



○ Nele – A Case Study

6.1 The Starting Point

6.2 Background at the School

6.3 First Response, Positioning, and Data Protection

6.4 Team Formation, Conflict Diagnosis, and Plan for Action

6.5 The Crisis Intervention

6.6 Regulating the Conflict

6.7 Follow-Up and the End of the Conflict

6

- 1 Introduction
- 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
- 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
- 4 Intervention Methods

- 5 Systemic Conflict Management
- 6 Nele – A Case Study**
- 7 Pedagogical Conduct
- 8 Projects in Practice

6. Nele – A Case Study

The following case is true-to-life, it actually occurred. Some details and personal characteristics have been altered – but the social roles and the sequence of events correspond fully to the conflict as it unfolded in reality.

This case of sexting (communication on sexual themes via mobile messaging, in particular involving photos or video) demonstrates that educators in schools and youth agencies are not helpless when faced with instances of (cyber)mobbing. Not only prevention is possible: intervention is, too, and it should not simply be left to the police. This case also shows how well interdisciplinary cooperation can work and how schools can tap into the expert knowledge of social educators and school psychologists. And finally, the case study illustrates the functioning of systemic conflict management (undertaken from a systemic perspective and with a systematic, planned procedure in a team), creating a school configuration that can lead to educational effects of measurable quality.

6.1 The Starting Point

One Tuesday, after morning recess, in the counseling room of an academic high school in northern Germany: Her head lowered, 13-year-old Nele is staring at her smartphone, her friend Jessica is next to her and Theresa Obermüller is sitting across from them. She is a school social worker and it's her job to provide psycho-social 'first aid' in cases of conflict and to advise the school decision-makers. As Nele starts to tell her story, Obermüller realizes quickly that the girl has become the victim of a serious and extremely hostile (cyber) mobbing attack. The counselor senses that the girl is going to need a lot of support in the coming days.

The story Nele tells is a teenage classic. Nele had fallen in love for the first time and had made, for her boyfriend Steve, a video in which she was shown nude. "The love I felt for him was like nothing I had ever known" says Nele, her eyes shining. When Steve had asked her for a video like that, she had in fact felt a bit queasy. She knew – from an information day at school where a

policeman said so – that one might perhaps take intimate photos for oneself, but should never send them to anyone via chat. Well, those were rules made by adults, she adds, as if making an excuse for something stupid. She didn't send the video to Steve right away – but he put her under pressure. "Prove that you love me!", it said in the chat, which Nele shows to the other two in the counseling room at their request. She felt blind trust towards Steve, who was two years older than she. Four months later, the relationship had broken up, and Steve threatened to pass around the video in a chat room – which Nele obviously did not want. He wrote, "I swear I'll send the video to everybody. I'm gonna finish you off. The whole school is going to see what a bitch you are!"

That Tuesday morning, Nele goes on, she learned that Steve's words hadn't been a hollow threat. The day before, a number of students from various forms had already seen the video on their mobiles, as Jessica found out. Nele had noticed that people were leering at her and exchanging whispers – something was off key. But that Steve would go that far: she just couldn't imagine that. "The video went around the school like lightning, and who knows where else it will end up!" She says she feels absolutely helpless and at people's mercy. She is scared that someone could use the video to go after her and maybe even blackmail her later on. "Now I'll never get an apprenticeship! The policeman said that the personnel bosses google you!" When Theresa Obermüller asks her what she wishes for right now, Nele doesn't need to stop and think: "not to come to school tomorrow!" She says she can't bear the whispering and gawking. But she doesn't want Steve to be punished and "thrown out of school" – in this statement the memory of her affection for him is still echoed.

Theresa Obermüller presents her with a different idea: "Nele, suppose you could regain control of the situation. What if the video disappears from your school because everybody decides that it's despicable to have that on one's mobile or to re-send it? What if your schoolmates, teachers, and the principal show you their compassion and want to help make sure people respect you? What if your reputation didn't suffer? If Steve admitted

1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

what he did, regretted it, and made up for it?" Nele starts listening hard. She hadn't thought of anything like that – since she'd always heard that once something was on the internet, there was nothing you could do about it. Besides, how would she ever be able to persuade her classmates to do that? She wouldn't even be able to speak openly about it with them. And Steve? "We'll talk to him", says Theresa Obermüller. "But I need your permission for that, and it would be best to have your parents' permission, too!" (see Chapter 5.5.1 on first response and positioning).

6.2 Background at the School

With regard to school development, this case has a back story that is essential to the success of the intervention that took place.

Theresa Obermüller is employed as a school social worker by an independent organization, her job is financed by three sources: this organization, the Social Ministry of the state, and the community (town). This is not to be taken for granted, since towns and independent organizations are not required to do this. But this town wanted to support its school with more than just a building and equipment to go in it. They wanted to make a contribution to quality education and good upbringing. One of Obermüller's specializations in her professional work is conflict management. In an average school year, she handles about 70 serious cases of conflict in several different schools.

At the school where Nele's case comes up, there has been a steering group for five years now – initiated by the principal, Mr. Schuster (see box). Thanks to this group, systemic conflict management has been firmly established as part of the school's culture; the procedural standards developed here have systematized pedagogical efforts and provided them with a reliable framework. After initial resistance, today the parents, students, teachers, Theresa Obermüller herself, and the principal are glad that these structures have been developed.

STEERING GROUP

Members:

- School principal Mr. Schuster
- School social worker Theresa Obermüller
- School counselor
- Teacher commissioned with prevention issues

Tasks:

- Implementation, ongoing development, and evaluation of systemic conflict management at the school
- Reporting to school bodies/committees and drafting proposals for decisions on issues relevant to the pedagogical profile of the school

Roster:

One meeting per quarter, lasting about 2,5 hours

As a result, this school is well set up to deal with (cyber)-mobbing. Theresa Obermüller may not have much power to make *decisions* – these are up to the principal. Nonetheless, she plays a key role by serving as a *conflict manager* in individual cases. In this role, and specifically for each individual case, she forms a team (called an SCM team, see Chapter 5.4.3), coordinates the process of conflict resolution, counsels the responsible parties, and conducts the intervention. She has achieved the high-level professional competence required for this demanding work through continuing education. In this context, a person's initial professional qualification as an educator is not as significant as the special skills acquired in advanced training, and the person's having sufficient resources of work time to apply them beneficially.

6.3 First Response, Positioning, and Data Protection

The first adult to hear about Nele's problem was the 'link' teacher (a teacher chosen at German schools who can be approached by any student). Nele's friend Jessica spoke to her after having seen the video with her friend in the nude. The link teacher listened carefully and empathetically. The student's extreme distress could be sensed immediately. But the link teacher also realized right away that this problem situation was over her head. As the "person of first contact" she now had to decide how Nele could be helped. Being a link teacher, she is glad to serve as a first contact, but not to take responsibility for further support. She therefore – with Nele's permission – accompanies Nele to see Theresa Obermüller and informs the principal. The link teacher, as the first educationally responsible person drawn into the conflict, takes a clear position on her own role: first link – yes, conflict treatment – no.

Theresa Obermüller would now like, together with Nele, to find out more about what has occurred. Sympathetically and respectfully, she places questions to Nele, who settles in to the relaxed atmosphere and is able to report more and more clearly. Obermüller tries to find out whether Steve has committed punishable offenses, and if so, how serious they were. Items of evidence – particularly videos, photos, and chat exchanges – need to be ascertained and documented, since they will prevent the offending student from denying or trivializing the matter, or trying to reverse the burden of guilt. "Nele, now everything has to be put on the table. I believe you, but I also need proof. Did you save the chat exchanges with Steve? I need to see the video and should also save it, otherwise I can't do the right things for you!" Quite some time back, the media appointee of the school had seen to it that Obermüller had the technical means to save quickly any material proof that was on the internet or on mobile phones. This way, she can view it in detail after an interview. To avoid committing an offense herself, she saves the potentially incriminating material only on DVD, not on the PC itself, and later hands the DVD over to the principal, to be stored in the school safe as ascertained evidence. If it couldn't be proven that Steve elicited a pornographic video from Nele and took possession of it, then he would not be an offender by constitutional standards – and would not need to take responsibility for it.

Nele is agonized, full of self-reproach. "It's my own fault if I behave like a bitch! How could anybody be that stupid!" At this point in the interview, Theresa Obermüller concentrates increasingly, together with Nele, on probing the girl's inner process; feelings and needs are now in the focus of attention. "Nele, how serious is the situation for you? So bad that you don't want to come to school anymore? Or so bad that you don't want to be anywhere anymore?" No, answers the student, she hasn't thought about doing harm to herself. Obermüller registers that there is no indication of acute danger, no threat to the girl's life. But the idea of refusing to go to school keeps circling around in Nele's head. The stares and whispers behind her back are unbearable, she wishes she could just beam herself away! Nele bursts into tears. Only Jessica is loyal to her. And from Jessica she learned what others were saying about her, "that I'm a slut and got what I had coming!" Theresa Obermüller asks whether everyone reacted that way. Jessica says no, some people were quite taken aback and pensive. But a few were maliciously sharing the video.

She doesn't know, says Nele, downtrodden, whether she will ever be able to trust a boyfriend again. "Nele, I hope that someday you will meet a person you can give your love to and still take good care of yourself, without his feeling slighted. Trust has to grow, and it always has a limit," answers the social worker. "I think, OK, what you did was pretty lightheaded, but there is nothing reproachable about making videos or nude photos of yourself. You have the right to do that and you were expressing your love. Steve did something wrong, not you!" One year later, Nele will get back to Theresa Obermüller to say that this 'first aid' provided by the social worker and the link teacher was tremendously important to her.

It would make Obermüller's work much easier, she explains, if Nele consents to her taking active steps in the case. Nele agrees to that and in doing so gives Obermüller a formal commission. Now they have to determine what kind of commission it should be: individual support or conflict support? First, Obermüller asks Nele whether she may inform Nele's parents; Nele gives her consent. If Nele also permits that data be given to the principal and the SCM team, Theresa Obermüller could accompany her within the framework called "conflict support". However, if Nele and/or her parents opt for full discretion, the commission would simply be "individual support".

1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

Under German penal law (§ 203 StGB), Theresa Obermüller as a “bearer of secrets” must observe strict confidentiality. Without consent, she cannot even take up contact with others involved in the conflict. Nele gives her permission to make the data available – and Obermüller can now approach the case as one of “conflict support”.

There is one exception to the school social worker’s confidentiality obligation. Even if Nele had not given her consent, in one particular case Theresa Obermüller would have been required to take steps. This would be her duty according to German social law (§ 8a SGB VIII): where there are serious indications of child endangerment, it would generally be imperative that she urge the legal guardians – here, the parents – to initiate remedial action.

Before bringing the consultation to an end, Obermüller must also judge whether Nele could be additionally endangered if her parents are informed. Theresa Obermüller knows from experience that parents are sometimes unable to cope and can react with force. Nele says it will be unpleasant and taxing for all three, but that she trusts her parents and that they will remain approachable for her.

Obermüller has been noting down Nele’s report in the first person; now she uses a standardized form to take down additional data (Form for Conducting and Documenting an Interview with a Person Seeking Help). Nele receives a copy of these minutes for her parents. Theresa Obermüller lets Nele know that the principal or the homeroom teacher will be getting in touch with the parents, probably that same evening. Before then, Nele should find an opportunity to get her parents ready for that. As a precaution, Theresa Obermüller tells the student that she can get back in touch with school social work immediately should there be any unforeseeable escalation at home (see Chapter 5.5.1).

6.4 Team Formation, Conflict Diagnosis, and Plan for Action

The initial steps are completed: ‘first aid’, clarification of the mandate, and definition of Obermüller’s position within the work field of conflict support. After a short conversation with the school principal, Theresa Obermüller sets up a first meeting of the SCM team for the next morning before school. With this step the case treatment which has, up to now, taken place on the intrapersonal level, is expanded to include treatment on the institutional level of the school. Because the social worker continues to assume that the student may be in danger, it is justified to call a meeting on such short notice. Theresa Obermüller will be coordinating the SCM team as the conflict manager. She has previously been given (blanket) permission to do so by the principal and the teachers’ conference. The other members of the SCM team are (in this case) the two homeroom teachers and the school principal (see also chart on role distribution in Chapter 5.4.3).

Wednesday 7:30 A.M. – Before school has even started, the SCM team meets for its first case consultation among colleagues. Obermüller gives the team members the support application and the minutes she prepared during the interview with Nele. Documentation and written reports form the foundation for successful conflict resolution. The first task of the team is now to come to an initial assessment and to clarify role assignments within the SCM team.

Theresa Obermüller projects onto a wall screen the completed Form for Implementing and Documenting a Conflict Analysis, and she summarizes what has happened: “According to the information we have at this point, based on statements made by the 13-year-old student Nele and her friend Jessica, as well as chat exchanges and a video that have been ascertained, the student Steve from the 9th form circulated, at 11:30 P.M. on Sunday – deliberately, to take revenge and against Nele’s express wishes – a video of his former girlfriend Nele in which she is shown in the nude. Nele had terminated the relationship several weeks earlier. In a viewing of the video, it emerged that circulating it is very probably a punishable offense under the penal code (§ 184b StGB), since the video contains child pornographic material.

There were numerous other students involved who became accomplices by requesting the video, taking possession of it, and re-sending it. It is not yet known how widely the video has in fact been distributed."

In brief, Obermüller categorizes the conflict on the basis of its characteristics: "The conflict occurring is to be considered as stage E and is very complex. That means that the potential for escalation and endangerment is very great for all involved; the psycho-social damage already done to those involved is, in part, extremely severe; in the course of the conflict process, criminal offenses have been committed; and the conflict events are highly complex! They are occurring on all levels: intra- and interpersonal, institutional, systemic and probably also on the level of parental cooperation." The assessment of a conflict is always undertaken on a scale set up by the Steering Group. It categorizes the gravity of conflict situations on a scale from A to E (the highest, see diagram in Chapter 5.4.2).

In Obermüller's estimation, there is a threat of serious detriment to Nele's social status and to her emotional and physical well-being. She reports that Nele is on the verge of refusing to attend school. Fortunately, she is not expressing any suicidal thoughts right now and says she has no tendency towards them. Steve's attack, Obermüller explains, began on the interpersonal level and then escalated systemically. It could potentially lead to a significant disturbance of the peaceful community and work climate at the school. How widely the video has circulated on the internet is not yet clear; up to now, it is known to have been sent to various groups on WhatsApp. Mr. Schuster, the principal, adds that he had a long talk with Nele's mother the previous evening. She impressed him as being cooperative and rational. At that point, Nele's father did not yet know what had happened because he didn't get home from work until very late in the evening.

In the SCM team, questions come up: What is Steve's response to the accusation? With teenagers, you can't completely exclude the possibility that someone else with a mobile could have posted the video. And: how is child pornography defined in legal terms? On this second issue, Theresa Obermüller has done her homework. She spoke to the youth officer in the police

department, using "What if...?" mode as one would for a fictitious case. Nele is 13 years old. That is very significant. Nele's video shows her genitals, which was no accident, but rather undertaken with sexual intent – meaning that it fulfils the legal criteria for child pornographic material, even if Nele looks like she's 16. When such videos (or photos) are produced, acquired, or circulated by other persons, it is a felony according to § 184b StGB. According to the penal code, this is a criminal offense and the police are required to investigate as soon as it comes to their attention – regardless of whether Nele and her parents want them to. If, on the other hand, the video (or comparable photo material) were not pornographic, then circulating it against Nele's wishes would not be quite as grave an offense in terms of the penal code, and it would only be prosecuted on demand. Here, however, "With very high probability, a crime according to the penal code (§ 184b StGB) is to be assumed." That Theresa Obermüller has this reliable assessment – made by her cooperation partner in the police department – so promptly at hand is an outcome of networking efforts she has pursued over many years.

In planning how to proceed, the SCM team follows systematically an action strategy that they have previously set out together (see Chapter 5.4.4). First, the mode of action needs to be determined – the team has to decide how to treat the conflict: by self-regulation, regulation on demand, obligatory regulation, threat intervention, or crisis intervention (see overview Five Elements of a Strategy for Action in Chapter 5.4.4). The following questions help in deciding:

1. Does the conflict have to be treated immediately in order to prevent acute, severe damage to anyone's emotional or physical well-being?
2. Would the conflict threaten to escalate and produce a situation of acute endangerment if there were no intervention?
3. Has there been a serious transgression against values and norms that calls for a pedagogical regulatory measure levied by the school?
4. Does the student who has been targeted wish for help with the conflict?
5. Does the homeroom teacher or the principal want to leave the conflict resolution up to the students (or the parents)?

1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

In this case, the group quickly reaches unanimous agreement: questions 1 through 4 clearly 'yes' and question 5 'no'. With that, the mode of action for the ongoing procedure is set: the school has to conduct a crisis intervention.

Every member of the SCM team now takes up a position in accord with his/her expertise and options for decision-making and action: as an advisor, conflict helper, conflict manager, or regulator. Treatment of conflicts that are serious or can escalate into a crisis should always be undertaken by a team.

Conflict treatment by a team ensures

- high quality of the treatment, particularly with regard to maximum protection of victims,
- a high educational standard in overcoming the crisis,
- the division of the time/work burden among several persons, which conserves resources,
- responsibility borne by several persons,
- critical reflection on and correction of planned actions, based on feedback from team members.

The following persons and roles should be involved in an SCM or crisis intervention team:

| The SCM Team | |
|--|---|
| The core team is built around four roles. Although they could be performed by two persons, this should remain an exception due to the work load, but also in terms of defining oneself in the role. Therefore, the SCM team should be formed by at least four persons. | |
| Role | Task |
| School principal (regulator, first order) (obligatory) | Directs the team; confronts student(s) with accusation; decides on strategy for action, particularly on interventions, pedagogical or regulatory measures; directs intervention in cases of threat or crisis; takes responsibility for all actions in the school; involves the conflicting parties |
| Homeroom teacher(s) (regulator, second order) (obligatory) | Directs the class; confronts student(s) with accusations; decides on pedagogical measures; also takes responsibility for the legality and commensurability of actions taken in classes; involves the conflicting parties |
| Conflict manager (role can be played by homeroom teacher or school social worker) | Conducts a conflict diagnosis; makes recommendations towards assessing the conflict process; advises the decision-makers in their planning and decision on strategies for action (mode, direction, level, data sharing); coordinates and supervises the process of crisis intervention, conflict resolution, and follow-up; reports to the regulators; involves the conflicting parties |
| Conflict helper (teachers or external consultants) | Conducts negotiations on reparation, three-way talks with victim and offender, mediation with others involved, coaching of human-rights observers; supports the monitoring of voluntary self-commitments or declarations to cease and desist |
| Expanded team | |
| Social education professionals | Conduct social training sessions, systemic mobbing intervention or brief intervention; these should be certified professionals who have pursued advanced training |
| Media education specialists (optional) | Provide advice on media education issues and technical-organizational aspects in cases of endangerment through the use of media |
| Coaches (optional) | Accompany and support victim and offender in serious conflict situations in order to avoid violent escalation or traumatization; these should be professionals who have pursued advanced training (school psychologists, school social workers, crisis intervention specialists, school counselors) |
| Support team (participates only partially in the collegial case consultations of those listed above) | |
| Conflict support assistants (teachers, external consultants or parents who have specific training) | Conduct exploratory interviews with involved students and teachers |

6.5 The Crisis Intervention

Due to the decision to conduct an intervention, in this case the SCM automatically becomes a crisis intervention team. Now they spell out the goals of the crisis intervention: the primary aim is to achieve, in short time, de-escalation on the interpersonal and systemic level (see Chapter 2.1.2). That means:

- supporting Nele in re-gaining her stability and refraining from acts that could be self-damaging or damaging to Steve,
- obliging Steve and accomplices to refrain from any further cyber-attacking,
- re-gaining control of the situation, above all over possession and circulation of the video, and thus preventing further criminal offenses,
- strengthening the pro-social value system among the classmates of Steve and Nele, and raising concern and compassion for the victim,
- and confronting the rationalization strategies that Steve has been propagating ("I didn't do anything wrong, Nele is a bitch and it's all her own fault!").

But first, several questions still need to be answered:

- How did the video get onto the net?
- How widely has it been circulated, and in what media forums?
- Who requested to receive a copy?
- Who forwarded/shared it?
- Who has it in his/her possession?
- Who has really committed a serious violation of values and norms, and may therefore be suspected of continuing to do so?

During the following school hours the conflict assistants (see Chapters 5.4.3 and 6.4), directed by Obermüller, conduct interviews with those students (and also teachers) who are involved in the conflict in the broadest sense (or who are witnesses to it). The outcome of the 30 interviews is already available the next day:

- At the school, approximately 70 students had viewed Nele's nude video up to that point.
- About 30 students had saved the video, which they received via chat, and stored it on their mobile phones.
- Several students were very eager to get a copy and sent out requests for it.
- Only a few students deleted the video, finding it offensive.
- During school breaks, groups had formed in the hallways with people smirking and laughing. Only a few students were concerned and pensive.
- With the exception of Jessica, not one of these 70 students got in contact with an adult about the matter – despite the fact that the disastrous results of sexting had been discussed at a prevention workshop only six months earlier.
- Justifications had produced their intended effect on many students: compassion for Nele was uncommon. Even when questioned explicitly about Steve's behavior, hardly anyone found it morally reprehensible – there were practically no critical statements.
- The focus of indignation was on Nele's behavior.

Theresa Obermüller had been expecting that Nele would not be treated with much compassion. The value system of many children and adolescents is not oriented, of its own accord, towards respect and human rights. On the contrary, commercial TV formats based on shaming people mercilessly ("Germany's Next Superstar") present a blueprint for cynicism. Malicious jokes about someone else's suffering are a lot more popular than compassion and moral courage.

1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

Now that Theresa Obermüller has been able to glean a reliable impression of the conflict’s status, based on the interviews, she can now arrange to talk to Steve. An essential principle of the school’s SCM is that every person must have an opportunity to be heard. But Theresa Obermüller won’t contact Steve directly. Her confrontative interview with Steve will be preceded by a conversation between Steve and the homeroom teacher or the principal. The binding tenet is: the accusation is always voiced initially by the responsible teacher or the principal (or the victim). Only the heads of the form and the school are legally commissioned to address educational issues of this gravity and have the right to

confront a student with an accusation. Therefore the principal, Mr. Schuster, conducts this first regulatory talk with Steve, who roundly rejects any blame for the cyber attack. He denies that he was the first to re-send the video. He claims that he received it from other students and then shared it. And besides, he asserts, Nele herself had already posted the video on Facebook. Mr. Schuster asks Steve to enlist help from Ms. Obermüller and get his version of the story down on paper. This way, everyone will understand him better. Steve agrees to do that, and Mr. Schuster accompanies him to Theresa Obermüller’s office.

Tasks of the Regulators and Conflict Helpers

In the terms of Systemic Conflict Management, the school principal and the homeroom teacher are regulators. While teachers bear “the direct responsibility for the education and instruction of the students”, the principal as head of the school has the “overall responsibility”, must see to it “that legal and administrative regulations and school ordinances are observed”, and must “take the necessary measures in individual cases” (quoted from the School Law of Lower Saxony).

It is the task of regulators to conduct a hearing with the student and, where appropriate, his/her parents relating to the student’s behavior that is assumed to be damaging (towards persons) or that violates values and norms.

This hearing includes the disclosure of an accusation. It confronts the accused student with having violated values and norms. With this confrontation, the institutional conflict between the regulators as representatives of the school community and a student suspected of damaging or injurious behavior has begun.

Conflict helpers may be school social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, or other professionals. It is not their job to confront the accused with a violation of values and norms, but rather, once the accusation has been articulated, to help him/her come to terms with it and present his/her perspective on the events (the experience and the acts that took place).

Where no significant violation of values and norms has occurred, only a disagreement, bad feelings or harm due to carelessness, the affected student should be the one to voice the reproach. This can be done in the presence of a conflict helper who, however, should never be the person articulating the accusation. The conflict helper’s role consists in offering the opportunity for talks to mediate and resolve conflicts, and in moderating such talks if indicated.

Theresa Obermüller greets Steve in a friendly and respectful manner. She will help him, she says, to express his view of the events, his experience, and his needs. "Steve, I would like to motivate you to be open and honest. If it came out later on that you didn't tell the truth, the situation might get unpleasant for you. I don't think that Mr. Schuster or your homeroom teacher would exactly be forgiving."

She confronts Steve with the facts and the subjective experience of those involved, and she is eager to see how he responds. After all, based on the interview reports and the chat exchanges that have been ascertained, he is highly suspect. Perhaps he can contribute new information that would be important in regulating the conflict? Theresa Obermüller's task right now is to understand him – his thoughts, his feelings and motives. In this consultation, she will establish whether Steve can accept the accusations and is willing to take responsibility for the effects of his own behavior.

Unfortunately, Steve does not react as Theresa Obermüller had hoped he would. There is a lot at stake for Steve. If he can manage to deny responsibility for the purported violation of values and norms and for the emotional harm done to Nele (as well as the violation of her personality rights), then he's off the hook. And in fact, Steve does grab for the same justifications that he has been trumpeting to his classmates. The strategies range from denial ("She sent out the video herself, even posted it on Facebook") through attempted reversal of the burden of guilt ("That slut, she shouldn't be surprised") to legalizing what he did ("That's not forbidden"). It's clear to Theresa Obermüller that there are plausible explanations for these justification strategies. That makes it possible for her to avoid condemning Steve morally. She holds to the basic tenet of separating the person and the behavior, and remains friendly and open towards Steve.

Steve's reaction does, however, reinforce Theresa Obermüller in her resolve to begin an intervention on the systemic level in both classes as soon as possible. And another matter seems to demand immediate attention, as well: Many of the classmates have already profited from possessing and sharing the video, motivated by things like sensationalism, wanting recognition from peers, or schadenfreude (gloating over another's misfortune) coupled with the feeling of being worth more than the victim, or glee over being on the safe side.

For a systemic brief intervention (SBI), formally speaking Obermüller needs a commission from the homeroom teachers and the principal. She would actually prefer having a decision made by the all-class conference as a basis for action, but there is no time for that now. The following points are of importance:

- For the intervention to succeed, one of the essential requisites is that of evoking compassion. There are two factors potentially working against that: firstly, the relatively low social status of the victim, even before the attack; and secondly, the possibility of socially incompetent behavior as a reaction to the attack, e.g. in the form of retaliation. On the first point, not much can be done in short order. Nele is not the class darling, but she's also not marginalized.
- Nele and her parents need further support without delay – coaching that is tailored to the situation. Her homeroom teacher says that Nele is a smart girl with good self-regulation.
- Another condition for success is that the behavior of Steve and his accomplices be ostracized by the homeroom teacher and the principal, plainly and clearly. Nele needs advocates. She is the one who was damaged – there can't be any doubt about that.

1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

The very same day, Mr. Schuster talks to Nele and her parents, in the presence of the homeroom teacher and Theresa Obermüller. Nele and her parents pledge to reveal any and all information relating to the conflict and to inform the school immediately should any further attacks occur. They give the school permission to exchange case data within the SCM team. Mr. Schuster makes it clear to Nele and her parents how important it now is that neither Nele nor any of her friends try to ‘strike back’ aggressively. That would seriously endanger the outcome of the intervention. Nele and her parents promise that they won’t make any moves on their own and will refrain from any use of force or escalatory acts. The parents report that, as Mr. Schuster had requested, they have temporarily taken away Nele’s mobile phone – among other reasons, to protect her from any further attack. Mr. Schuster, for his part, promises to keep Nele and her parents well informed about how things progress. He reminds the parents that they can turn to him or the conflict manager Ms. Obermüller at any time. Theresa Obermüller offers Nele highly-frequent counseling and coaching sessions; Mr. Schuster urges Nele to take advantage of that and never miss a session. The professional approach of the SCM team impresses Nele and her parents – they have trust in the team.

The next morning – it’s Friday – the SCM meets for its second collegial case consultation. Theresa Obermüller reports that the circumstances have been clarified, unequivocally: stowed in the school safe is a DVD with the ascertained video and the chat exchange between Nele and Steve. These suffice to prove that Steve – contrary to what he claims – posted the video against Nele’s will, purposely and deliberately, in order to “finish her off”: it is indisputable that Steve bears the responsibility for escalating the conflict.

Theresa Obermüller addresses a concern that relates to the conflict process on the systemic level of the school classes and peer groups. From her point of view, dissocial attitudes and behavior have come to the fore in both classes. Justification strategies have been taken up by classmates. Due to the attack, Nele has been maneuvered into an inferior position. In many of the interviews, she was condemned – and Steve’s behavior wasn’t. The responsibility for the

offense is being reversed. There is a danger that Nele will be marginalized even more. She is now in dire need of advocates, and both classes are in need of pro-social orientation.

Theresa Obermüller suggests that a systemic brief intervention (SBI) be carried out in both classes, and very soon. The SCM team agrees. The principal commissions Tom Griener with conducting the intervention. He is a teacher who is also a certified specialist for social training and systemic mobbing intervention, and has engaged in both for many years. Together with the homeroom teachers, he plans for the intervention to take place on the next school day.

Parallel to the SBI, the SCM team also develops a plan for other actions. The most important steps are summarized in a 10-point crisis plan:

1. Individual support for Nele through highly-frequent coaching on the intrapersonal level (one-on-one)

2. Highly-frequent information and counseling for Nele’s parents and – if they wish – also for Steve’s parents to avoid a blockade in the form of a secondary conflict on the level of cooperation among the educational partners.

3. A hearing with Steve and his parents suggesting a “package deal” for his participation

Since Nele says she can imagine continuing to attend the same school that Steve does, the SCM team recommends that the principal suggest a “package deal” to Steve (on the direction of action, see Chapter 5.4.4). The offer would involve *deed adjustment* to “heal” the institutional conflict between Steve and the school community, as well as *loss adjustment* or reparation to ease the interpersonal conflict between Steve and Nele. The “deed” aspect usually includes doing a certain amount of unpaid work for the school community and apologizing, in front of the class, to the principal and the homeroom teacher. In this particular case, Steve would also be expected, very soon, to revisit the chatrooms, disclosing his misbehavior, expressing his regret (and thus restoring Nele’s “honor”) and requesting that the chat members immediately delete the video he has circulated.

Deed and loss adjustment are, at Steve's school, pedagogical methods that are applied according to established procedural standards and are usually implemented by the school social work office in the framework of conflict support. If he wants to profit from this offer, by a given date Steve has to submit a formal application to that office for conflict support. His taking this opportunity would be the starting point for consensual resolution. Other sanctions could be avoided or reduced. One such conceivable sanction might be suspending him from class for a limited time.

4. Restriction of mobile phone use during school hours

It will be suggested to Steve's parents that, for a period of four weeks, he will not be allowed to carry a mobile phone during school hours. When entering the school building, he must hand in his smartphone to the secretary's office and may not pick it up until his school day has ended. Should Steve be willing to observe this measure voluntarily, that will be acknowledged as a sign of willingness to make reparation.

5. Deposition renouncing the use of force

A renunciation of (the use of) force is a particular type of declaration to cease and desist, which is formulated in the presence of the parents and signed by the student. In it, the student pledges to refrain from any further use of force.

In this case, the deposition includes the pledge to delete the video, never re-send it again, and refrain – also, expressly, in chatrooms – from commenting on the conflict, apart from posting a negotiated statement (see above under point 3). In addition, the renunciation of force comprises refraining from mental or physical coercion or harassment and from any violation of property rights (pertaining to photo/video material). In the event of any violation of this deposition, the school administration will impose sanctions: an official complaint to the police and Steve's expulsion from the school. During the meeting in which the deposition is composed, an assessment will be undertaken of the willingness of the student offender and his family environment to conform to legitimate values and norms in the future. Point 4 (restriction of smartphone

use) can be included in the deposition as a voluntary effort on the part of Steve.

6. Offer of support through highly-frequent coaching for Steve

Under the condition that Steve is willing to work towards improving his behavior and resolving the conflict amenable (as stated in Point 3), he will be offered support towards fulfilling his deposition in the form of highly-frequent coaching.

7. Monitoring during school hours

For a period of four weeks, Steve will not be allowed to move freely about the school without a monitor. During this time, options for his mobility and communication at school will be restricted for him and his accomplices. His presence on or in the school properties will only be allowed if he is monitored by a teacher or other educator who is present.

8. Implementation of systemic brief intervention (SBI) in Steve's and Nele's classes

In the course of systemic brief intervention, in both of the (entire) classes, the students are expected to develop their compassion for persons in a situation similar to Nele's and to compose a voluntary declaration of commitment towards that goal (see Chapter 4.4, Step 5). Human rights observers shall be chosen in each class, and the distinction between tattling and eliciting help will be clearly drawn.

9. Talks with class members emphasizing norms and risks

Shortly after the mobbing intervention, the principal and homeroom teachers will conduct talks with students who were involved, in order to elucidate norms and risks and to re-emphasize that the possession and circulation of unauthorized images and videos constitute a criminal offense, violating the value system of the school community and, in the future, will result either in educational and regulatory measures or in notification of the police. The principal and homeroom teachers can refer in this context to the declarations of commitment that were composed and confirmed on a voluntary basis during the SBI.



1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

10. Announcement of a social award – Monitoring the declarations of commitment

Once the SBI has been successfully completed, monitoring will occur on a regular basis in both classes to ensure compliance with the declaration of commitment (see Chapter 5.5.4 on follow-up). If the class members succeed in observing their self-made rules on decency, they will receive a social award. The human rights observers will receive recognition in their school report (‘Student N.N. contributed very significantly to the development of social awareness and norms within the class’).

The minutes of this meeting are – as always – taken down by Theresa Obermüller in her role as conflict manager and distributed to the members of the SCM team.

The implementation of the 10-point crisis plan gets off to a good start. Nele and her parents accept the offer of counseling and coaching. Nele is able to refrain entirely from retaliation or returning insults. Her parents act prudently; they set aside their idea of confronting Steve personally and having a talk with his parents. They are not planning to notify the police. The homeroom teacher and the principal were able to convey how damaging a further escalation of the conflict would be for Nele at this time. At bottom, Theresa Obermüller herself would not have been disinclined to recommend an official complaint. There had been several instances in the past where the involvement of the police and the district attorney added gravity to the process. However, the SCM team estimated that notifying the police would have made it much easier for Steve to present himself as the victim and to reverse the burden of guilt. The chance of forming an alliance with Steve’s parents and the classmates would have been reduced. Still, the possibility is not excluded that the police may later be involved if pedagogical measures do not produce the desired effect.

The principal invites Steve and his parents to a formal hearing (see Point 3), giving them an opportunity to comment on the events and the principal an occasion to take stock of Steve’s willingness to de-escalate and make reparation, while trying to enlist the parents as partners for educational measures. The conversation begins as Mr. Schuster and Theresa Obermüller had expected it would. Steve tries to deny it all, to trivialize

it, to put the other side to blame. His parents adopt his position. They endorse it. They say they trust their son and cannot imagine that he would do something like that. When someone makes videos like Nele did, that tells you a lot. They voice doubts about Nele’s moral integrity. Besides, other students had also re-sent the video: why should their son be the one to be punished? The tide doesn’t turn until Theresa Obermüller describes in detail the events as they unfolded and reveals the content of the chat exchange between Nele and Steve. Now the parents are unsettled. Steve breaks down. In tears, he admits that he had posted the video “to get back” at Nele. He hated her after she broke up with him. The conversation takes a turn. Steve indicates that he is willing to make reparation.

The principal has the best intentions. He wants Steve to learn something from this conflict. He gives Steve his first chance for reparation: If, by Tuesday evening, Steve publishes a chatroom post in which he sincerely regrets his actions and requests that the video be deleted by all recipients, Mr. Schuster as principal will recognize that Steve is prepared to make a step in the right direction. Towards the end of the conversation, he gives the student another deadline: Steve has until Tuesday to submit his application for conflict support to Theresa Obermüller.

The Systemic Brief Intervention

On the next day of school, Monday, Tom Griener comes into play with the systemic brief intervention SBI. Theresa Obermüller is involved as co-trainer. Tom Griener is like a boulder in the bedrock of this school; he is a member of the steering group, and many years earlier he had pursued continuing education to acquire the advanced skills such work demands. On such occasions as this, Mr. Schuster excuses him from regular lessons – he considers himself lucky to have such capable people among his teachers.

The “scripts” for the intervention (see Chapter 4.4) have been set out together with the two homeroom teachers. For their orientation, Griener goes through the plan step by step. In advance of an SBI, Theresa Obermüller is always a bit tense. She never knows exactly what values and norms she is going to encounter in a school class. On the basis of the interviews, she

reckons with considerable erosion of values in these classes. She and Griener take into account that the SBI may fail. That tends to occur in classes where pro-social values have been trodden upon over a long period of time, and where pro-socially inclined students and parents are few and far between or have withdrawn out of anxiety. Nonetheless, even if the SBI fails, it remains valuable as a diagnostic tool. The SCM team can orient its ongoing strategy to the outcome. But Theresa Obermüller is optimistic that the classes will, collectively, develop their compassion. If things go well, at the end there will be voluntary declaration of commitment signed by everyone.

The SBI is successful in both classes: both prepare declarations to respect human rights (“I hereby pledge that in the future I will not re-send and will immediately delete any damaging images, texts, or videos that I receive”). Since she didn’t have to play any exposed role in the SBI, Nele was present the whole time. Afterwards, she seemed visibly relieved. A few students who did not want to sign were not pressured to do so. They hadn’t done anything wrong, they argued. It was not possible to convey to them that the intervention was not about the past, but rather about future behavior.

Theresa Obermüller asks Tom Griener to put together a formalized report on the SBIs. With their completion and the declarations of commitment, a milestone is set for the overall intervention. That is the basis for Point 9 of the 10-point plan: talks with class members to elucidate norms and risks. They take place on the same day – directly after the SBI – and are conducted exclusively by the “regulators” (the principal and home-room teachers). In this case, Mr. Schuster conducts them in both classes. Addressing the students, he calls attention to the legal norms and school rules that apply and emphasizes the risks students would be taking if they violate these norms in the future. And he makes it clear that he considers the appointment of human rights observers an important step. That is not an easy job, he explains, and taking it on indicates a person’s great capacity for compassion and their impressive moral courage. Theresa Obermüller is watching the students’ response. The principal’s talk hits the mark. The students appear concerned, aware of the seriousness of the situation. Theresa Obermüller is

convinced: the use of force – in the form of cyber attacks or otherwise – has just become a lot more unlikely in these classes!

The next day, Theresa Obermüller picks up the human rights observers for a first briefing and coaching session, for which they are excused from class. In the school community, sessions such as this are regarded as part of the educational work and can therefore be held during class hours. The human rights observers have the task of reporting, without naming names, any violation of human rights – in this case, as pledged in the declaration of commitment. Obermüller discusses at length how the monitoring of a voluntary declaration works. The observers need protection, good orientation, and frequent recognition. “You have to be aware that in this function, sooner or later someone is going to give you a hard time!” It’s no accident that the word “courage” is contained in the expression “moral courage”. Obermüller assures them she will provide support whenever they need it.

A discreet survey in both classes is conducted to see whether the SBI is bearing fruit. The results show that a large number of students are in favor of refraining from damaging behavior in chatrooms. The majority says that force is taboo. A smaller number, those who had previously set the tone, still trivializes it, reverses the burden of guilt, and clings to justification strategies. The pro-social value system of the classes has been strengthened, but is not yet firm. Rules for the class chat are rejected. That is nothing new to the SCM team, it is a typical reaction of many classes in that age group: their need for autonomy and their corresponding resistance against interference from adults is great.

Conflict Support for the Offender

On Tuesday morning, Steve appears in Theresa Obermüller’s office. Since the hearing on Friday, he has had time to think about whether he will submit an application to the social worker for conflict support – and finally has brought himself to take this step. Steve opens the conversation as was to be expected: Mr. Schuster had told him he was supposed to go and see her. Theresa Obermüller replies, “Steve, you’re telling me what Mr. Schuster wants. I would like to hear from you what it is that you want. Maybe you’re just

1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

doing Mr. Schuster the favor? Or do you yourself want to accomplish something?" A bit annoyed, Steve says he has to put in 20 hours of work for the janitor as a punishment, and he has to apologize. The school made that decision, and otherwise they're going to throw him out. Theresa Obermüller sets that straight: he must have misunderstood something. The school can't demand voluntary work or an apology. Only he himself, and in accord with his parents, can make a decision to do those things. If he really wants it, then the teacher responsible for mediation and reparation at the school will give him support. (This could also be done by the school social worker. But it is advisable to have various competent partners for different tasks at the school. Differentiating in this manner helps to avoid work overload and role confusion.)

Theresa Obermüller senses how annoyed but also torn Steve is inwardly. "You're annoyed? I can help you to get things back in order – but only if you want that!" She offers to support him in finding his own way. Steve takes her up on that. Then Obermüller sets up two chairs in front of him and asks him to think about which one stands for the side of him that is annoyed, feels treated unfairly, and wants to refuse the deal on reparation and reconciliation – and then she asks him to sit on that chair (on work with chairs, cf. Hartmann-Kottek 2008, p 206 f.). It's easy for Steve to take up this position. A lot of resentment and injured pride comes to the fore – for Theresa Obermüller, an unmistakable sign of needs that have been neglected. He can't forgive Nele for having left him. She had just zapped him off with a message on the chat. "She was already keen on somebody else! She said the reason was that my clothes were shitty and I was not cool and got on her nerves all the time!" Theresa Obermüller mirrors him on the experiential level, saying "I can imagine that really hurt, being rejected like that." Bull's eye! Steve falls sad.

Now she asks him to sit on the other chair. "Steve, that could be the side of you that thinks it's done something wrong. The side that wants to get things back into order. So I'm asking this side: Do you think that you did something wrong?" Resentfully, Steve gets right to

the point. Yes, he did something wrong, he knows that now. He shouldn't have posted the video. That was going too far. And he hadn't known that it was so strictly forbidden. "Okay. So what does this side of you say about Nele? Do you think you did something wrong to her, too?" A hard nut to crack! "Not really! She earned it that I hurt her just as bad!" – "Whoops, you just slipped back over onto the other chair, he's already had his say. Try again to see it from this chair! Start talking about the effects this had for Nele!"

This is the entry into assuming another perspective and workings towards empathy and compassion. Theresa Obermüller presumes that Steve has a long way to go. Maybe he will at least be able to take the next step towards cognitive assumption of a different perspective. The school specialist for mediation and reparation would be able to continue working on that with him.

Obermüller pulls out the application form for conflict support. "So, Steve, now decide: accept help – yes or no? Now you have the opportunity to give one side of you the right of way. I think that the right decision would be to accept help. It would show that you're strong enough to face the music for what you've done. Don't forget that Mr. Schuster wants to give you a chance if you post an apology on the class chat today! Without that, it'll be the end of the road. This is your ticket to patching things up." She gives him an hour's time to come to a decision.

Steve returns to Theresa Obermüller's office right after the next lesson and fills out the application for conflict support with her. He formulates his apology for the class chat, including a short description of the consequences of his offense. Theresa Obermüller fetches Steve's smartphone from the secretary's office. He prepares the text and discusses it with Theresa Obermüller. Then he posts it on the chat. With that, the path towards ongoing conflict resolution is opened. Theresa Obermüller is glad that Steve seems to be getting on the move, too. But things are yet to take a different turn.

On Thursday, the SCM team holds a short meeting to assess the situation. All agree: the crisis intervention seems complete. Due to it, the crisis has de-escalated from stage E to D (see diagram in Chapter 5.4.2). Hostility and malice have, in the main, given yield to concern, compassion, and fear of prosecution. According to a criminological study, 70% of children and adolescents adjust their behavior with regard to norms and rules when threatened with prosecution (cf. Pogarsky 2002). For the time being, the heat is off.

6.6 Regulating the Conflict

Theresa Obermüller regularly asks Nele, the homeroom teachers, and the human rights observers about the current status of things. She concludes that for the time being, the de-escalation of the conflict is ensured: there seems to no longer be a high degree of self-endangerment or endangerment of others. The human rights observers have the impression that all the classmates have deleted the video, not re-sent it, and not received any new videos. Still, the conflict is not yet definitively regulated.

This is a moment at which Theresa Obermüller, in her role as conflict manager, is irreplaceable – it can happen all too quickly that people start congratulating themselves in the assumption that the goals of the intervention have been attained. The 10-point program for crisis intervention has been implemented in many of its parts – but not in all of them. There remains the educational heart of the matter: work with Nele as the person who was targeted. She needs support in overcoming the injury and learning the right lessons from it.

On the offending side, Steve requires support, during the course of reparation, in working through what he did and maturing personally in the process. And finally, in both classes the development of pro-social competence has to be promoted through ongoing efforts.

The homeroom teachers are monitoring whether the declarations of commitment are actually being complied to – and in fact, no violations have come

to their attention. Nele seems more relaxed. She has the feeling that she has regained some control – but she still feels unsure of herself. She is worried that the video may have been circulated among students of other schools and may suddenly pop up again on the net – a fear that is hardly unfounded. Nele takes advantage of the coaching she was offered. She doesn't want "buddies" who go to bat for her. Her friend Jessica suffices as a back-up among her peers. The topic of refusing to go to school is off the table. Classmates don't mention the video to her. She doesn't really want to consent to victim-offender mediation with Steve. She doesn't want to be around him anymore. Due to the monitoring requirement that was imposed on him, at the moment Steve cannot move around the school freely – so there is no danger that she will run into him during a break. This relieves the pressure on her.

And then: on Thursday, Steve does not come to school. His parents write him in sick. A week later, they give notice that he is leaving the school. He is transferring to another school, they say, to make a new start. The educational partnership with Steve's parents ends here. The next day, the SCM team discusses the new situation. Cancelling the 'package deal' would normally result in a notification of the police about the offense. It would also be possible to expel Steve from the school 'after the fact'. The other option is to refrain from these measures in the hope that Steve will effectively withdraw from the conflict. Then again, he might find another victim at his new school – no one really knows whether he has now learned better. Theresa Obermüller recommends that protection of the victim be given the highest priority and that the school refrain from a post-facto expulsion and an official complaint to the police, under the conditions that Nele and her parents agree and Steve does not initiate any more attacks. Steve's homeroom teacher regrets the student's withdrawal: "He could have learned a lot for the future from this conflict." The specialist for mediation and reparation adds, "Making retribution for the deed in front of his class and the reconciliation that would have followed could have worked wonders!" In lack of an educational partnership with the parents, however, formative influence at this level cannot be exerted.

1 Introduction
 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
 4 Intervention Methods

5 Systemic Conflict Management
6 Nele – A Case Study
 7 Pedagogical Conduct
 8 Projects in Practice

The principal decides to involve Nele and her parents, as well as Steve and his parents, in the decision. He gets in touch with Steve's parents. They are of the opinion that Steve has already made his contribution to settling the matter. "He apologized on the chat. That's enough." The parents don't want him to work on regulating the conflict and making reparation. They request that Mr. Schuster let him go his way without burdening the new start at the other school with a post-facto expulsion from the old school. Mr. Schuster is not very satisfied with this. After conferring with Nele and her parents, he decides to refrain from further measures. That provides the best foundation for sustained protection of Nele and for control over the situation. Nele's parents want to "calm things down" now, so that Nele can think about schoolwork again – right now, she's way behind on that. Nele herself feels no urge to retaliate. She is glad that the climate in her class and her circle of friends has returned to normal.

In a final team consultation, Theresa Obermüller concludes that the conflict regulation is now completed – and the team working on the case can be scaled down in size. Now, the follow-up phase begins.

6.7 Follow-up and the End of the Conflict

It would be naïve to assume that two days of social training or even a systemic brief intervention could alter the informal value system and the dissocial tendencies that have been established in a school class over the years. Alterations in behavior can be accomplished over a period of time through emotional concern, insight, good relational work, and also the threat of sanctions – but one has to keep at it.

One of the central tasks during the follow-up now consists in monitoring the observance of the agreements that were made. The students need the supportive presence of adults if they are to adjust their behavior in the long term in accord with a re-activated framework of pro-social values and norms. The outcome of the

systemic brief intervention serves for Theresa Obermüller as a basis for the follow-up phase. She will support the homeroom teachers in their next steps. On her agenda are:

- orientation talks with the human rights observers, then further meetings with them – on a daily basis during the first week,
- periodic monitoring of the declarations of commitment during the coming school weeks, at least twice a week,
- composition of a renunciation of force together with one student and her parents, since she has declared her intention to continue re-sending the video if she gets a copy of it,
- invitation from the prevention team to the police to return to the school for another information event on the legal situation and the consequences of offenses against the penal code,
- across-the-board measure: acknowledge the students' effort! at least once a week!
 Don't forget to announce the social award, and remember the acknowledgment for the human rights observers in their school reports.
- Attempt to reach agreement with the classes on rules of conduct in social networks.

Unfortunately, when it appears that a conflict is over, motivation often slacks off. So too in Nele's case. After the first monitoring rounds provide grounds for optimism, both homeroom teachers want to get back to the normal agenda as quickly as possible. One of the classes is behind in math, the other is busy with a vocational preparation project. That means that time for social education work is scarce, as Theresa Obermüller also knows. Therefore, she is not really disappointed when the teachers come out with a more or less definitive statement against further monitoring of the declarations and against continuing the human rights observers' work. The social worker would have liked to see things progress otherwise, but she respects the decision of the homeroom teachers.

She has two more tasks to complete. Firstly, she produces a final report on the events and on the outcome of the systemic brief intervention, distributing it to the entire team. In it, she also mentions the deficits during follow-up, since they present a risk for the sustainability of the learning process. Secondly, she keeps in close touch with Nele.

Half a year later, Nele and Theresa Obermüller are holding their last session. Nele's mother is also there. During these months, no further cases of (cyber)-mobbing have come up in the classes. That is a success! Obermüller is eager to hear how Nele and her parents have experienced the work that was done. "When I think back..." Nele's mother sets in, "that was a shock! As a mother I want to protect my daughter from that type of thing and I had to see: I couldn't do it!" Theresa Obermüller knows that in cases of such serious violations of values and norms, feelings of guilt and failure are always involved – for the victim, the offender, and within their school and family environments. The question of who is at fault is a burden for everyone, causing stress and overload.

Nele says that during the first few days she had had great difficulty going to school. The first steps into the building were like "horror". She was glad to be able to take up the offer of coaching by the school social worker. It helped her a lot that the school had assured her its support and had looked after her. "Mr. Schuster, my homeroom teacher and you, you were so optimistic and you bolstered my courage. I remember that you told me, 'We'll master this together! We want you to go through this conflict together with us. That will make you even stronger!'"

Her mother adds, "It was really important for my daughter that she had people at school who took her part and spoke out about who was the offender and who was the victim!" She remembers well the first thing that the principal said to her: "Anyone who behaves like that at my school and damages other people so badly is going to take the responsibility. We don't tolerate that kind of behavior here!" For the principal,

protecting the victim was the highest priority. He could have reacted with hesitation or reproaches, says Nele's mother. She is thankful to him to this day for his resolute stance. Theresa Obermüller documents the conversation and prepares an evaluation of today's feedback for the next meeting of the steering group. This conflict case can now be considered closed.



- 1 Introduction
- 2 From Mobbing to (Cyber)Mobbing
- 3 Four (Cyber)Mobbing Case Stories
- 4 Intervention Methods
- 5 Systemic Conflict Management
- 6 Nele – A Case Study**
- 7 Pedagogical Conduct
- 8 Projects in Practice

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