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# Bullying: Research into Practice

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*Annual Conference for Educational Psychologists in Scotland,*  
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# Why should EPs be concerned about bullying research?

- Young people and parents perceive bullying as a serious problem
- It happens at all stages and probably in all schools
- It can be associated with underachievement, truancy, depression, and in extreme cases, suicide
- There may be adverse long-term outcomes for both victims and perpetrators
- Pupils with ASNs in mainstream may be particularly vulnerable
- Schools should be safe for children
- Research indicates that intervention can reduce levels of bullying in a school



# The Nature & Scale of the Problem 1



“We say a child is being bullied, or picked on when another child, or a group of children, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a child is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, sent nasty notes, when no one talks to them and things like that. These things can happen frequently and it is difficult for the child being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a child is teased repeatedly in a nasty way. But it is not bullying when two children of about the same strength have the odd fight or quarrel.”

(Whitney & Smith, 1993:7)

## Issues:

- Imbalance of power: bullying versus peer aggression...
- Repeated versus ‘one-off’ incidents...
- Intent: actual or perceived...



# The Nature & Scale of the Problem 2



## Prevalence:

- Bullied 'this term'
  - Self-report: 6%-28% victim; 3-17% bully
  - Peer nomination: 7-19% victim; 8-18% bully
- Prevalence decreases as pupils get older, with peak at around 11 years
- More long-term (> 6 months duration) in secondary schools
- As many as 85% of pupils may experience bullying at some point in their school lives
- 4-5% of those involved are bully-victims



# The Nature & Scale of the Problem 3



## Where does it take place:

- Mostly in the playground in primary school, but also in corridors and in classrooms in secondaries

## Who gets bullied:

- Boys report being bullied more than girls
- Boys are mainly bullied by other boys and girls are bullied by girls and also by boys
- Children who are anxious, insecure, lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem
- Children with physical difficulties, unusual names or accents
- Children with ASNs in mainstream schools
- Children from ethnic minorities or other countries
- Children new to the school
- Many victims of bullying are 'passive' (anxious, insecure, unable to defend themselves).
- Other can actually be 'provocative' (create the tension, hot-tempered and fight back)



# Long-Term Impact

## For Victims:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Suicidal ideation
- Problems in peer relationships
- Problems persist beyond the duration of bullying, even into adulthood
- Severity of outcomes linked to frequency of victimisation

## For Bullies:

- *Intragenerational* continuity:
  - male bullies at 14 also bullies at 32
- *Intergenerational* continuity:
  - male bullies have children who go on to be bullies
- More likely to have court appearances





# Types of bullying



- Physical
  - Direct aggression, hitting, kicking etc.
- Relational
  - Exclusion from relationships and activities
- Verbal
  - Malicious teasing, name-calling, rumour spreading etc.



# Challenges for Intervention



- Can't solve the problems by 'treating' the victim
- Bullying is not a simple relationship between a bully and a victim
- It is a complex social process involving the whole peer group in distinctive roles
- Approaches to intervention have to reflect this complexity
- Schools vary in the extent to which they can/will commit themselves to tackling the problems



# Issues

## Issues:

- Links with peer rejection
- While some bullies may have good 'Theory of Mind', they may lack empathy and may rely upon aggressive behaviours rather than upon non-aggressive alternatives
- To what extent do 'Bullies create victims and victims create bullies'?



# Transactional Coping Paradigm

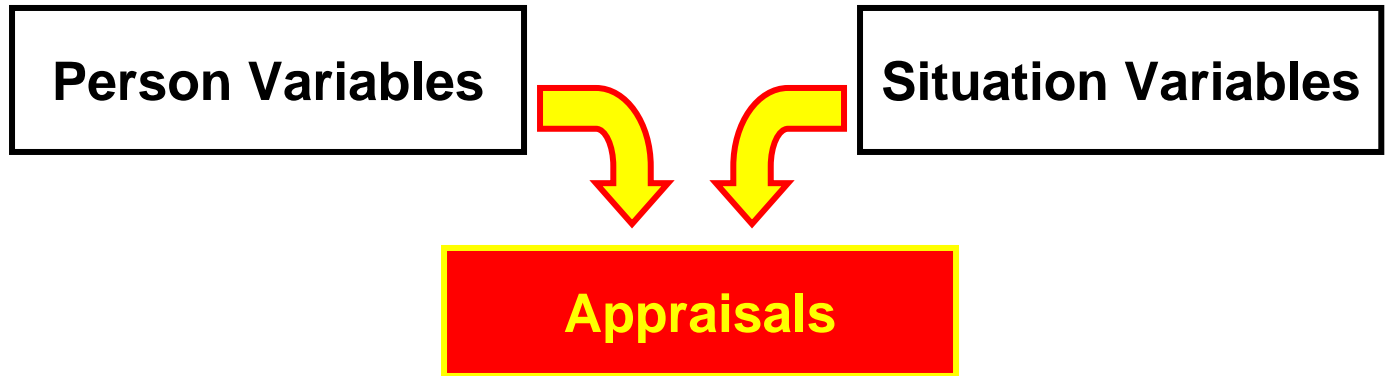


**Person Variables**

**Situation Variables**

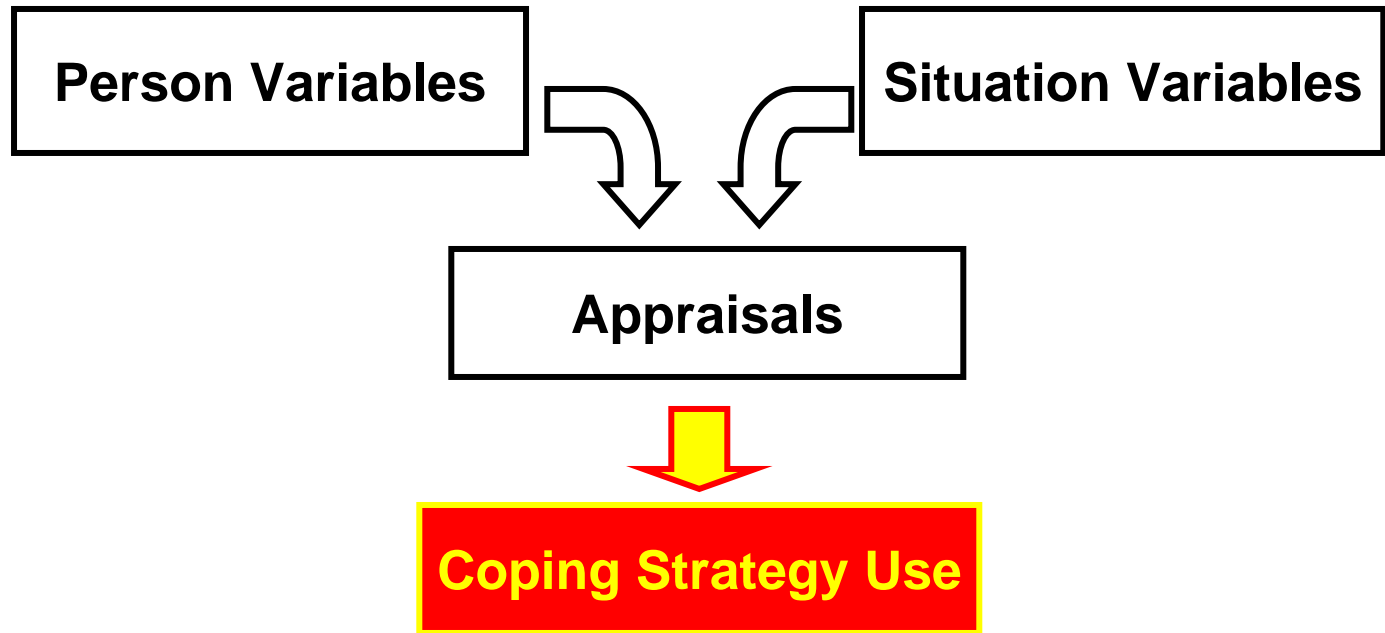


# Transactional Coping Paradigm



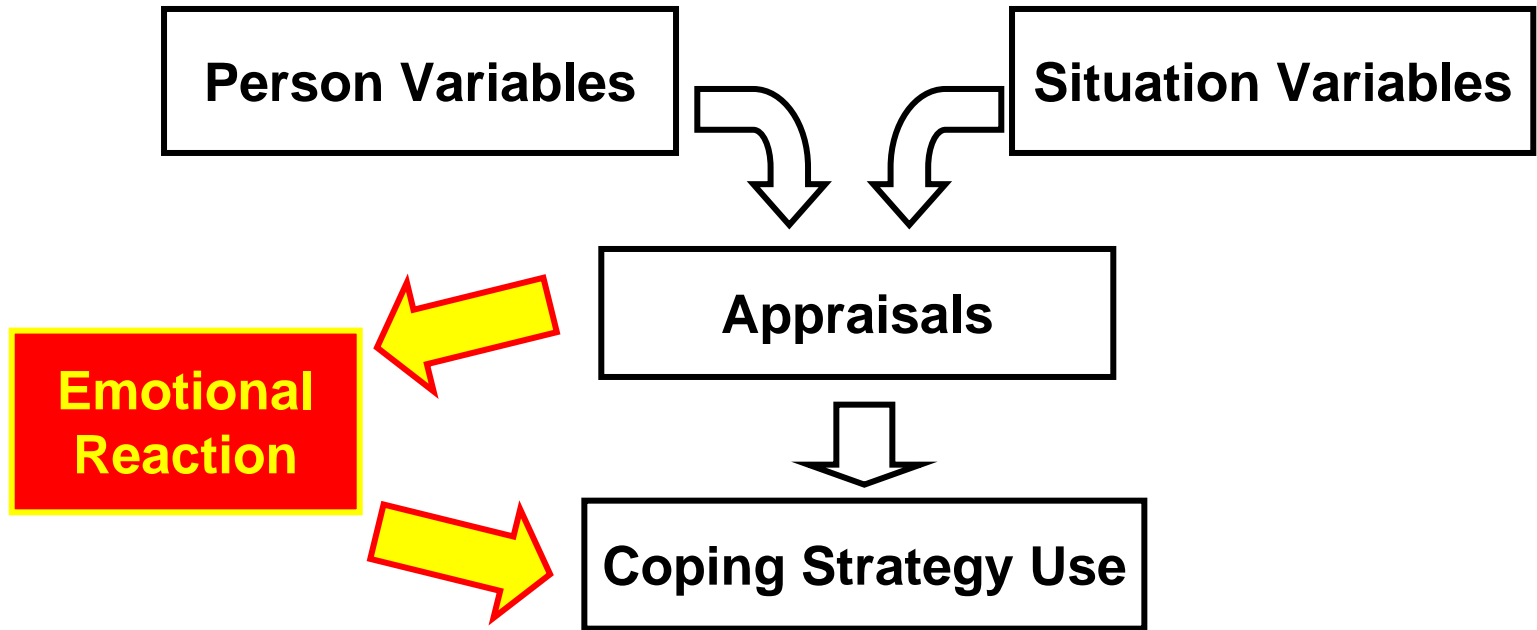


# Transactional Coping Paradigm





# Transactional Coping Paradigm





# Methods



**Two studies** (Hunter & Boyle 2004; Hunter, 2004) **with a total of 1,289 pupils from stages P5, P6, S2, S3.**

**All pupils completed self-report measures on:**

- peer-aggression/ bullying**
- coping strategy use**
- control, challenge and threat appraisals**
- emotions**





# Results



## Study 1.

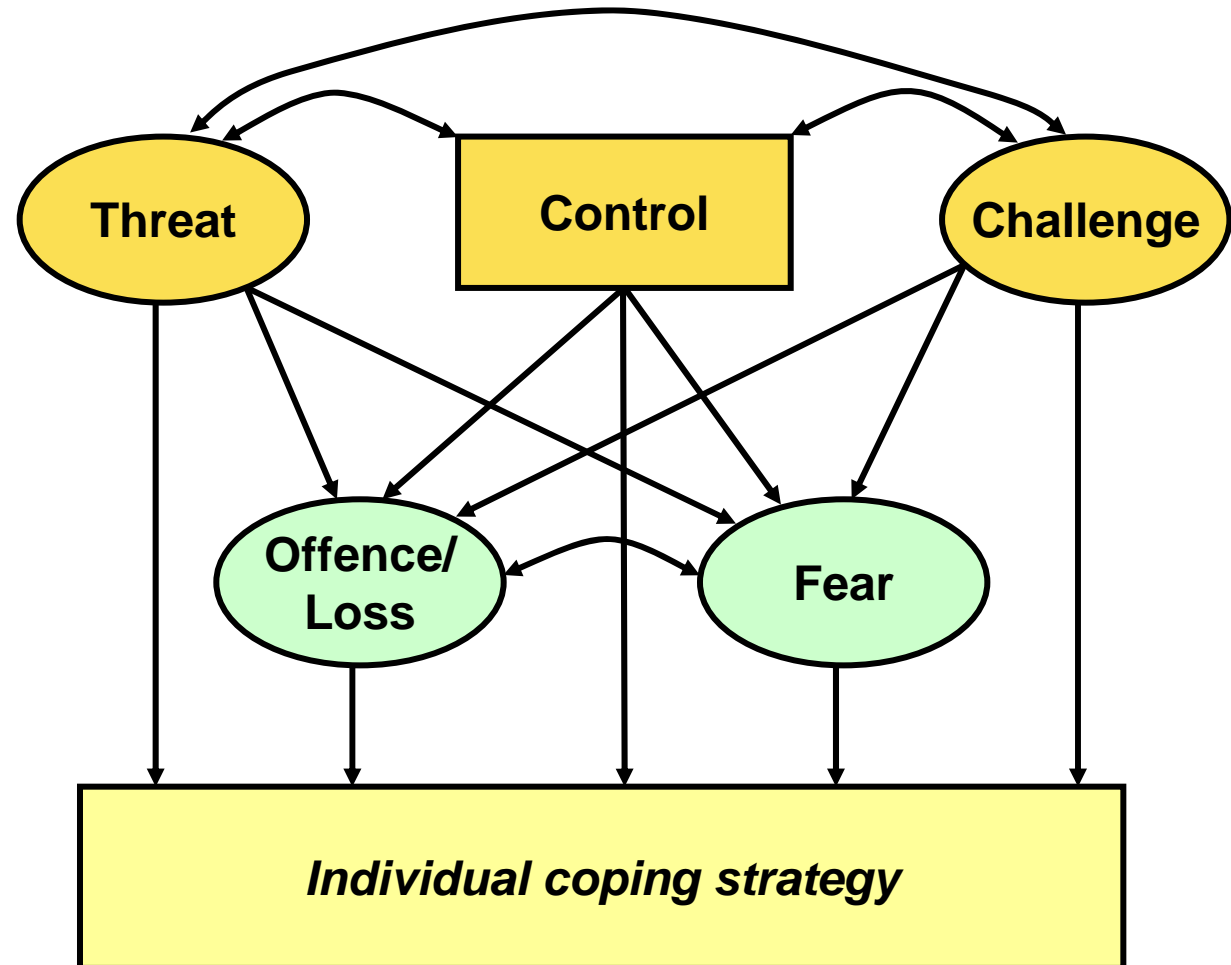
- **More frequent aggression = more avoidance and ‘wishful thinking’**
- ***Control* – “no” reported using sig. more Wishful Thinking than “yes”**
- ***Threat* – unrelated to coping strategy use**
- ***Challenge* – less Problem Focused coping used when no positive outcomes are perceived; more Social Support used when unsure of possibility of positive outcomes**



# Results

## Study 2.

- **Structural equation model tested:**





# Results



## Study 2. Appraisals and emotions

- Threat significantly negatively correlated with both control and challenge.
- *Control* reduces levels of both negative emotions.
- *Threat* increases levels of both negative emotions.
- *Challenge* increases levels of offence/loss, unrelated to fear.



# Results



## Study 2. Coping strategies

- ***Control*** positively related to assertive strategies (e.g. standing up to bullies) but also to aggressive strategies (e.g. hitting bullies). Negatively related to avoiding bullies and bottling up feelings.
- ***Threat*** positively related to aggressive strategies, crying (among girls) and truanting.
- ***Challenge*** positively related to standing up to bullies, telling bullies how they feel, staying away from bullies, distracting self, and ignoring bullies.
- **Emotions** positively related to telling, threatening to tell, wishful thinking, and crying. Negatively related to standing up to bullies.



# Implications



## Solution Focused Brief Therapy

- Increasingly used to deal with bullying situations
- Findings support utility of the method, but suggest two modifications:
  1. Tackle victims' threat perceptions
  2. Teach victims emotion regulation techniques i.e. how to cope with distress, anxiety and negative feelings



# The participant role approach



*“Bullying is collective in nature, based on social relationships in the group”* (Lagerspetz et al, 1982)

- Peers present in over 80% of bullying episodes
- Peers as reinforcers, assistants, outsiders and defenders
- Time spent by peers during bullying:
  - Join in - 21%
  - Intervene - 25%
  - Passively watch- 54%
- Preadolescent cliques and relational bullying

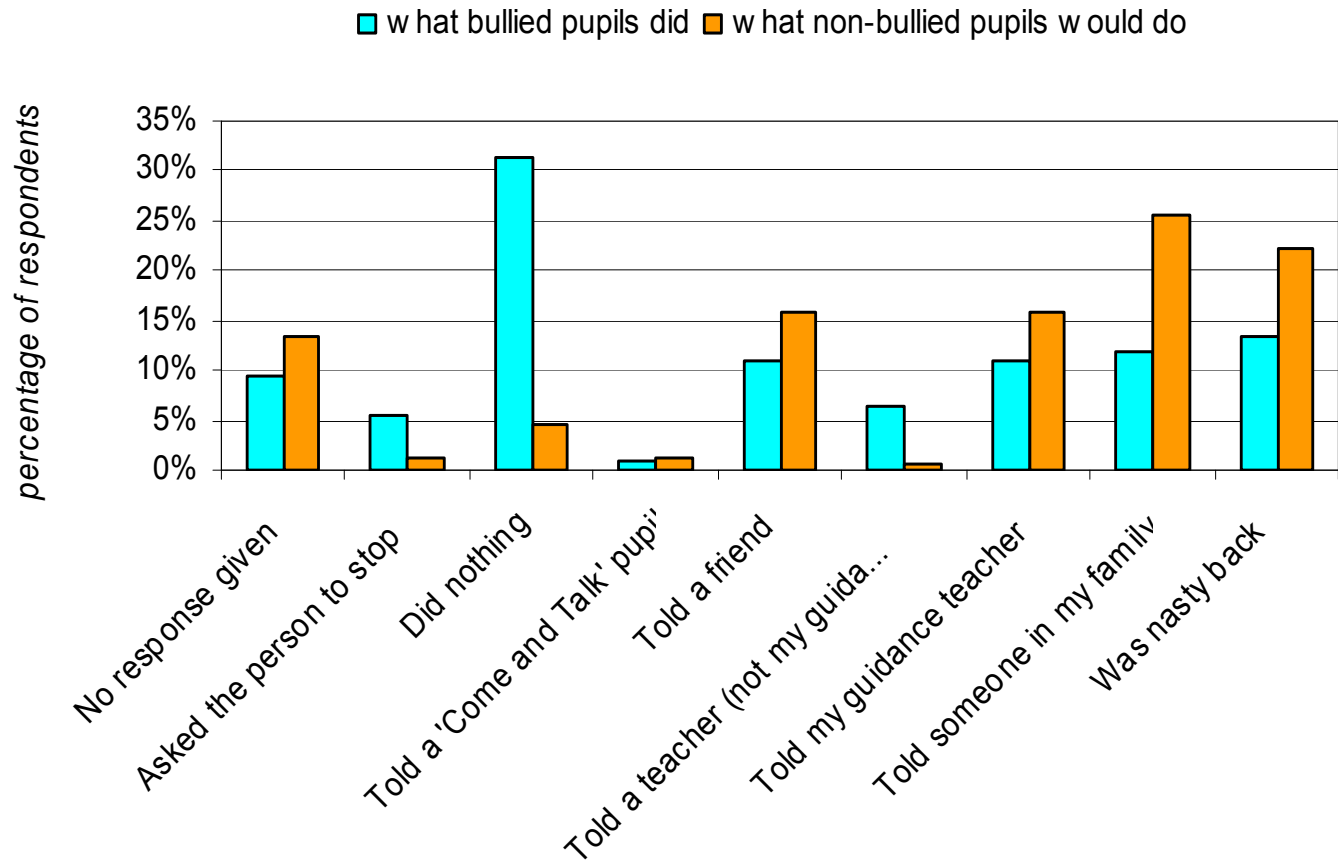


# The intervention context

<b>Results</b>	<b>Intervention</b>
High levels of bullying and slagging, general concern over ethos	Review of social supervision
Confusion over definitions and processes	Action group set up to re-write policy
Concern over reporting to teachers	Awareness raising and staff development
Good pupil support systems	New PSE anti-bullying programme with concurrent drama sessions



# Example of findings







# Development of a PSE programme



- McLean 1994
- O'Connell, Pepler and Craig 1999
- Salmivalli 1999, and 2001

## Aims:

To raise awareness

To equip pupils to deal with bullying and peer pressure

To impact upon pupil culture



# The PSE programme

S1, S2 and S3 pupils

Pre (n=300) and post (n=199) evaluation

4 lessons covering:

1. Awareness raising of bullying in their school
2. Teaching on group influences
3. Role of the peer group in bullying
4. Assertiveness training



# Results

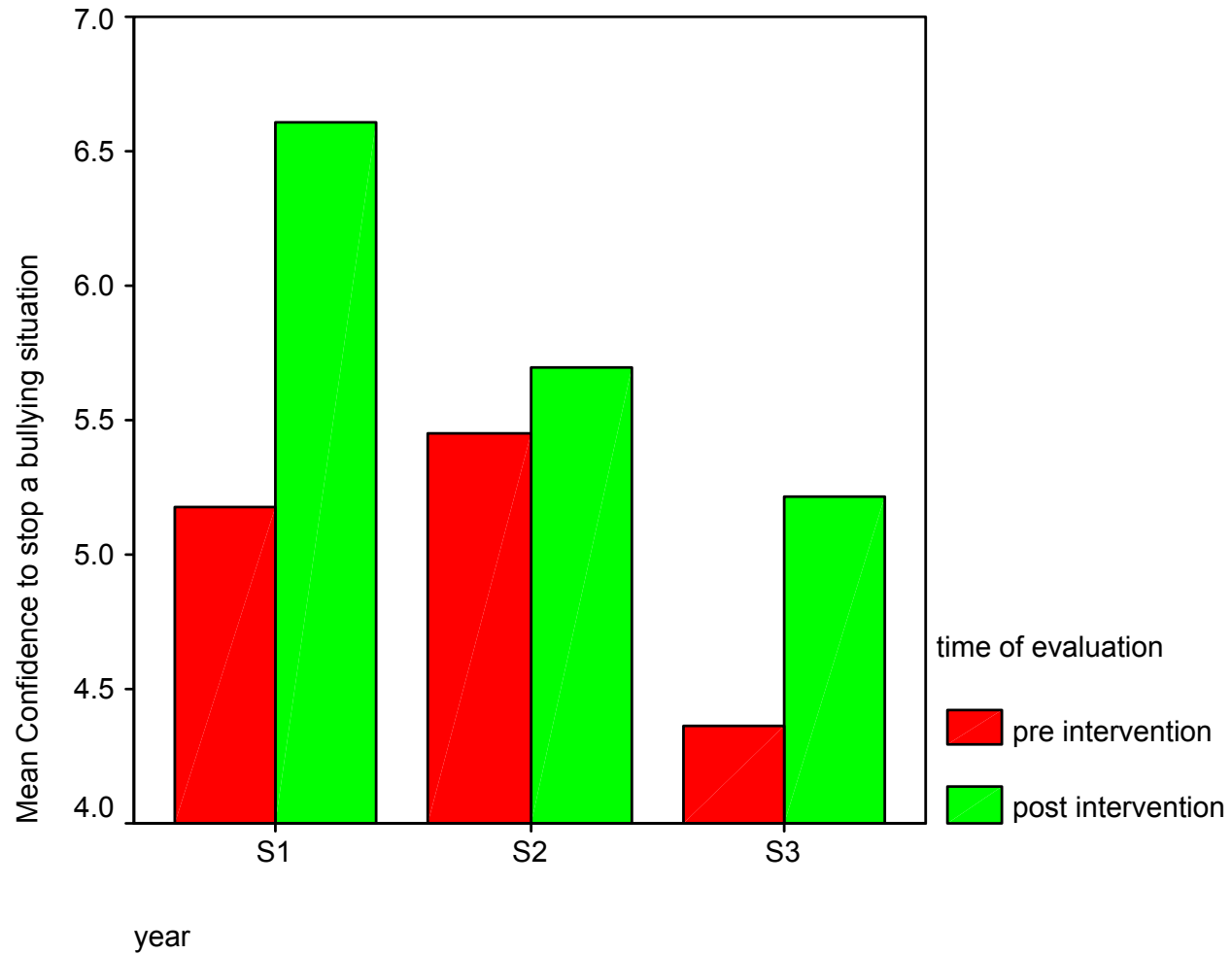
- Confidence to intervene raised
- Confidence to tell someone to stop significantly raised for S1
- Teaching on group influences appeared to be appreciated
- Opinion on responsibility of the bystanders did not appear to have changed
- Follow-up required to look at impact on behaviour



- Now a framework for 6 lessons for S1-S4



# ‘Confidence to tell someone to stop’





# *General conclusions*

- Need to address pupils' emotions when they ask for social support
- Partial support for SFBT
- Assertiveness training, related to bullying, may change appraisal of the situation
- Older pupils may benefit from peer-support
- Psychology in the classroom
- More research needed, to look at behaviour change and how to raise sense of responsibility