



Growing and nurturing relationships for life



GROUP DYNAMICS: GONE TOO FAR

Jason, a top gamer, is the new boy at school and everyone is interested in him. Charlie is threatened by Jason and challenges him to an online game, which Jason wins. To get back at Jason, Charlie starts an online campaign against Jason, who quickly becomes a victim of cyberbullying.

See

- **What is happening?**
A newly arrived student competes against and beats a leading online gamer. Seeking revenge, the 'beaten' student launches a cyberbullying campaign to get back at him.
- **Who are the people involved?**
Everyone aware of the situation, and in particular the classmates who are viewing, fuelling and validating the cyberbullying.
- **Who gains from this situation? Who loses?**
The power and fear of exclusion-teenagers are hyper-sensitive to this. The bully and bullied are both losers-one in rejection, the other through jealousy and insecurity. The cyberbullying is fuelled by and channelled through homophobia, which in turn feeds discrimination, suspicion, fear and division.
- **What is the situation doing to people?**
Ostracising and alienating the young man who is being cyberbullied, as well as his friends featured in the posts. Feeding homophobia.
- **Why is it happening? Why does it continue?**
Fear of rejection or unpopularity by the bully. A lack of action by the group either supporting or passively/tacitly accepting the campaign.

Act

- **What can we do to bridge the gap between what is happening (the reality) and what should be happening (the ideal/what our faith says)?**
Assist my teenager to navigate the ups and downs, the acceptance and rejection that comes with transition and change, and seeking out new friendships. Listen to them and offer unconditional love-the love we enjoy in, from and with God. Challenge them to call out bullying-online or in person. Explore whether there are options to be involved in supportive communities, including Parish youth groups.
- **What action are we going to take?**
'Today we constantly see the phenomenon of bullying in schools, of people assaulting the weak: 'because you are fat' or 'because you are like that, or a foreigner, or black, or because of this ...' Assault, assault ... Children, kids ... Also children. This means that there is something within us that drives us to do this. To be aggressive against the weak' Pope Francis, 2018. As an adult, engage with my teenager to help them better understand group dynamics, power imbalances and bullying. Brings facts, reflection, support and empathy, not judgement.
- **Who can we involve in our action?**
Parent/carers of my teenagers classmates-try to be connected with them, know who they are, together check in and monitor... what are others hearing/seeing, does the school know... Together form the 'village', the 'alliance' required to raise/form thoughtful, tolerant and accepting children, teenagers, and future adults.

Judge

- **How do you feel about this situation?**
As a parent/adult, I can be both understanding from experience, and concerned when teenagers target others, in person or online. There is no place for bullying or homophobia.
- **Have you ever behaved or acted like anyone in the situation? If so, what happened? Why? How did you and/or those involved feel?**
As an adult, I can identify with the behaviour and experience. I have experienced acceptance and rejection from others, and know how difficult this can be. I have been silent when I should speak up and challenge the bullying or harassment by another.
- **What do you think should be happening?**
Can I strike a balance of support and care for my teenager, alongside providing them with tools for reflection and action, to create boundaries, call out and challenge bullying, all designed to maximise the safety of those involved.
- **What does our faith say about it?**
"Unfortunately, bullying is an 'air' that our children often breathe. The remedy is to make them breathe a different air, a healthier and more human one. That's why an alliance with the parents is very important. We need a new complicity between teachers and parents. Yes, I mean to say 'complicity.' We need to renew our commitment to work together for the good of children and young people." Pope Francis, 2018