Cyberbullying: Prevention and Reduction Strategies

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Overview

- Prevention recommendations
- Technological responses
- Non-punitive strategies

Principles for Cyberbullying Prevention

- Do not assume legislation will eliminate the problem.
- Relying on blocks and filtering software is insufficient.
- Fear-based education is unlikely to change young people's behavior.
- Effective prevention programming for conventional bullying is likely to reduce cyberbullying (Salmivalli et al., 2010).

Effective Strategies

- Clear policies developed with input from all stakeholders, including parents and students and widely publicized.

- Attention to fostering a positive school climate

- Education on digital literacy and digital citizenship at all grade levels.

- Focus on the role of bystanders

- Providing ongoing professional development to school staff.
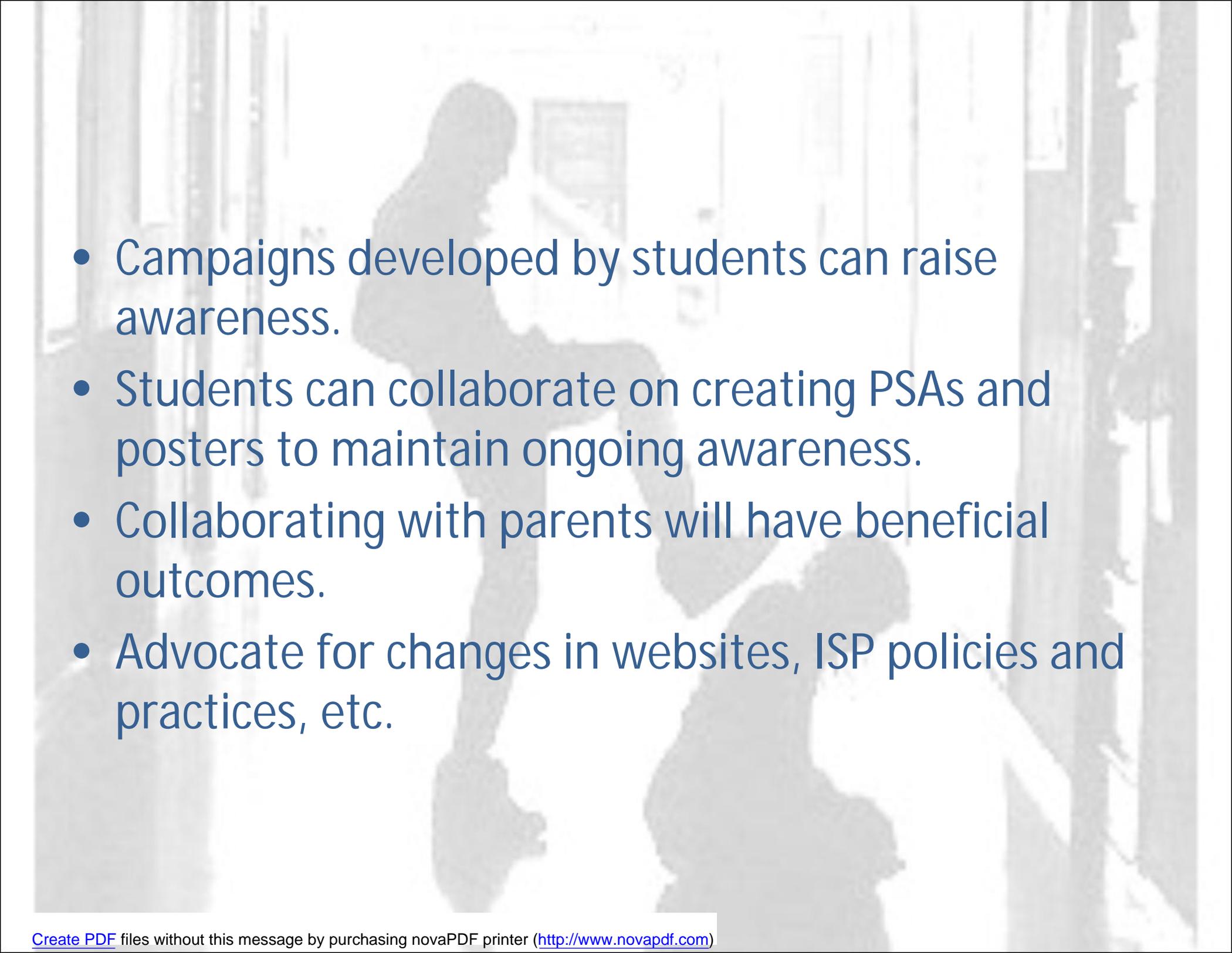
- Campaigns developed by students can raise awareness.
- Students can collaborate on creating PSAs and posters to maintain ongoing awareness.
- Collaborating with parents will have beneficial outcomes.
- Advocate for changes in websites, ISP policies and practices, etc.

Technological Strategies

- Teach students skills to keep safe in cyberspace:
    - How to block or report a sender
    - How to report abuse
    - How to use and understand privacy settings on social networking sites (E.g., Facebook).
    - How to follow "cyber-footprints" to identify perpetrators.
    - How to help as a bystander

Punitive Responses

- The effects of "zero tolerance" policies are questionable at best (Casella, 2003, Nelson, 2008; Skiba, 2000, 2004).

- Punishment may work in the short-term, but is unlikely to produce lasting change in attitude or behavior.

- The student learns what NOT to do, but does not get information about appropriate behavior.

- The effectiveness of punishment varies with the aversiveness of punishment and likelihood of being caught if behavior is repeated.

- Punishments in school tend to be generic (e.g., detention, suspension, etc.) so offender is not necessarily made aware of extent of harm caused.
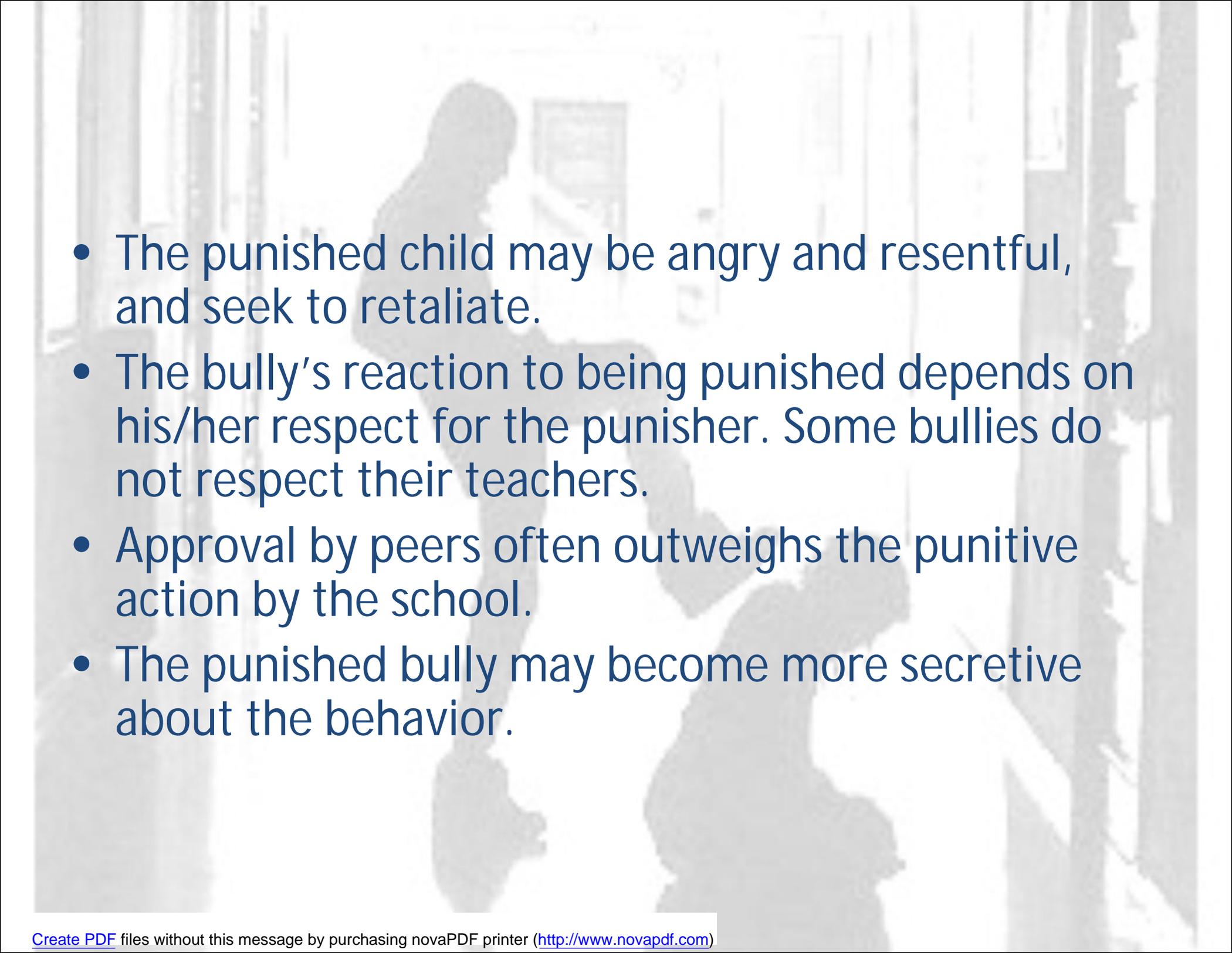
- The punished child may be angry and resentful, and seek to retaliate.
- The bully's reaction to being punished depends on his/her respect for the punisher. Some bullies do not respect their teachers.
- Approval by peers often outweighs the punitive action by the school.
- The punished bully may become more secretive about the behavior.

What can you say to parents/teachers who think punishment is necessary?

- Develop a collaborative goal of STOPPING THE BULLYING and, when possible, REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS.

- Express confidence in the approach and your ability to achieve the goals.

- Point out that punishment (sanctions, consequences) have not been effective.

Non-punitive Strategies

- Brief Solution-Focused Counseling for Individuals
  – Useful in low-severity incidents
- Support Group Approach (Sue Young, Robinson & Maines)
  – Most suitable with elementary/middle school students
- Method of Shared Concern (Pikas, Rigby)
  – Suitable for middle and secondary students
  – Useful when bullying is a group activity
- Restorative Justice
  – Focus is on repairing the harm done
  – Can be formal or informal

Incident Severity	Method	Group Sessions	Participant Criteria	Outcome
Very High	Sanctions	None	Offense is legally actionable	Offender is punished
Moderate to High	Restorative Justice	Multiple	Harm to target is severe, parents need to be involved	Amends are made, relationships are restored, bullying stops.
Moderate	Method of Shared Concern	Multiple	Target's functioning is affected in multiple areas (attendance, school engagement, etc.)	Bullying stops and does not re-occur.
Low	Support Group	Multiple	Target shows distress, feels isolated	Bullying behavior stops. Social support for target increases, self-esteem of supporters increases.
Low	Individual BSFC	None	Target shows little distress	Bullying behavior ceases. Self-efficacy of target increases.

Brief Solution-Focused Counseling for Bullies and Victims

- Sue Young's approach (Young & Holdorf, 2003) is an excellent guideline to follow.
- Assumptions:
  – Clients have the strengths and resources to change school problems.
  – Focusing on past successes and exceptions leads to solutions
  – Focusing on future possibilities and solutions enhances change.
  – Small changes lead to larger ones.

Advantages of Support Group

- No sanctions means no one is unfairly punished.
- Staff can show parents that they are intervening.
- Children are involved in a positive approach to helping others.
- It has been effective in many cases.

Support Group Approach

- The absence of assigning blame reduces defensiveness on the part of bullies and bystanders.

- The absence of punishment reduces the fear of retaliation on the part of the victims.

- Parents of victims often feel ignored, feel powerless to help, and distressed about their child's treatment. This approach demonstrates school's concern.

Helpful Dynamics

- Altruism
- Cohesiveness
- Instillation of Hope
- Universality
- Guidance
- Identification
- Interpersonal Learning
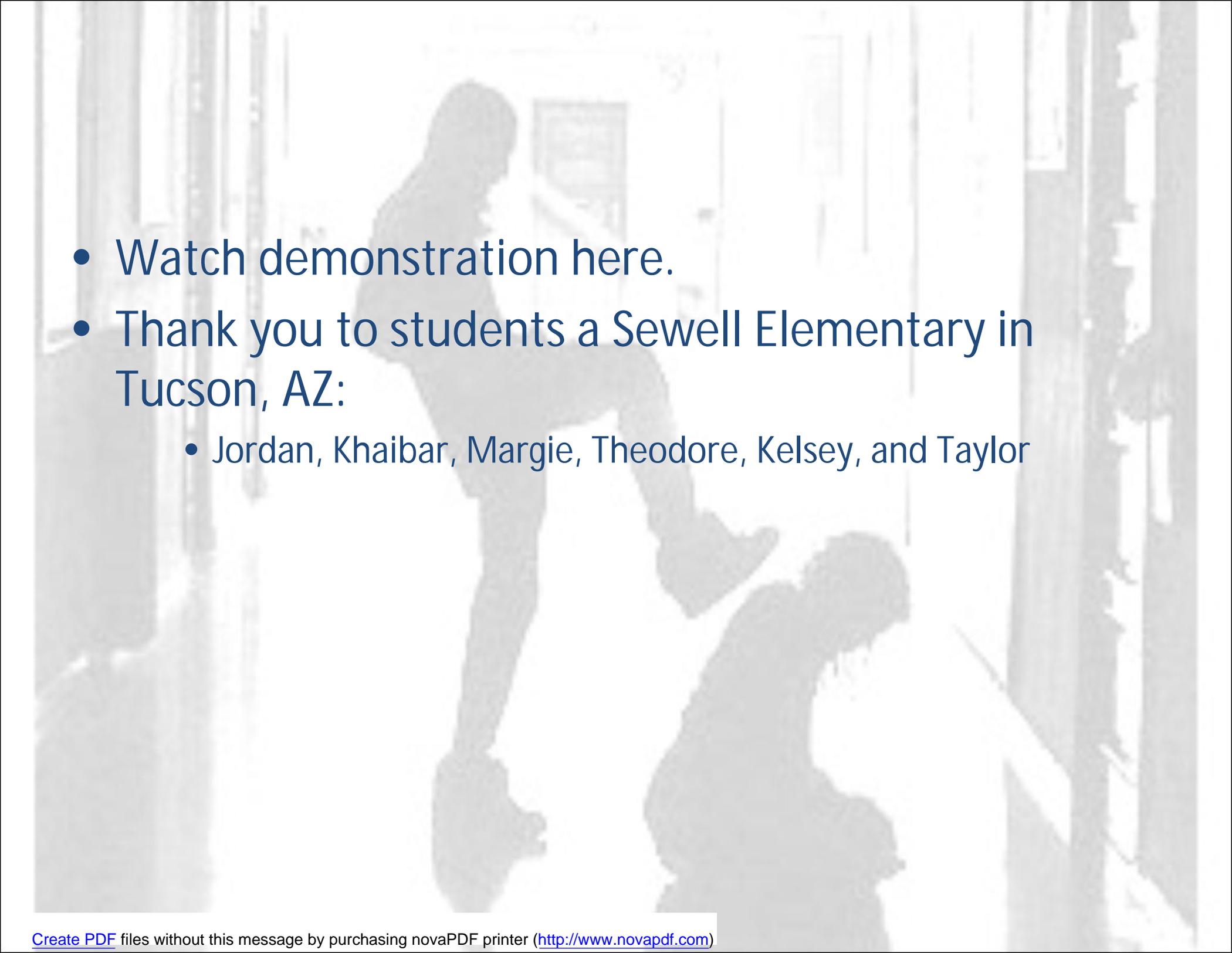
- Watch demonstration here.
- Thank you to students a Sewell Elementary in Tucson, AZ:
  - Jordan, Khaibar, Margie, Theodore, Kelsey, and Taylor

Method of Shared Concern

- The rationale is like the Support Group Method in assuming that punitive methods typically fail to produce sustainable change.

- This method assumes that a great deal of bullying involves **groups of students** – and there is need to encounter those involved in a case of bullying (i) **first as individuals** and (ii) later as a group.

- It is a multi-stage process involving a series of meetings culminating in a final occasion at which the bullies and the victim are expected to resolve their differences.

- It requires that practitioners are carefully trained and that they select cases that are appropriate – typically medium level severity cases with group involvement; but not mild cases involving two individuals, nor very severe cases for which legal or criminal proceedings are demanded.

Need for New Approaches

- Studies have consistently found that about 25% - 30% of students in schools are involved in bullying.

- Bullying "may be the most prevalent form of violence in the schools and the form that is likely to affect the greatest number of students" (Batsche, 2002, p. 171).
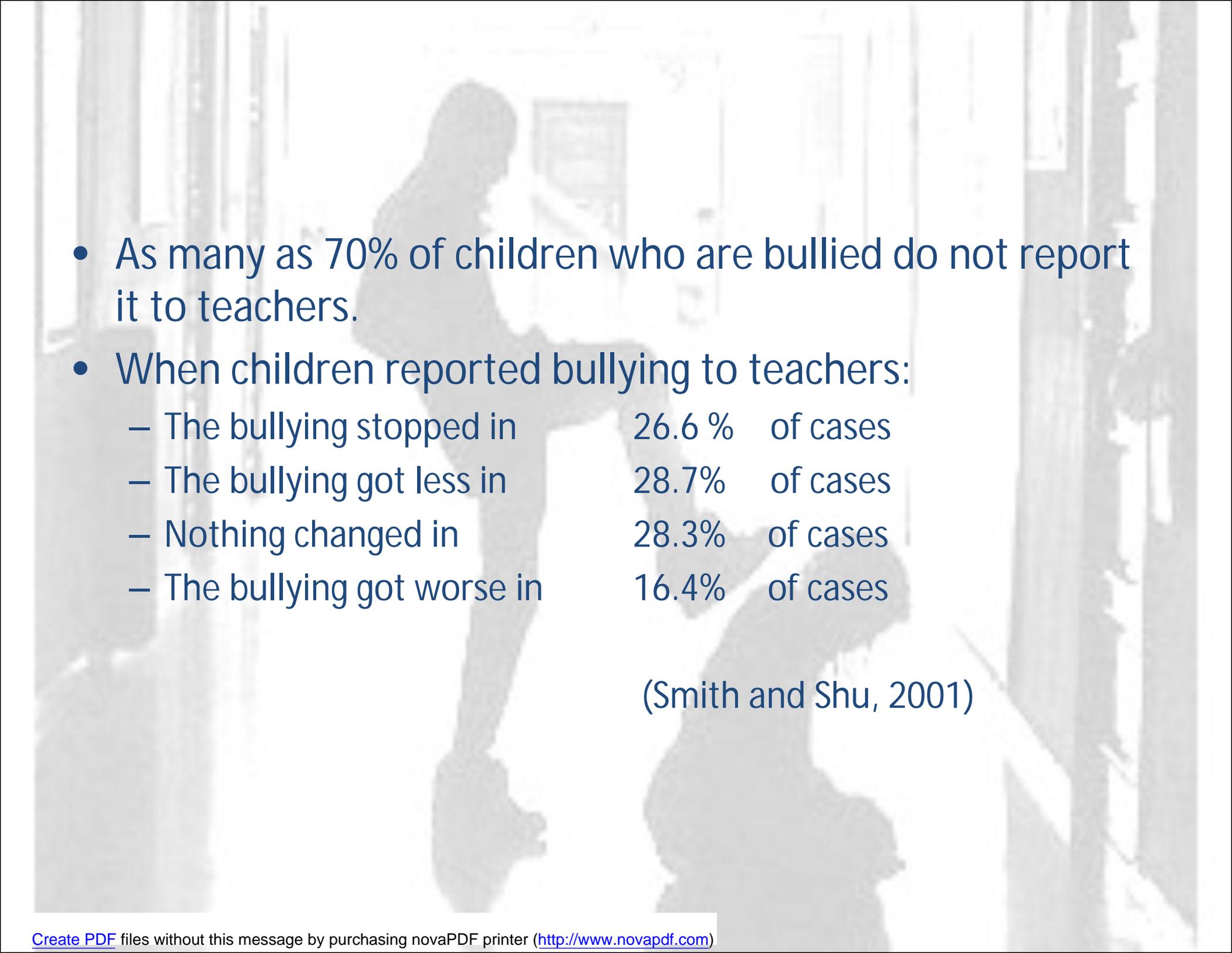
- As many as 70% of children who are bullied do not report it to teachers.

- When children reported bullying to teachers:
  - The bullying stopped in   26.6 %   of cases
  - The bullying got less in   28.7%   of cases
  - Nothing changed in   28.3%   of cases
  - The bullying got worse in   16.4%   of cases

                                   (Smith and Shu, 2001)

What did kids who told a teacher think would happen to the bully?

- 48% believed the bully would be punished.

- 37% believed the bully would be excluded (suspended or expelled).

- 36% believed their parents would have to come to school.

Importance of Bystanders

- Bystanders are present at 85% of the occasions when bullying takes place on the playground
- Most bystanders ignore it.
- About 15 to 20% of the time, bystanders object in some way.
- When someone objects, about 50% of the time the bullying ceases.
- Bystanders may wish to intervene, but are fearful of retaliation, and are uncertain what to do.

BFSC for Bullies

- Step 1: Build rapport and cooperation
  - Brief general conversation (weather, their clothing, school events, etc.)
  - "**Mr. Smith tells me he is concerned about you. I think I can help. Is that OK with you?**"

Step 2: Scaling

- Ask "What number is closest to how school is going for you now, if 1 means the worst you can imagine and 10 is the absolute best possible?"

- Get student to identify positives.
  - Ask, "So you are a 4? So there are some things that are going okay? What are you doing that makes it a 4 instead of a 3?" [You are seeking to identify personal resources] What else do you do that makes you a 4 instead of a 3 or 2?
  - "**What about with your classmates? How would they rate how well you get along with others**?" Use same procedure as above: "What are you doing that keeps your friendships at a 5 instead of a 4?"
    - If student says "10," you can refer to the reason for referral. "It's great that you have good friends. How do you think Mr. Smith would rate you on getting along with others? "

- After exploring all the positives at the present level, begin discussing how to get to the next level.
  - "So, if I talk to you next week, and you are now a 7 instead of a 6, what *will* you be doing that is different?" [**use pre-suppositional language**]
  - "Who *will* be the first to notice the difference? What *will* he/she notice?"
  - "How *will* you manage that? How will you do that? Will that be very difficult for you?"

Step 3: Compliment Strengths

- "Now that we've talked, I see that you have lots of things going for you. You are doing well in Science, and have lots of friends. And you also have some very good ideas about how to make things better at school. You decided that you would spend recess with your friends and stay away from student X."

- "I want you to notice during the next week when you are a 7, and what you are doing differently, and if anyone else notices. I'll meet with you again next week. Would that be ok?"

Step 4: Follow-up

- Use scaling
  - "Where are you this week on the 1- 10 scale on getting along with classmates?"
    - If student is higher, ask "How have you managed to do that?"
    - If they are the same, "How have you kept it from getting worse?"
    - If they are worse (rarely happens), "How have you kept it from getting even worse?"
      - "What we are doing doesn't seem to be working. Let's come up with another plan. Was there any time during the week when you were doing even a little bit better?" (seek and amplify exceptions to the problem.

SFBC for Victim

- Step 1: Establish rapport and collaboration
  - "I understand **things** are not too happy [distance the problem from the person] for you at school right now. Is that right?"
  - "I think I can help you with this. Is that OK?"

Step 2: Scaling

- "If 1 is the worst you can imagine and 10 is happy at school, where would you say you are now? "
- "So, what is happening that makes it a 3 and not a 2?"
  - "Great – and how does that help you?"
  - Expand any positives the student mentions.
- "How else are you managing to stay at 3 instead of 2.?"
- "Are there some times when you are a little more than a 3?" **[seeking exceptions to the problem]** "What are you doing that is different? If I had a video of you when you were a 3.5 or 4, what would I see?"

Step 2a: Generating Solutions

- "What have you done about the problem so far? How did it work?"
- "What have others suggested doing about it?"
- "Of the things you've tried, which one worked the best?"
- "How have you handled similar situations in the past?"
- "What kinds of things have you thought of doing but haven't actually tried yet?"
- "What kinds of things might you or others try that would be really different from anything you've done so far?"
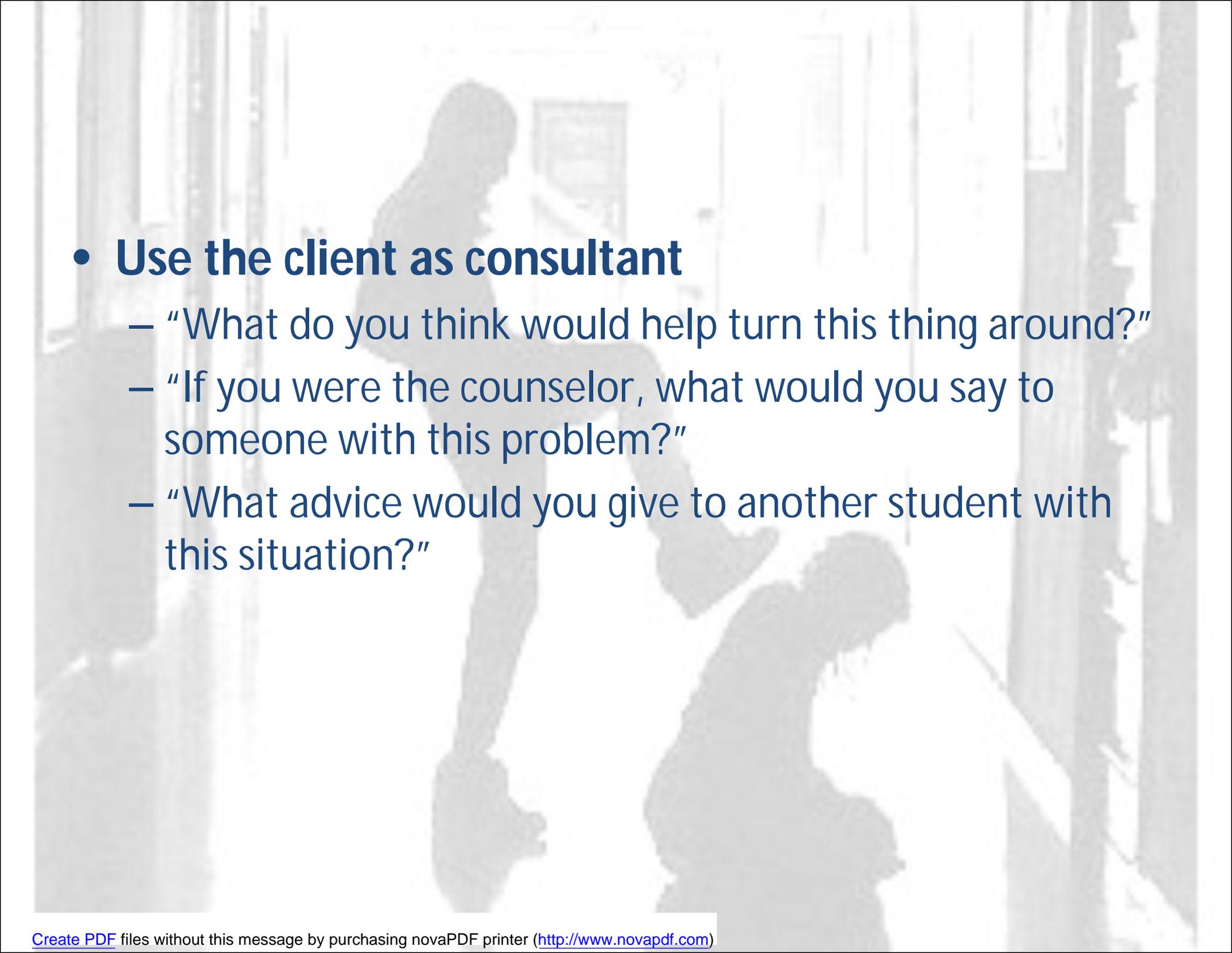
- **Use the client as consultant**
  - "What do you think would help turn this thing around?"
  - "If you were the counselor, what would you say to someone with this problem?"
  - "What advice would you give to another student with this situation?"

Step 3: Complimenting Strengths

- "I'm impressed at how well you have handled this situation."
  - "You have found a friend who spends recess with you, and you've told your teacher."
  - "You've been brave to tell me about this too."

- "I want you to notice over the next week when you are a 4, and what you are doing differently, and if anyone else notices? OK?"

- "And in a week, we'll meet again and you can tell me what you notice."
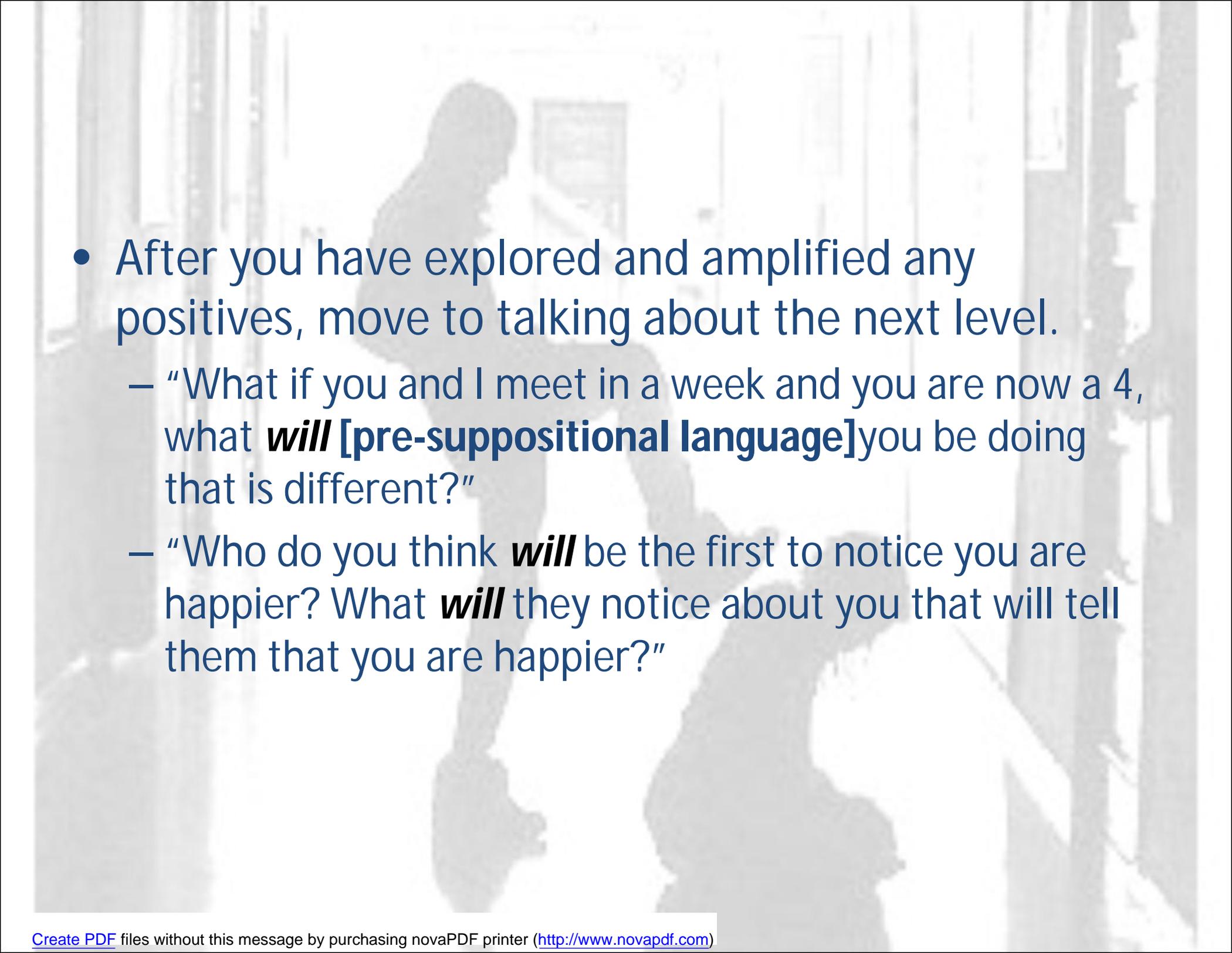
- After you have explored and amplified any positives, move to talking about the next level.
  - "What if you and I meet in a week and you are now a 4, what *will* **[pre-suppositional language]**you be doing that is different?"
  - "Who do you think *will* be the first to notice you are happier? What *will* they notice about you that will tell them that you are happier?"

Possible Concerns

- Parents of victims may say they want punishment for bully - but what they really want is for the bullying to stop.

- Teacher may believe the victim deserves to be bullied, particularly provocative bullies.

Implementing

- Step 1: Interview the victim
  - Say how you know that he/she has been unhappy at school ("your teacher told me, your friends, your parent called, I observed …)". Tell the child you believe you can help.
  - Ask the child to tell you what has been happening. Accept the report without judgment. Stress that the bullies will not get in trouble so they don't have to fear retaliation.
  - Find out:
    - Who are the main characters (bullies and bystanders)?
    - Who are the victim's supporters/friends (or who he/she would like to have as a friend)?
  - Ask permission to form the support group, emphasizing your optimism for success.

Step 2: Form Support Group

- Select a support group from the names provided by the victim (6 – 8 students).
- Bring them together, assure them they are not in trouble and explain why they have been invited.
    - "I need your help and I know you can help."
    - "Student X is unhappy at school. I need your help to make things better.

Step 3: Elicit Empathy
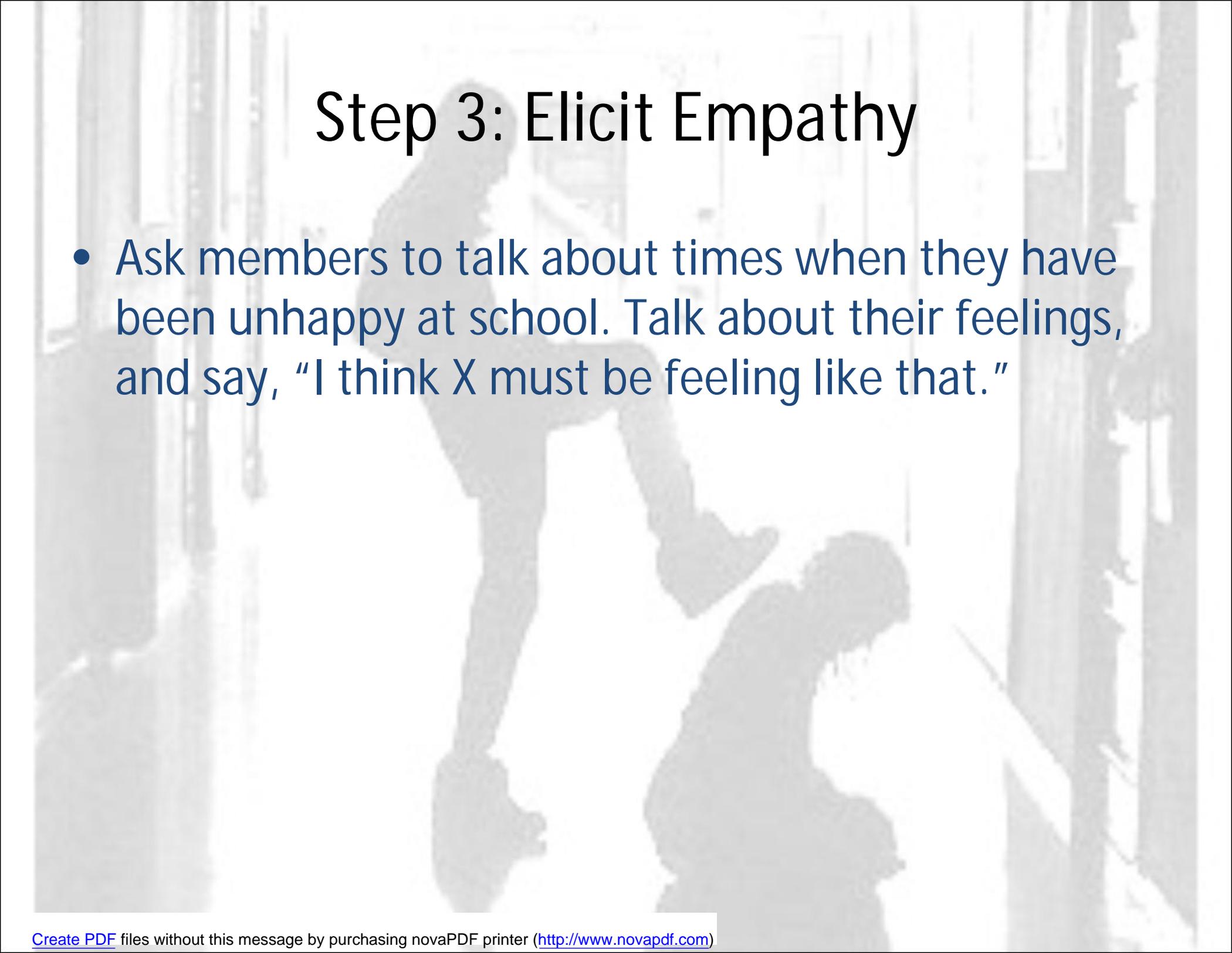
- Ask members to talk about times when they have been unhappy at school. Talk about their feelings, and say, "I think X must be feeling like that."

Step 4: Gather Information

- Express your belief that no one should be unhappy at school.
- Say that since they know X better than you do, they probably know why and when he/she is unhappy.
  - If they provide details, accept them. If they provide names, interrupt and say that no names are necessary.

Step 5: Solicit Suggestions

- Invite the group to make suggestions about what might be helpful to X.

- Praise all suggestions (except those of the "I'll beat up anyone who bothers X" variety).

- Try to encourage everyone to make suggestions, but it none is forthcoming, you can say, "perhaps several of you can do ..."

Step 6: Close the Session

- Thank the group members for their help.
- Express confidence in their plan.
- Tell them they will meet again in a week to see how things are going.
- Do not demand promises from members.

Step 7: Follow-up session

- First, check with victim to see how things are going. Do not withdraw attention if things are going well.

- Convene the group. Are them how things are going. Ask them how they helped. Encourage compliments, and ask if they are willing to continue for another week.

- Watch demonstration here.

Steps in MSC

- Identify the problem, including who is involved. Do NOT gather information from the victim, but by observation and reports.
    - This protects the victim from being viewed as "telling."
- Each individual is seen individually in turn, starting with the ringleader.
    - After inviting the student to be seated, the interviewer waits for eye contact before beginning.

Comparing Support Group and MSC Approaches

- Permission from victim?

- Individual meetings?

- Written agreements?

Restorative Justice

- Basic Premises:
  - Bullying harms relationships, and the response should help **restore those relationships**.
  - Bullying values dominance; restorative justice values mutual support and human dignity.
  - The aim of interventions is to "put things right," or "repair the harm."
  - **The goal is not to assign blame but to help everyone involved find a mutually acceptable way forward**.
  - The aim of restorative justice is to integrate children who bully and children who are bullied into the school community so they can be cooperative members of the school community.

Restorative Justice: A New Paradigm

- **RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE**
- Bullying defined as breaking rules

- Focus on establishing blame/guilt
- Adversarial relationship – authority decides penalty

- Imposition of negative consequence to punish and deter/prevent
- Attention to rules
- School community is represented by the authority
- Accountability defined in terms of receiving punishment

- **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**
- Bullying defined as harm done to someone
- Focus on problem solving
- Dialogue and negotiation – everyone involved in cooperating and communicating
- Restitution as a means of restoring both parties, reconciliation is goal while acknowledging responsibility
- Attention to relationships
- School community involved in facilitating restoration
- Accountability defined as understanding impact of actions, taking responsibility and suggesting ways to restore harm

Underlying Values

- The person who was harmed deserves:
  - Respect for their experiences, needs, and feelings
  - Acknowledgment of their harm or loss
  - Recognition of the need for amends to be made
  - The opportunity to communicate with the person who caused the harm (if the person is willing)
  - To receive reparation
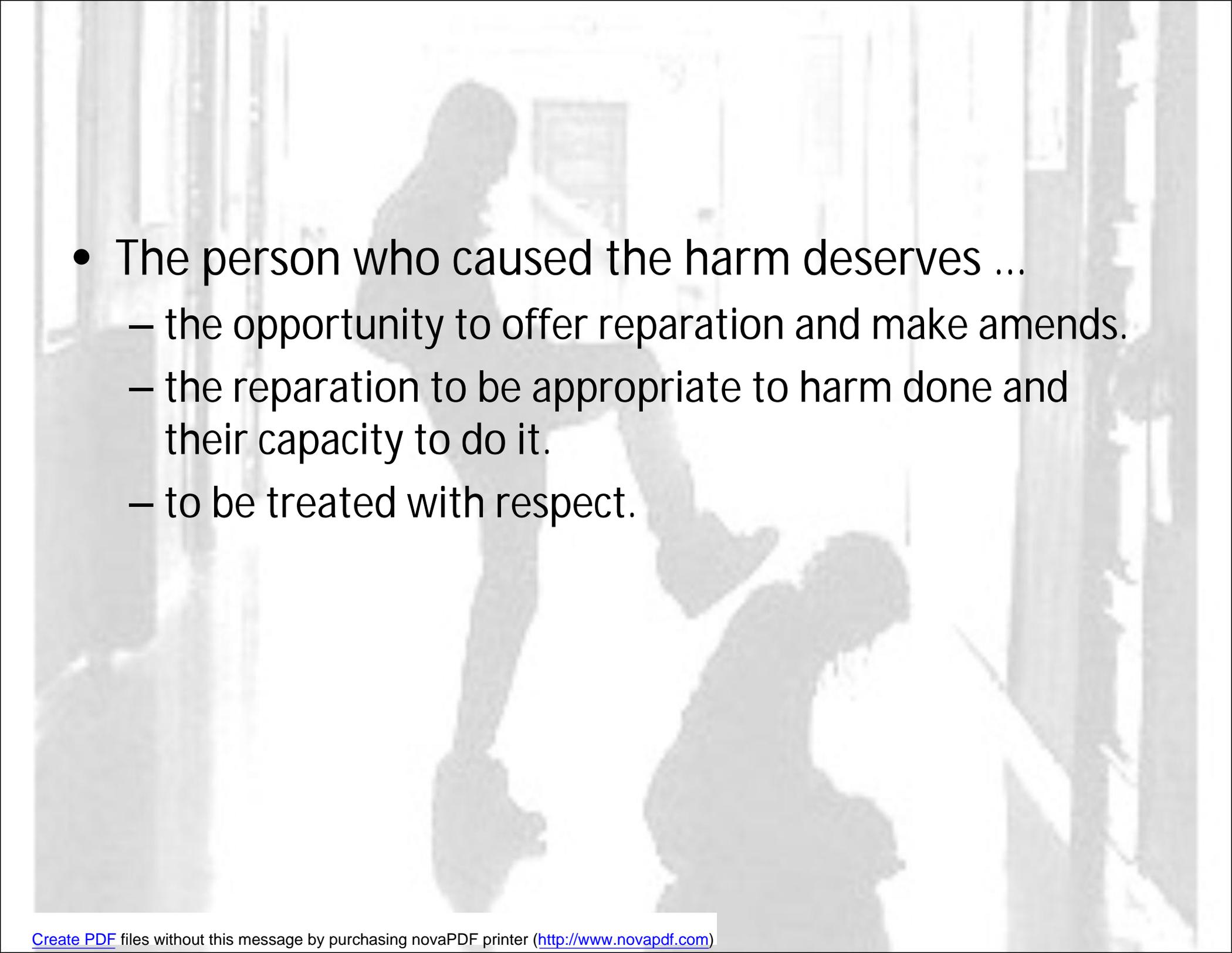
- The person who caused the harm deserves ...
  - the opportunity to offer reparation and make amends.
  - the reparation to be appropriate to harm done and their capacity to do it.
  - to be treated with respect.

Restorative Practices

- Classroom conferences
  - Useful when teaching and learning, and/or student well-being, are affected
  - Teacher-student conflicts (respectful treatment, classroom disruptions)
- Small group conferences
  - Low-level bullying
  - Parent not directly involved, but informed of process and outcome
- Formal community conferences

**Thank you for your attention
and
your open minds!**

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