offenders are not mentioned when students describe acts of force that have taken place, and there are no accusations of individual guilt, since everyone is collectively responsible. The person conducting the intervention demonstrates concern and thus fosters the students' willingness to change the situation (emotional contagion). | Aim: The act(s) of violence are now apparent to the whole group, and this gives rise to concern and shock over the extent and cruelty of the deeds, generating readiness to alter behavior. |
| Step 3 | Confrontation, through reversal of perspective, with the consequences of violent acts | Aim: intrinsically motivated inhibition of force due to emotional empathy and compassion |
| Step 4 (if necessary) | Addressing the hooks used to legitimate aggressive acts; breaking down justifications Behavioral patterns of the victim are addressed that have triggered feelings of anger, fear, or rejection in the group on a daily basis. | Aim: sources of anger are reduced, i.e., behavioral adjustments on the part of the victim (self-regulation) lead to reduced availability of hooks and in this way undercut the supposed legitimation for acts of force. Attributes (hooks) that cannot be changed, such as clinical conditions, are understood and tolerated by the rest of the class. |
| Step 5 | Further acts of force (violations of human rights) are declared taboo and it is made clear that any future offenses will be followed by sanctions | Aim: Articulating the threat of sanctions in order to reach those students who are only willing to adjust their behavior if explicit controls are in place (not on the basis of an intrinsic motivation) |
| Step 6 | Establish a peer-related helper system | Aim: Mobbing can only establish itself when the victim has insufficient or ineffective defense, and too little or no support. The helper system serves to overcome these circumstances. |
| Step 7 (follow-up) | Observation of adherence to human rights commitment | Aim: Sustainability. Reduce the likelihood of attacks recurring by demonstrating presence (pedagogical counsel, observation, controls); exert a norm-reinforcing effect on the class and encourage behavioral modification of offenders by seeing to it that restitution is made. Due to the danger of relapses in systemic conflicts, this task extends over a period of at least six months. |

Step 1 (Preparation): Identify mobbing victim(s), motivate them to participate in intervention

The focus here is on the mobbing victims that can be found in almost every school class: students who have been suffering under the analog and digital attacks of their classmates for week and months, or even years. The focus is not on acute crisis events that are sometimes associated with spectacular cyber attacks: these should rather be addressed with the help of an SBI.

Often, mobbing victims are not clearly identified as such. (Cyber)mobbing usually occurs over a longer period of time in covert spaces not openly visible to adults, and teachers are not made aware of it. The victims are ashamed to speak openly, and bystanders refrain from getting involved. Potential defenders don't want to tattle, are afraid of being mobbed themselves, or fear that unqualified reactions on the part of adults could simply make things worse. In brief: seen from the outside, there are few indicators of what is occurring and who the victim(s) could be.

Seeking out the victims therefore has to be an active process involving everyone in the class – even when the identity of at least one victim already is (or seems to be) clear. The mutual process of bringing things to light has the advantage of shared responsibility among the class: no one person can be blamed for exposing the situation.

Although there are many methods used to identify victims, ultimately the following questions need to be answered: who in the class is most frequently teased, demeaned, harassed, badgered ...? Who has to put up with the most? Who is most often the target of aggression? (see Chapter 5.4.2).

As a means of protecting possible victims, this survey is usually completed in writing, without any one else seeing it. To ease the hesitation of the class in addressing the topic, it helps to mention that this behavior occurs in practically every school class and the aim of asking about it is to relieve the problem, not to blame or punish possible offenders.

Motivating mobbing victims and their parents to participate in an intervention

The process of uncovering and the ensuing offer to conduct an intervention can be received quite differently by those affected. While some are happy and relieved that someone is concerned about their worries, others may be anxious because they don't know how things will develop. Some may even be unimpressed because they don't expect much good to be done by adults. For the parents of the victims, it is similar. The task is now to gain consent to an intervention from the victims and also their parents, and to motivate them to participate (see Chapter 5.5.1, Clarifying the Mandate). As necessary and emancipating as an intervention may be, it can also be associated with a burden on the victim. Sometimes the responsible parties at school (homeroom teacher and headmaster) or the parents hesitate for this reason. The solution to this problem lies, on one hand, in the appropriate personal qualification of the facilitator for the intervention, and on the other in transparency: sufficient information for the the victim and parents in advance of a clear decision on their part to proceed.

Comprehensive information for the victim and his or her parents is based on the following insights:

- Now that the adults also know about the (cyber)mobbing in progress, it would be irresponsible not to act – since the class might otherwise come to the conclusion that all the harassment isn't that bad, or that it is permissible. In other words: what will the class be thinking if we do not intervene now?
- Fear is normal, and a part of life. But if one never faces up to it, it never stops. The only way to overcome it is to say: I'll do it anyway!
- Active participation of the victim is not necessary, or only to a small extent. Most of the work is done will the class. If the victim does not want to say anything, he or she can participate passively. An intervention is also possible without the victim being present.
- The victim has to be able to grasp the significance of step 2 (bringing the acts of force into the open). Everyone in the class has to understand how bad it is to be harassed continually; their eyes need to be opened so that they will refrain from such harassment in the future.
- The purpose is not to identify guilty parties or to punish them (see also Chapter 4.5).

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The person who will be conducting the intervention obtains the mandate from the victim and his/her parents and from the homeroom teacher. The latter is important as the constant guide of the class, the only person who is always engaged with the students, who can ultimately insist on changes in behavior and successfully accompany the follow-up process.

In a few cases there are parents or victims who agree to an SMI, but do not wish to participate actively. Should the victim and parents decide against taking part in the SMI – despite the mechanisms in place to prepare and protect the victim –, it is nonetheless possible to conduct the SMI. The class/group is to learn about the suffering of the victim, but the victim does not necessarily have to be present. However, the victim then does not experience the compassion, concern, and sympathy of the classmates.

Step 2: Bringing acts of violence to light

Since (cyber)mobbing is a systemic problem of the entire class – everyone shares responsibility and should contribute to the solution –, it is made clear to the students at the outset that there will be no search for offenders or guilty parties, and that no one will be punished. This promise (of freedom from punishment) creates the basis for successful intervention – namely, freedom from fear. We want to solve the problem and, to do that, we need the help of everyone in the class.

In this step, the students are asked to name the ways that they themselves have made use of force. The list below (Figure 12) demonstrates how open a class can be during this exercise. This list is the outcome of a ten-minute collecting session of all the attacks the victim was exposed to daily; this is not an extreme case, but rather typical for such a list.

In compiling this list, it is insufficient to just make a summarial note, such as “insults”. Every single invective should be articulated in full and written out on a flip chart. In this way, the very mass that accumulates can move or shock the classmates – which is just the point. The students see with their own eyes how extensive and how cruel their abuse has been. This should cause them concern and increase their willingness to modify their behavior. At its core, this procedure aims at enkindling the form of intrinsic motivation that is described as compassion (see Chapter 7.2.7).

The individual listings are assigned to the three categories of emotional violence, physical violence, and damage to property, and are designated as violations of human rights. In this way, the students begin to perceive a value framework that they can use for orientation. In other words: we pull the distorted value frame of the class back into shape, expose as illegitimate the informal set of values the class has set up, and work toward establishing in the classroom the basic principles of civic order.

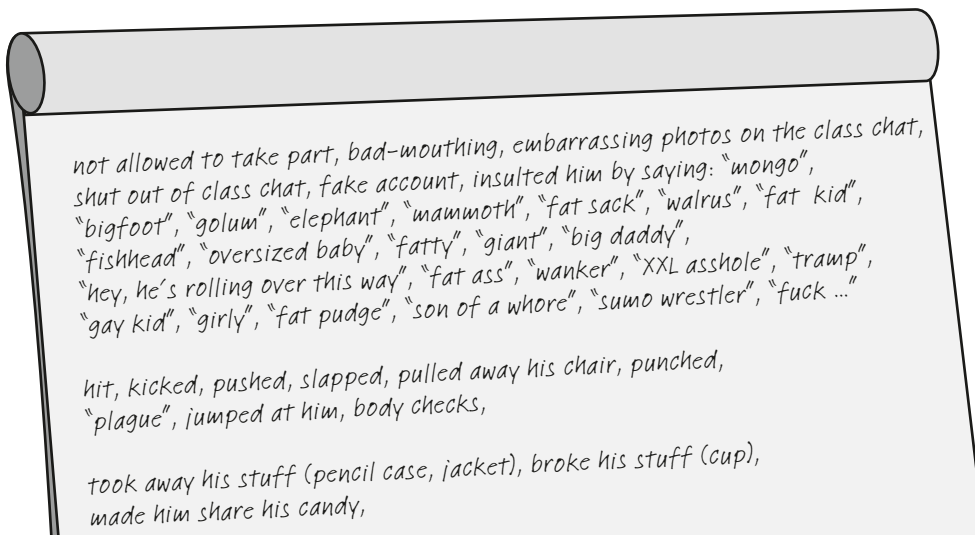


Fig. 12: Example of explicit listings of violent acts, compiled by a school class.

This work of uncovering violent acts by naming each instance explicitly does not require naming the offenders. Concentrating on the behavior is enough.

Due to the clear distinction between the person and the behavior, it is also possible for offenders to take an active part here, which caters to their need for prestige. Sometimes, the names of the offenders are known in advance – perhaps because teachers have reported on unsuccessful attempts at intervening. It is astounding to see how confidently offenders participate in compiling this list of violent acts. The offenders, too, are caught in the system of (cyber)mobbing and are not necessarily content with their role, which may simply serve to protect them from becoming victims. If they have the opportunity to gain acknowledgement in some other, acceptable way, they will usually take advantage of it – particularly if they are younger students.

The victim doesn't need to say anything in the context of the intervention, and should in fact say as little as possible. It would be a major mistake in this phase of work to let the victim say more than a few words. For the moment, we will mention only the most important reasons for this aspect of protecting the victim:

- The classmates may feel betrayed by statements the victim makes, and react negatively to them.
- The victim may lose his or her composure and corroborate the image of being a "crybaby", or react strangely and thereby reinforce the hooks already being used by his classmates.
- The victim doesn't want to be perceived as a "sissy" and tends to play things down ("It has gotten a bit better").

In the course of our experience with and ongoing development of SMI, these arguments have emerged as increasingly significant, so that we have begun giving the victim the opportunity to speak – if at all – only at the very end of this phase. By then, the classmates have done the heavy work, so to speak, reporting in detail on what has occurred. The victim can restrict himself to confirming what the classmates have said, which at that moment is a positive contribution. Victims who start to cry in this situation

make the class feel more concerned and more prone to develop compassion. One student who had been mobbed said, for example, "I knew that I had to take a lot, but I didn't realize it was so much."

It happens frequently in this phase that students try to sabotage the process of uncovering previous deeds, since they feel under pressure to rectify themselves in the face of their own violent acts. In this phase, they bring up the 'hooks' that serve as a justification for the (cyber)mobbing going on in the class (see also Chapter 2.2.2). At such a moment, it is essential to continue with compiling the list of cruel acts. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to brusquely interrupt this mention of hooks because doing so could evoke more resistance and interfere with the overall process of resolution. Therefore, the facilitator accepts the remark without commenting on it. Instead, it is made note of as an agenda point for later on in the SMI. Managing this kind of touch-and-go situation can call for a great deal of skill.

Once all the statements of the students have been collected, the facilitator brings this phase of the SMI to a close by expressing his or her own concern. He calls to mind the immeasurable suffering of the victim (not estimable for the classmates, either, up to now), confronts the class with the extent and cruelty of their actions, and does not conceal his own great dismay and concern over it. The aim is to accompany the students beyond their shock over their own behavior to a point where they begin to identify with the reaction of the facilitator, realizing that with their actions they have violated both the victim and universally acknowledged human rights.

For the victim, this phase is difficult to bear due to the fact that everything "comes to light", but it is also an important step toward healing: the victim is no longer alone with all these events. His suffering is being witnessed and acknowledged as real. Sensing the concern of others permits the victim, as well, to acknowledge how badly he has suffered. And it does him good to feel the compassion of the facilitator and potential defenders. The pain had to be hidden for such a long time. Now it is being given a chance to surface and granted recognition.

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Step 3: Confrontation with the consequences of violent acts, through reversal of perspective

In this phase, the object is to promote and deepen the emotional empathy that has already been triggered. The students are asked to focus on the inner experience and suffering of the victim, and thus develop a sense of the consequences their behavior has had. They should feel the effects of their dissocial behavior so strongly that they not only grasp them on a cognitive level, but rather are truly moved, startled, concerned, shocked, and shaken – which makes them feel deep dismay and become pensive. Only in this way can they advance from emotional empathy to compassion (see also Chapter 7.2.7).

Two universally effective techniques can be employed to induce this change of perspective:

- The class is asked to imagine the inner experience of the victim: “How do you think XY feels, having to take this all the time? What could he/she be thinking or feeling (while trying to get to sleep, the next morning, on the way to school, in school, on the way home)?”
- The class is asked to relate comparable experiences of their own: “Who among you has ever experienced a similar situation where other people were badgering you or getting at you all the time, teasing and taunting or harassing you? What was the worst thing for you? How did you feel then?”

In addition to the aspect of reversing perspectives, the answers to this second group of questions also enable the expression of solidarity, coming as they do from classmates who enjoy more recognition than the mobbing victim but still admit that they have also at some point been cast in a similarly debased, marginal, inferior, or helpless role. This parallel is reinforced by the facilitator who listens attentively with respect and understanding, asks about one detail or another, and finally sums up, “Yes, that’s about how XY must be feeling in this class.”

In this third phase, every class reacts differently. Sometime you could hear a pin drop and you could practically grasp the dismay that’s in the air with your bare hands. Sometimes almost all the students have a story to relate, and other times only two of them will be able to admit ever having had such a negative experience. Sometimes there is hardly any reaction to the first set of questions, but on the second set the stories just keep pouring out. In one secondary school, a boy who was a mobbing victim started to cry quietly at this point. One after another, three other boys related stories of their suffering, and in the end all four were crying. The class was deeply shaken. The facilitator supported the boys by praising their courage and openness, and by saying that crying was a normal reaction: “Every one of you has cried sometime. You boys have the courage to show us how you really feel, and that shows how much trust you have in your classmates.”

In attempting to support a reversal of perspective, there is one line of questioning frequently used that can produce very unfavorable outcomes. The actual question is introduced by a sentence such as, “Imagine that this happened to you” or “What if someone picked on you like that ...”, followed by the question itself “How would you feel? What would you think (feel, say) if someone ...?” Overt or latent resistance is often the response. Here are the essential arguments against such attempts at reversal of perspective:

- The focus of such questions is not the victim, but rather the aggressor. He therefore concentrates on himself (and not on the victim). This makes it easier to pass up the offer of taking on the other person’s perspective.
- Questions formulated in this way tend to be understood as reproaches, attacks, accusations, or demands for a concession, and so they provoke counterreactions such as: “It wouldn’t make any difference to me” (trivialization) or “Things like that don’t happen to me!” (denial) or “No idea!” (refusal).

Step 4: Addressing the hooks used to legitimate aggressive acts (if necessary) and breaking down justifications

If behavioral hooks (such as stuttering or losing one's temper) play a significant role in the class, these are often mentioned earlier on, in step 2. Now is the suitable time to take them up during SMI. If the class has not yet mentioned any behavioral hooks, the facilitator now has the task of consciously searching them out, so that they can also be brought out into the open and will not continue working under the surface.

In order to protect the victim and ensure that only those hooks are discussed that have resonated with the class and therefore serve to maintain the mobbing process, the facilitator installs a three-fold filter before inviting the students to contribute statements. He/she says: "There are some kinds of behavior I find so bad that I even have difficulty respecting that person's human rights, because it gets me so upset that I can hardly control myself. If XY [the mobbing victim] is behaving in some such way, then you can talk about it now. But three conditions must be fulfilled before you so: firstly, this behavior has to be something that upset you to the point where you almost lost control; secondly, it has to be something that happens practically every day; and thirdly, you have to be sure that not only you experience it that way, but all or almost all of your classmates as well. If these three conditions are fulfilled, you will now have a chance to speak about it."

Our experience is that, in about half of the classes, one or more students will say something. They describe behavioral habits of the victim that cause strong feelings of anger, anxiety, or disgust in the group on a daily basis.

In working through these complaints, the idea is to dry up the source of the anger or disgust, so that the hook loses its significance. Without much detail, here in brief: the facilitator performs the task of categorizing the statements of the class members. If they bring up personal attributes, such as hair color, skin color, overweight, thick glasses, or reticence (clinically relevant matters such as stuttering will be discussed later), then it's very simple. Discrimination 'hooked' (hung) onto such attributes is easily identified as a violation of human rights. Moreover, these are not behavioral habits, which is what originally (and exclusively) was asked for. Now, it is possible to convey the insight to the students that every person has some attributes that distinguish him from others and that can be used against him. "Basically, no one is normal!" was the succinct conclusion drawn by one seventh-grader.

If the hook is a behavioral habit of the victim that can be influenced – such as frequent, violent outbursts of temper – then the task is to work on modifying that behavior. Violence or behavior that damages the community cannot be tolerated on the part of the victim, either. At the same time, it has to be considered whether and how the classmates' actions affect these outbursts. In mobbing cases, the victims' 'red buttons' are often pushed by the others as way of provoking a violent reaction that everyone can then laugh about.

Sometimes when students are irritated by behavior that itself is a reaction to their mobbing, e.g. dropping back from the group, breaking off contact, isolating oneself, or being mistrustful, it helps to ask question such as: "What could bring someone to do that? Do you have an idea where that behavior might come from? What do you think that XY is trying to achieve by that?" Essentially, this serves to improve the tolerance of the class, due to a better understanding of the behavior.

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In some particular cases, working on the hooks has to be postponed. When the behavioral trait results from a clinical condition (stuttering, lisping, a tic, selective mutism, Asperger, ADHD, etc.), part of the solution can also lie in raising the tolerance threshold of the group by making the behavior comprehensible. If diagnostic clarification by a doctor is necessary, it will presuppose the participation and consent of the victim's parents. Therefore, in advance, the homeroom teacher must first speak to the parents and also individually with the affected student. On occasion, the participation of other agencies is indicated – school social work, youth agency, family counseling, or child psychiatry. If all this is successfully completed and there is no deterrent to speaking openly about the outcome, then the classmates can digest this new information along the lines of, "Oh, now I get it, he doesn't do that on purpose!" This brings everyone much closer to solving the mobbing problem.

Dealing with justification strategies

When the facilitator starts asking about behavioral hooks, he has to be prepared and agile enough to field the trivializations, accusations, and justifications of violence that may follow. For, despite the fact that SMI promises freedom from punishment (see step 2), it does occasionally happen that some students try to rectify their actions toward the mobbing victim and, at the same time, put the blame on the victim.

Why do they do this? Persons who make use of force have learned to block off their empathy. With the help of blockade or neutralization techniques, they protect themselves from their own guilty conscience and talk their way out of any responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Based on experience, we bake these attempts at justification down to five typical strategies:

- **trivialization or denial**
 "We were just having fun!" – "It wasn't intentional!"
 – "We didn't do anything!" – "Somebody else sent me the photo!"
- **reversal of guilt**
 "He started it!" – "He's asking for it!" – "She's just a slut if she takes that kind of pictures of herself!"
- **loss of control**
 "We can't help it!" – "That's just the way we are!"
 – "When she says that, I just lose it!"
- **legitimation of force**
 "That's normal, that's what everybody does!" – "He's got it coming to him!" – "He needs it!" – "That's the way we do things here!" – "My father says I shouldn't take that sitting down!"
- **posturing as a victim**
 "You're always after us!" – "It's always our fault!"
 – "Are we on your bad-boy list, or what?"

In order to protect the victim, these attempts at justification have to be rebutted. It is not the victim who is responsible for the mobbing, but rather the class. This must never be watered down during the intervention, it has to be perfectly clear at all times. Each of the five justification strategies has its own peculiar logic. For those seeking to reverse the guilt: "It's not our fault, it's the victim's. And that's why we shouldn't be punished, he should." To each of the justification strategies there is a fitting response. For reversal of guilt, it would be shifting the focus from reproaching the victim to examining the experience and behavior of the offenders. It is the offender who interprets the victim's behavior: is it a provocation, an attempt at making contact, or a cry for help? And the offender himself is responsible for this interpretation and for his reaction to it. It follows that the facilitator's response to the 'reversal of guilt' tactic would be: "Yes, you feel provoked by XY's behavior. In what other way could you take it?" or "OK, his behavior gets on your nerves. What could you do the next time you feel provoked by it, instead of reacting violently?"

In most Systemic Mobbing Interventions SMI, steps 2 and 3 lead to a good deal of compassion. Thanks to the exemption from punishment, the offenders and their assistants feel secure enough to refrain from attempts at justification. If the latter do come up, the facilitator has to be well-enough trained to have fitting responses to all five of the standard rectifications right at hand, without hesitation.

Working on these hooks can be painstaking and tedious. However, it is indispensable for any sustained resolution of mobbing. If the class group is not supplied with answers to its troubles and ends up still sitting on its 'anger triggers', then there will always be food for social unrest and more mobbing. If no one stands up to the challenge of addressing the group's anger and instead simply 'helps' the victim, the anger will only grow. Due to this injustice, the danger of renewed attacks on the part of the class will increase. More and more classmates will participate, and as a result of this unprofessional handling, the class will slip further and further into the manifestation phase.

Step 5: Further acts of force (violations of human rights) are declared taboo and it is made clear that future offenses will be sanctioned

Mobbing is violence in one of its most massive forms, and it is clear that it should never happen again in the class. The entire class is responsible for this violence, meaning that – after the intervention – each individual student will have to face consequences if he or she again uses force against the mobbing victim. Up to this point, the intervention has been focused on motivating as many classmates as possible to compassion and behavioral modification. It is necessary to now threaten with consequences, since it can easily happen that some students are not willing to show compassion or to change their behavior, or are not capable of sustaining such feelings or alterations in their behavior over a significant period of time. Since there is a risk of relapse and continued threat to the basic human rights of physical and emotional integrity, we work at this point with the concept of forbearance. Either the

homeroom teacher bearing responsibility for the class makes a statement to cease and desist, or the teacher calls on each student to sign a personal commitment to refrain from further violent acts. This can be done by prefacing the list of violent acts that has been compiled on the flip chart with the declaration, "I respect human rights. That means that I will refrain from ..."

Step 6: Establish a helper system

As explained in Chapter 2.2, mobbing can only occur when the victim can't or can not effectively defend himself, and too little or no support is provided by others. A helper system can compensate these deficits so that these prerequisites for mobbing are no longer given. To work well, the helper system has to be attuned to the needs of the individual case, suitably arranged, and sufficiently strong.

We distinguish here between human rights observers on one hand and buddies (advocates) on the other. The classmates chose five or six boys and girls from their midst as human rights observers (comparable to electing class speakers). Their number ensures that the observers will be 'everywhere'. They receive the recognition and trust of the homeroom teacher and the headmaster.

Supported by this democratic legitimation, they have the task of being on the lookout for human rights violations within the class and, should they take place, reporting back to the homeroom teacher on what was done and by what means – but not by whom. This is not about tattling, but rather about informing the homeroom teacher of human rights violations. The teacher can then, in the context of the intervention work described in this chapter, learn who the offenders were and offer them the chance to make restitution in the form of reparation for the deed and the damage. This process is usually conducted by the homeroom teacher or the school social worker. The girls and boys who have been designated as human rights observers are given an introduction to their role by the homeroom teacher or the school social worker, and they receive ongoing support at regular meetings.

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Buddies, on the other hand, are direct supporters of the victim. They come into play if the homeroom teacher judges that the victim – despite the successful intervention – will be in need of personal support in touchy everyday situations because he or she will not quickly enough be able to develop the personal prerequisites for successful and nonviolent defense. By accepting this support, however, the victim surrenders part of his or her own independence – and that should only be done if it is unavoidable. A buddy can serve as a go-between if the victim is threatened with violence or the victim himself is on the verge of an outburst. To fulfill their task, buddies need to be accepted by the victim and to have a good standing in the class.

Step 7 (Follow-up): Observation of adherence to human rights commitment

The goal of the follow-up is sustainability. Mobbing is an extremely intractable problem. It not only satisfies the needs of the offender, the assistants and claqueurs, it also can become, the longer it lasts, a behavioral pattern of the entire class that they tend to fall back into again and again. Human rights observers and buddies, along with a tenacious homeroom teacher, work against that. The teacher attends to cultivating close contact with the human rights observers, including a ritualized review of the declaration of commitment. The time-consuming and intensive contacts with the human rights observers can also be taken on at the outset – at least for a limited time – by school social workers. At first, at least two contacts per week to the human rights observers and/or buddies should take place, later on these can be gradually reduced. Relapses occur often: the decisive issue is the pedagogical response to them. Whenever a relapse comes up, that is, when a new instance of mobbing is observed, the frequency of contacts to the human rights observers needs to be stepped up again. Only after at least a half year ‘with no symptoms’ is it advisable to discontinue the regular review of the declaration to desist. If this is discontinued sooner, the risk of relapse rises.

Helping and regulating roles are coordinated

Working as a team is essential for successful follow-up, as is the clear distinction between helping roles and regulating roles (see Chapter 5.4.3). When declarations to desist are not adhered to, there have to be consequences. If the offending students are unwilling or reluctant to accept support toward altering their behavior, their dissocial attitude should be sanctioned. This task can only be performed by those with regulative roles in the school system: the homeroom teacher or the headmaster.

Nourishment to help growth – Strengthening pro-social communication

In addition to systematic checks on compliance, positive encounters with the students are essential: weekly or bi-weekly sessions to train pro-social skills. These sessions can be supported with methods from adventure and experiential education or from resiliency work. The primary aim is to consolidate pro-social behavior – once mobbing has been stopped and declared taboo – by cultivating good relationships between the homeroom teacher and the students, as well as among the students, and to celebrate this interaction with one another (think: Mexican wave).

Strengthening pro-social abilities is an effective way to prevent relapses. One suitable tool, a concept used in social learning, is the class council for democracy education. Here, students experience what it means that every person has equal value and each has “one vote in parliament”. Every individual can voice his or her opinion politely and respectfully, no matter whether others agree with it or not. Decisions are arrived at democratically. The teacher is one member of the community among many. Students and teachers learn to apply pro-social communicative skills: to express wishes, to make demands, and to give feedback. A feedback culture oriented to nonviolent communication (in the sense coined by Marshall B. Rosenberg) grows and develops.

Monitoring and trust belong together

All in all, the task is: to minimize the likelihood of renewed attacks through presence (escort, observation, review); to reinforce norms in the group and bring about changes in the offenders' behavior through reparations and sanctions; and all the while to tap into the effective energies of interaction, recognition, and training. This sounds like a big order – and it does, indeed, require a lot of time. But it is also a very satisfying type of work. John Hattie, author of the meta-study "Visible Learning", designates as essential prerequisites for successful learning (cf. Hattie 2011): the relationship between teacher and student and the personality of the teacher. In this context, both can prove and improve themselves.

Scholarly evaluation

During the academic year 2014/2015, the module "Social Training and Systemic Mobbing Intervention" from the Multi-Level Program Konflikt-KULTUR was evaluated in a longitudinal study undertaken at the

University of Münster in Westphalen. The control-group design with three data collection rounds at different points in time encompassed 20 groups pursuing training and 10 control groups without training sessions. Among other things, the self-assessment of the students and the external assessment by teachers on issues of aggression and victimization were analyzed.

In the course of evaluation, significant changes became evident, with moderate to strong positive effects noticeable after each training round. While the enactment of aggression and victimization was reduced in the classes with training, it increased in the control group. That is to say, the students felt more secure after training, and their fear of being victimized was assessed by the teachers as considerably reduced. In the classes with training, the number of victims and offenders dropped significantly from one data collection point to the next, while the number of non-participants grew (cf. Linßer 2019).

4

Conditions for Success

The following pre-conditions will contribute to the success of a Systemic Mobbing Intervention:

- *Previous participation of at least two professional educators working at the same school/agency in a continuing education measure (ideally, one educator per 100 students)*
- *Work time allowance (without other commitments) averaging at least one hour per week and educator*
- *Information event (lecture or teacher-training day) for teachers and education professionals on the dynamic involved in the emergence of mobbing, as well as the pitfalls and conditions for success in intervention*
- *Regularly (annually) held parents' evening with a talk on "Social Training and Systemic Mobbing Prevention"*
- *Resolution passed by the school conference and teachers' conference on the implementation of social training and Systemic Mobbing Intervention*
- *Integration of social training and Systemic Mobbing Intervention into the social curriculum of the school*
- *Intervision or supervision for the education professionals at the school*
- *Integration of the topic into an existing steering group, resp., establishment of such a group under the direction of the headmaster (participants: headmaster, teacher, where available school social worker or school psychologist, teacher-counselor, prevention specialist)*
- *Embedment of the method in an ongoing process of Systemic Conflict Management (see also Chapter 5)*

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4.4 Systemic Brief Intervention

Systemic Brief Intervention SBI is a derivative form of Systemic Mobbing Intervention SMI. It incorporates methods originating in sociodrama and hypnotherapy as described by Erickson (see References attached to this chapter). Systemic Brief Intervention SBI is distinguished from SMI in particular by the following characteristics:

- The victim is not identified.
- The hooks and justifications for attacks are not addressed, in order to sidestep the resistance this can evoke in a class group.
- The occasion for an SBI need not be (cyber)mobbing, it can also be a response to other conflicts, such as cyber attacks or sexual harassment.

Other distinctions between Systemic Brief Intervention SBI and Systemic Mobbing Intervention SMI are discussed in Chapter 4.2.

SBI is always applied in cases where the pedagogical plan for action makes it imperative to address a conflict quickly in order to exert a de-escalating influence on hostilities or violent acts that might otherwise spiral out of control. But whenever the conflict events permit, social training with an SMI should be the preferred method!

An SBI lasts up to 90 minutes (two school periods); the duration depends largely on the discipline habits of the class. Its primary aims are to re-invigorate the formal framework of values and norms, to establish social controls, and to set up a peer-related helper system.

SBI Step 1: Preparation

First, the facilitator prepares the victim for the brief intervention by explaining the method. Then, together with the homeroom teacher, three case examples are developed, which in the following will be called "stories" and which will later be presented to the students. Two of these stories serve to create a context for the event that occurred, and the third story addresses the actual event.

The first two stories approach the acute conflict situation indirectly, as a way of sensitizing the students. The third refers to the actual case at hand, but is sufficiently distanced in its details (dissociated) that no direct connection can be drawn to the persons actually involved. Nonetheless, the victim's consent to this case construction is necessary, since many students will recognize the constellation anyway.



Goals:

- Preparing the affected student for the SBI
- Preparing a script for the SBI
- Organizing materials (signs, yellow cards)

SBI Step 2: Clarification of roles and tasks

Work with the class begins with a friendly greeting.

"Hello everybody! No tests to take today? Did you see the game yesterday? Who was rooting for which team? ..."

Next, the playing rules for the work to be done together are laid down (comparable to the social training described above). Signs with the words "earnestness", "respect", and "self-control" are posted on the board. No circle of chairs is formed: the class remains sitting as usual during lessons.

"Believe me, I like to party and have fun. But today, I've come to your class with a topic that makes me feel very sad and concerned. I have something serious to say and I'm going to need you to take it seriously, to be respectful, and to keep control of yourselves. I would like you to show me that you are already somewhat grown-up. Please raise your hand if you can promise to do that. If anyone doesn't act respectfully enough, I'm going to let them know by flashing a yellow card – because that a foul in my eyes!"

Now, signs are posted that say "no names!" and "behavior".

"I'm not here today to make accusations or blame anybody. I am a school social worker (school psychologist...) and my job is to help people straighten things out. I was asked by your homeroom teacher (headmaster) to talk with you about how one can behave in difficult situations so that everyone is OK and everyone can feel at ease. My concern is not about individual persons, it's about behavior. So please don't name any names. I won't ask you for names, either. I would like to help, and I'm asking you to assist me."

As an alternative, a teacher from the same school who happens to be conducting the SBI could start off differently:

"Today, I'm not standing here in my role as a teacher who has to correct people or criticize them. Instead, I want to help you. I want to talk with you about how one can behave in difficult situations so that everyone is OK and everyone can feel at ease.

My concern is not about individual persons, but about behavior. So please don't name any names. I won't ask you for names, either. I would like to help, and I'm asking you to assist me."

 **Goals:**

- Establish contact with the class
- Agree on playing rules for working together
- Clarify roles and tasks:
The facilitator is offering help.
- Commitment (students agree to cooperate)

SBI Step 3: Telling the stories

At this point, the approach to the conflict event begins with the first two stories. The aim is to evoke concern and compassion and to motivate the students to shift their perspective. It soon becomes apparent how capable the class is of earnestness, self-control, and compassion.

The facilitator approaches the stories like an actor would, taking the stage and symbolically involving students in the plot so that they are integrated into the "social drama".

"I would like to tell you three stories. One is about a girl who, like me, weighs a bit too much. Somehow, it got started: somebody insulted her on the class chat by calling her 'fatty', and somebody else had the idea that only girls who weren't overweight should be allowed on the chat. Lots of people thought that was funny, but it made the girl feel very sad ... [pause]. Have any of you ever seen that happen, that somebody gets insulted on the chat? ... [hands go up] ... OK, that's quite a few. What do you think, who was having fun, and who felt hurt? ..."

Here's the second story: A boy who was a little shy and also had slight speech defect ..."

[Somebody grins and, with no further ado, gets to see the yellow card.]

Interruption: the story continues only after confronting this violation of rules. Disturbances and rule-breaking have to be taken up right away and used to induce the students to shift their perspective.

"What do you think – how would the boy feel if he heard you laughing now?"

Wait until a pro-social student says something.

"Yeah, right ... he would feel very hurt, not just because of his speech defect, I mean, it was really, really bad for him! His suffering deserves respect! He really got taken for a ride. Other boys from his school had set up a fake account, pretending to be a girl, and gotten him to do sexy things in front of webcam ... One day when he got to school, one of the other boys said, 'Today, you're going to see your dick on the internet, and the girls will be crazy about you!' In his distress, he turned to the teacher.



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The boy felt destroyed, he just wanted to disappear into thin air. He said if that happens he won't ever leave the house again. It would be better if he didn't even exist!"

The story has to be told with weighty pauses, so that its effect on the class can be observed in their non-verbal communication. Afterwards, the method of "circular questioning" can be used: all the questions relate to the past, and they're all in the subjunctive (what if, what could ...):

"What do you think, what consequences would that have had for the boy? What would have happened to him? What would he have needed? Yeah, that's it. He needed the other people's compassion. How could they have helped him?"

Post the "compassion" sign.

If the students don't take up these questions, but instead make other comments about the story, it's important to intervene ("Please stick to the question I asked. What happened to him?").

"The teacher was able to help the boy. The video never surfaced, and the other boys apologized when they realized how awful the situation was for him. That was a close call!"

Only if the class demonstrates a good measure of earnestness, concern, and empathy – i.e. the willingness to continue following the facilitator through the intervention – can one now proceed to step 4. Otherwise, step 4 is omitted, and the group proceeds directly to step 5 (agreement on rules, personal declaration of self-restraint).



Goals:

- Bring the conflict event out into the open
- Evoke concern
- Stir up compassion
- Test the capacity of the class for earnestness, self-restraint, and empathy

SBI Step 4: Tell about the mobbing case and call for compassion

Now the actual situation is described – in anonymized form, of course. Again, this serves to evoke the students' concern and to motivate them to see the event from the perspective of the victim. Because the consequences of the deeds are spelled out, compassion is raised and violence is regarded as taboo. The third story relates to the conflict at hand, which was the reason for conducting the SBI:

"My third story is about a girl who fell deeply in love with a boy from her school. This was a real big thing. She trusted him completely... Because he asked her to, as a sign of her love, she sent him nude photos of herself... Then their relationship took a bad turn, and the girl brought it to an end. That hurt the boy very badly. He was very angry, but hadn't yet lost all hope. He threatened to circulate the nude photos at school, thinking that this would get her to come back to him. But she wrote back that she wouldn't do that. She wrote that it was forbidden to post photos like that, and she warned him. But he couldn't control himself and did it anyway. For the girl, it was a catastrophe! She didn't want to go to school anymore. She was ashamed. The worst part was that if a classmate even just looked at her or smiled, she thought they could be making fun of her. Her life seemed dark and desolate. She never would have expected the boy she had once loved so much to do anything like that.

What do you think the girl was feeling like? What consequences did all this have for her?"

At this point, the facilitator must strictly avoid asking certain types of questions that could either: block the participation of the class, in some way expose anyone or assign blame, be answered simply with yes or no, trigger justification strategies, or contain indirect reproaches. Examples of no-go questions would be: "Who knows anything about what happened?", "Why do you think the boy did that?", "Whose fault was it?", "Did the girl do the right thing?"

Examples of more productive questions: "What would be important to do now, so that things don't get worse?", "How could everyone contribute to that?", "What should definitely not happen again?"

Good contributions to the discussion should be acknowledged and reinforced immediately:

"Yes, exactly, I see it that way, too ... that would have helped ... the photos shouldn't be forwarded again ... something like this should never happen again ... somebody has to sound the alarm ..."

If there are objections made and students try to make a direct connection to the actual events that took place, their perception of things has to be acknowledged – but without naming names.

"Yes, I understand what you mean. This story could have something to do with what is going on in the class right now. But you all know: I'm here to talk about behavior, not about individual persons."



Aims:

- evoke concern
- stir up compassion
- spell our consequences
- call for compassion
- declare violence to be taboo

SBI Step 5: Negotiate agreements

On the basis of the resilient personal abilities called for in step 4 (earnestness/self-restraint/respect/compassion), the facilitator and the class together set out a "contract with oneself" (a declaration of commitment) naming the forms of behavior that should no longer occur.

"What should not be allowed to happen in this class any more? I'm writing down what you say ..."

The forms of behavior are written on the board or the flip chart. The text says:

Contract with myself toward respecting human rights in Class 7b.

I pledge that in the future ...

- 1.** *I will not re-send and will immediately delete any hurtful texts, photos, or video that are sent to me.*
- 2.** *I will respond to the person who sent them, making clear that I do not want to be sent any such texts, photos, or videos again, and that I object to his or her behavior.*
- 3.** *I will inform the human rights observers or the teachers about any incident of this kind. I know that this would not be tattling, but rather providing support.*

I am aware that breaking this contract with myself can have serious consequences for me.

The students are asked to come forward individually and sign the declaration.

"Who among you is now willing to come forward and sign the contract?"

In the next class session, the headmaster/homeroom teacher expresses recognition for the students' having reached and signed this agreement, reminding them that their contract is to be taken seriously and the school will not tolerate violations of it.



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The declaration of commitment that has been signed in front of the whole class is now photographed. A sign with the word "courage" is posted.

"Now I'm really curious. I want to see who among you has the courage and the strength to stand up in the future and see to it that the agreement is adhered to – so that everyone in the class can feel at ease and everyone is OK. Whoever does that will get a note of praise in his or her school report, your teacher told me. Any hands raised? ... Quite a few, I'm glad to see."

At this point, the homeroom teacher can make suggestions (see exercise in Chapter 8, Project 10).

"Right now, the task of the human rights observers is to support the class in complying with the declaration. If any violation of it takes place, the human rights observers have to report on it without naming names. You all know that this is about behavior."



Goals:

- Declare that violence is taboo
- Set down a declaration of commitment
- Implement a system of social peer supervision and support

SBI Step 6: Closing survey (optional)

In order to estimate the chances of success, the value framework of the class can now be asked about in a (protected) written survey. With a guided questionnaire, tendencies in the class toward pro-social or dissocial behavior can be detected. Usually, it also emerges whether there are also other students who have been victimized. This survey can be very valuable toward understanding the overall situation.

The students respond in writing (under conditions similar to those of a classroom test) to questions on

the situation in the class and on the acute conflict event(s). The following text is presented on a flipchart:

"Write your name, the date, and your class at the top. Please answer my questions openly and honestly. Respect the privacy of your neighbors and let them find their own answers by themselves without any disturbance. Every person has the right to their own opinion – whether it suits the others, or not! Please remember that I'm not interested in names of classmates."

Question Nr. 1: *What do you think of it when classmates are insulted on WhatsApp?*

Question Nr. 2: *What do you think of it when photos are posted on WhatsApp against a person's will?*

Question Nr. 3: *What things like that have happened in this class?*

Question Nr. 4: *Are you afraid that you could be dissed on WhatsApp someday?*

Question Nr. 5: *Do you think that the declaration of commitment will result in fewer things like this happening, or maybe no more at all?*

Question Nr. 6: *Would it be tattling or helping if the human rights observers sound an alarm?*

Question Nr. 7: *What is your opinion on setting up binding rules for the class chat?*

Question Nr. 8: *This is the only question where you're allowed to name someone's name: Right now, in the class, who is taking the most hits/getting dissed the most?"*

The survey outcomes are discussed in the team consisting of homeroom teacher, headmaster, and school social worker or school psychologist. They are not made available to the class.

**Goals:**

- *Input on current framework of values and norms in the class*
- *Estimation of chances for success in implementing a system of social peer supervision and support*
- *Finding out how many students have pro-social or dissocial tendencies*

SBI Step 7: Follow-up

The results and experiences of the SBI are assessed by the team, with the homeroom teacher and the headmaster. Based on these outcomes, ongoing social measures are planned for the class, e.g. writing letters with wishes or praise, a two-day social training, or an adventure education project. A date is set for a review of the declarations of commitment.

**Goal:**

- *Drawing conclusions/consequences from the SBI process and the protected survey*

4.5 Pitfalls

The treatment of (cyber)mobbing usually involves a great deal of effort. However, many of the persons bearing responsibility at schools are already pressed for time. Lack of time and lack of knowledge lead in many cases to a situation in which insufficient attention is addressed to dealing with (cyber)mobbing. Instead people respond spontaneously, perhaps also intuitively. With the best of intentions, educators transpose methods suited for resolving individual conflicts over into the (cyber)mobbing case. In doing so, they encounter pitfalls from which they themselves and the persons affected cannot easily escape – and which, in the worst case, can lead to an escalation of violence. The following list points toward essential mistakes that are often made inadvertently:

Pitfall 1: Just conducting individual talks with the victim will not end the mobbing

Of course it is important to have an initial conversation with the victim. At the same time, it's clear that mobbing is a systemic phenomenon that can only be resolved in the systemic context, i.e. by involving all the participants. For lack of suitable professional tools, adults often restrict their efforts to individual talks with the victim. These conversations are made note of by the classmates, however, and they react with irritation because they feel disadvantaged. Attention is hard to get in schools – why should the victim get more than anyone else? What is more, the classmates feel betrayed and unsure of themselves. They don't know what's going on behind their backs. What did the victim say, how did he get the teacher/social worker to take his side? The result can be that students who formerly weren't participants also turn against the victim and reinforce the mobbing.

An individual talk certainly needs to take place, but it does not alter the fact that the victim hasn't got a chance against the overweening force of the offenders. Victims need support from their classmates, meaning that other measures also are necessary. Individual counseling in itself cannot end mobbing.

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Pitfall 2: Intervention by the parents can make things worse

The parents of a victim see clearly how their child is suffering, and they suffer too. Perhaps they also feel guilty because they haven't been able to protect their child adequately up to now. Usually, they want put an end to their own inactivity and help their child, so they press the child to name names and, in their desperation, take up direct contact with the offenders and their parents – hoping to terminate the mobbing.

How cool and calm, how constructive can a telephone conversation possibly be under such circumstances? What affect does this first contact have on the course of events? Generally, it leads to further escalation for one of the following reasons. Either the offenders' parents try to protect their children and end up reinforcing the offenders' position, or they threaten to punish their children, with the effect that the offenders relay this pressure onto the victim – they want to get revenge for having been betrayed. At worst, the mobbing escalates from the student level to the parent level, with the offenders' parents recruiting allies among the other classmates' parents and attacking the victim's parents – a dynamic to be observed at parents' evenings planned to discuss the problem.

If, on the other hand, the parents have the impression that the professional educators at the school are doing a good job and giving their child competent support, they can remain more or less relaxed. Parents can restrict themselves to doing what they can to contribute to a solution: giving the child all the love they have and encouraging the child to pursue positive experiences in other groups.

Pitfall 3: Promptly threatening to punish offenders

Mobbing is not an individual offense, but rather the result of a group process. Simply punishing an individual will therefore bear no fruit. The assistants and claqueurs – and also the uninterested and the inactive – also are responsible for it. Should they be punished for refusing to help? Or should everyone be punished?

Threatening punishment and assigning guilt actually hinder the resolution of mobbing cases and promote solidarity with the offenders. Such actions drive the harassment underground, lead to covert attacks, and undermine the transparency that is necessary to come to a solution. To end mobbing, you need to bring it out into the open, into the civic sphere, and you need compassion. But how can any compassion with the victim be shown if the offenders are trying to avoid punishment by trumpeting rectifications and self-serving attempts to justify their own behavior? They will present themselves as the ones who are suffering and claim that they are being treated unfairly: "We were just making a joke!", "He was the one who provoked us!", "He gets on everybody's nerves!" The threat of punishment and the assignment of guilt put the offenders at the center of attention, allowing them to slip into the role of victim. In addition, their repeated attempts at justification make it impossible for them and the other classmates to feel empathy with the actual victim. Accusations directed toward the offenders may actually have the effect that the class steps up its mobbing activities.

Before the offenders are confronted, the class needs to have it brought to mind that human rights are the basis of civil society, and that they are violated by mobbing. Mobbing is violence against the soul, the body, and a person's property. Another prerequisite is the development of empathy as the fundamental ability to sense the suffering of the victim, and as the intrinsic motivation to help the victim. The likelihood of this is greatly reduced if an educator's first reaction has been to threaten punishment and assign guilt. With that, pressure is built up under which the offender and the class will be able to continuing refusing to empathize, and which undercuts the integration of the offender and the class into the process of resolution.

Needless to say, guilt and punishment certainly are important in mobbing cases. But they need to be addressed at the right point in time – which the next pitfall is intended to illustrate.

Pitfall 4: Lack of supervision after the intervention

After a mobbing intervention, there is a high risk of relapse, particularly if the mobbing has been in progress for a longer time. Mobbing activities tend to establish a status as a stabilizing factor in a system, and now, this prop has been removed. Former offenders can no longer satisfy their needs for power, recognition, amusement, etc. in the customary way. This is why consistent monitoring is necessary for at least six months. One aspect of this is the threat of punishment, as formulated in the context of Systemic Mobbing Intervention (see Section 4.3 of this chapter, Step 5).

Pitfall 5: Ascribing guilt to victims can be taken as a legitimization of violence

Sometimes victims behave strangely. Their behavior is not readily understood, even irritating adults, and giving rise to comments such as "He shouldn't be surprised that he gets treated this way sometimes," "He seems to be enjoying the role of victim," or "It's his own fault if ...". Some classmates interpret these more or less subtle statements made by adults as a free pass for harassment. But there is no strange behavior, no tic, no selfie, no body scent, no outburst of rage and nothing else that can legitimate systematic harassment and violence. At the most, it can indicate that a behavioral contract should be negotiated, for instance in the case of temper outbursts.

Pitfall 6: Urging the victim to defend himself

Naturally, it is the task and usually also the impulse of every person to defend himself – thus also against harassment. In the case of systematic harassment, as in mobbing, the victim is by definition the weaker party. The offenders will emphasize this and will not allow their power to be taken away. Calling on the victim to defend himself only escalates the use of force.

Pitfall 7: Expecting the class to solve the problem

The students cannot cope with this alone. This would also risk cementing or escalating the conflict.

Pitfall 8: "Discussing" the problem with the class

(Cyber)mobbing has its own specific dynamic (see chapter 2.2). If an intervention is to counteract this dynamic constructively, the procedure must be highly structured. Simply discussing things without a conceptual basis will make everything worse. It will create a stage on which the offenders can rectify themselves and develop their profile.

Pitfall 9: Information briefings with a cognitive emphasis

Intervention measures are long-term efforts, they relate to the entire class or group and encompass effective behavioral regulation. Emotional aspects of interaction are taken into account, so that compassion can be developed, and helpers from the peer group are provided for the victim in the ensuing period. Reducing all this to informative briefings will not turn the trick.

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