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Turning Points: A key to understanding persistent bullying and implications for promoting social justice in faith-based educational contexts

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We would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people who are the Traditional Custodians of this Land. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past, present and future and extend that respect to other Indigenous Australians present.



What is bullying?

- Use your phones
- Go to **www.menti.com**



What is Bullying?

- physical, verbal or psychological attacks or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress or harm to the victim;
- an imbalance of power (psychological or physical) with a more powerful child (or children) oppressing less powerful ones;
- and repeated incidents between the same children over a prolonged periods

(Farrington, 1993; Farrington & Ttofi, 2009; Olweus, 1993b).



Bullying Trajectories

Pepler, Jiang, Craig and Connolly, (2008)

Trajectories of bullying through adolescence were studied along with individual, family and peer relationship factors:

- 8 waves of data over 7 years (N=871: 466 girls)

Overall:

- **9.9% reported consistently high levels of bullying**
- **13.4% reported early moderate levels desisting to almost no bullying at the end of high school,**
- **35.1% reported consistently moderate levels**
- **41.6% almost never reported bullying.**

Developmental Trajectory of Power and Aggression





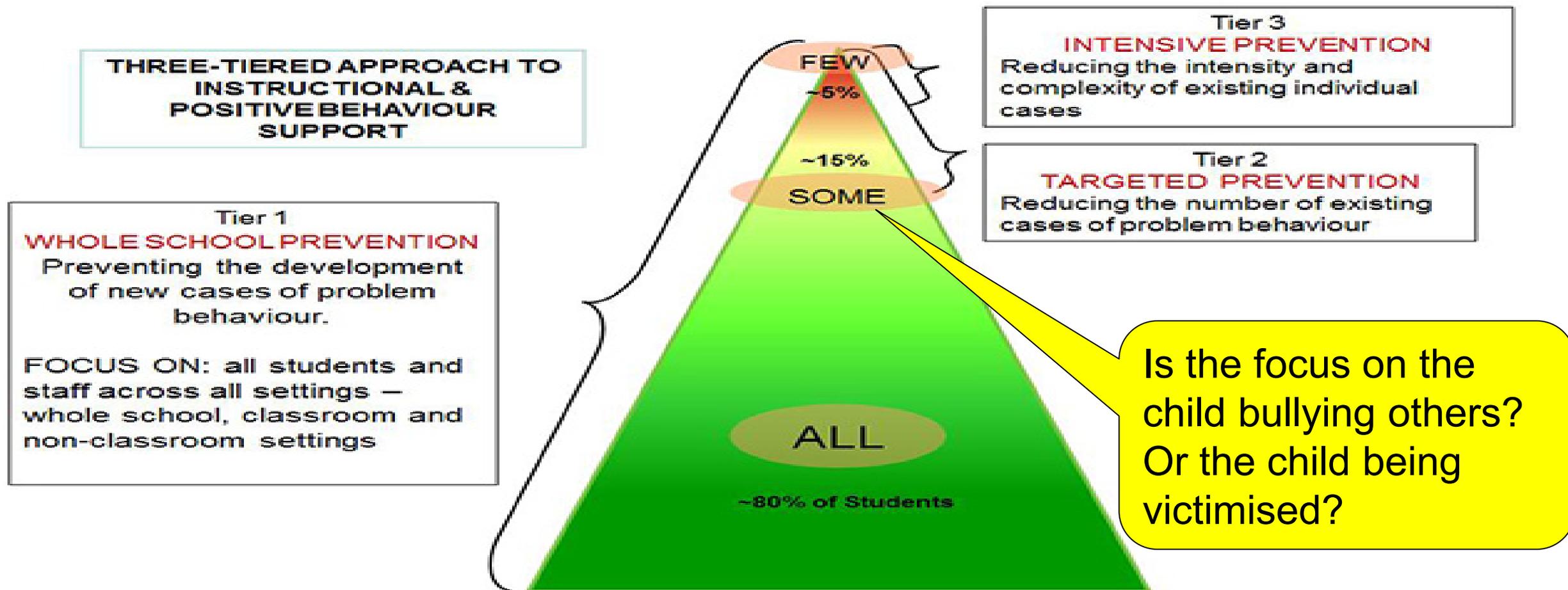
Pathways for consistent/persistent bullies

- Drop out of school early
- 4 times more likely to come before Criminal Courts
- Suicide
- Trouble relating to others
- Peer rejection
- *Five times* more likely to abuse alcohol
- *Seven times* more likely use drugs
- Boys - delinquency & criminal behaviour
- Girls tend to move into violent relationships

(Glew, Rivara & Feudmer 2000; Farrington 1993; Olweus 1993, 1995; Pepler et al. 2001; Roberts 2000; Sampson 2002)



Three Tiered approach to address bullying



Interventions can be successful with many students BUT ***those in high risk category need individualised strategies***



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Theories of turning points & chain reactions

- Studied in resilience
- Series of risk factors increase the chance of engaging in bullying (Garmezy 1993; Orpinas & Horne 2006)
- Turning points are persistent enough to effect change over time either negatively or positively
- Three categories of turning points:
 1. either shut down or open up opportunities (i.e. dropping out of school at a young age);
 2. a lasting change in one's environment (i.e. death of a significant other);
 3. a lasting effect on a person's self-concept (i.e. peer rejection) (Rutter 1996).
- A series of turning points = chain reaction



Case Study

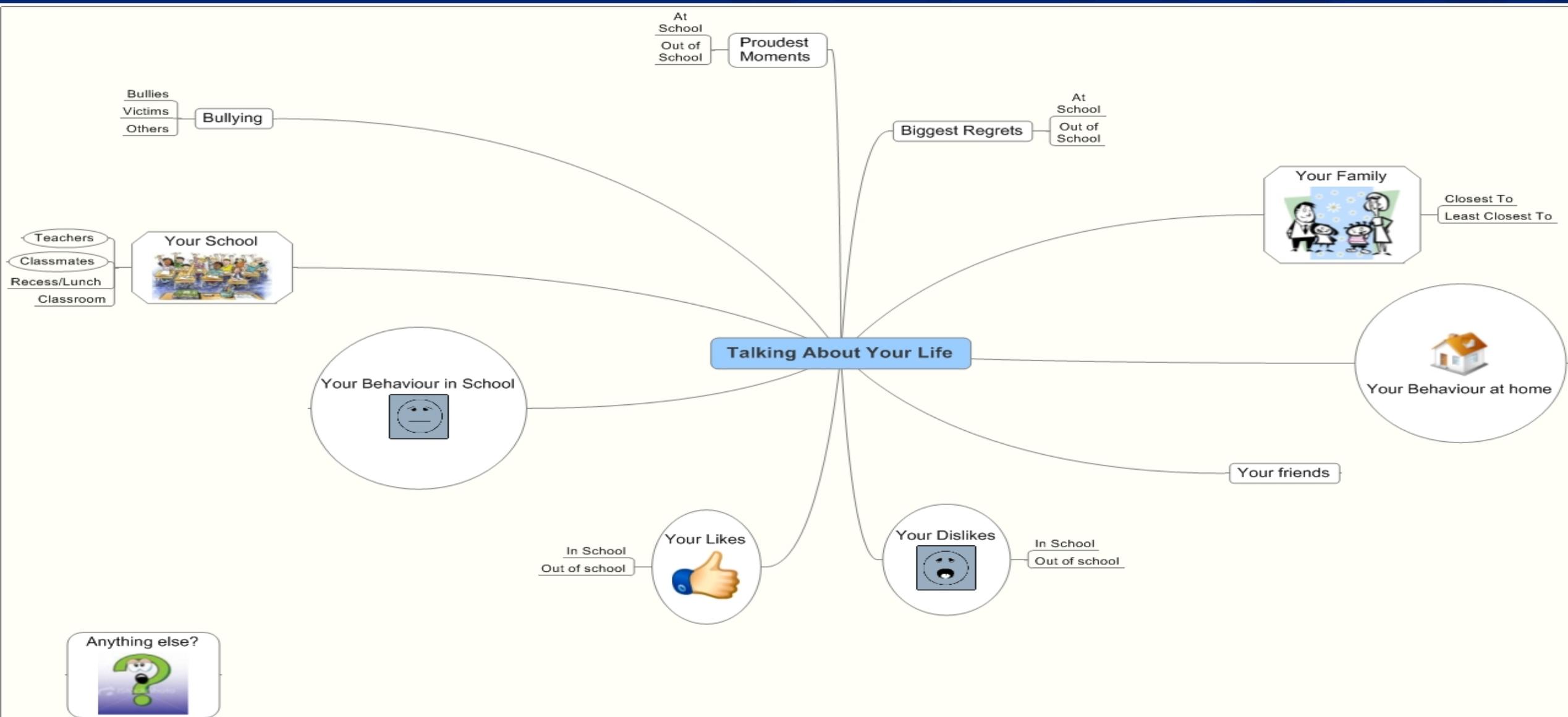
Lived experiences of persistent bullies, victims, desister, bully/victim and bystanders

- Co-educational Catholic school contacted
 - Four (4) students between 9 and 12 years of age were interviewed
 - Identified as playing different bystander roles
- Parents in the pre-service education program were contacted inviting their children to participate in the study
 - Two (2) females aged 6-8 years were interviewed
 - One identified as a bully and the other a victim
- Pre-service education students who had themselves *engaged* in bullying whilst at school were interviewed
 - Four (4) participants: one (1) male and three (3) females aged between 21-27 years of age
 - Identified as a persistent victim, bully/victim, desister and persistent bully



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'About Your Life'





Brooke's reflection

She didn't care ... she was just rocking up, it looked like to intimidate me... she was getting a thrill out of seeing me scared ... she was always walking around the school... I don't know what she was doing ... just the looks ... it's funny how much power a look can have and how scary it can feel.

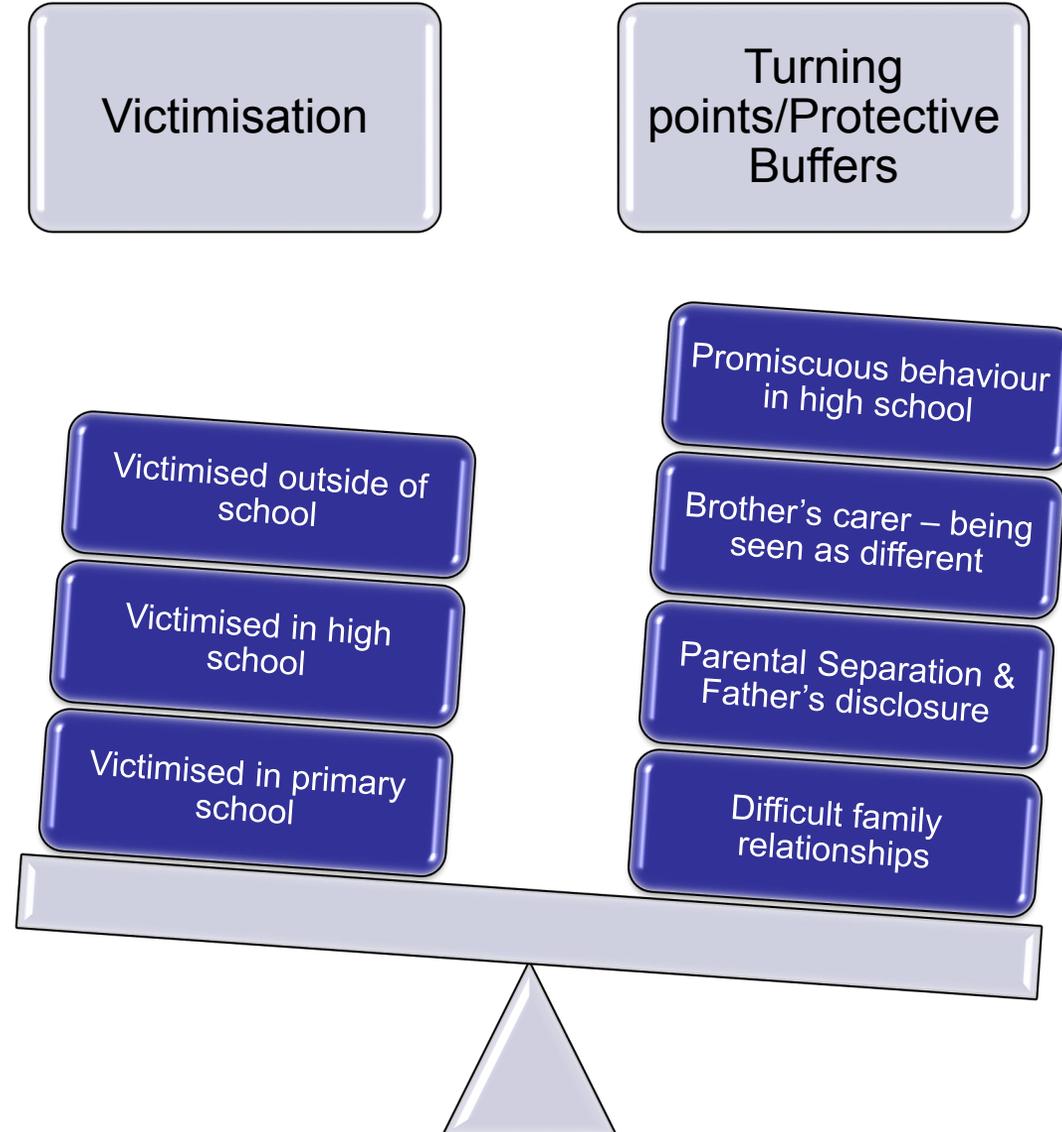


Brooke's life

- 23 year old pre-service teacher
- Lived in a small country town
- Parents divorced due to dad's disclosure of homosexuality
- Brother in a near fatal accident
 - Needed to learn to walk and talk
 - Brooke at 9 years old played a key role in his care
- Not close to either parent
 - Very close to her brother
- Close friendships
 - Best friend
- Proudest moments
 - Sporting achievements & academic results

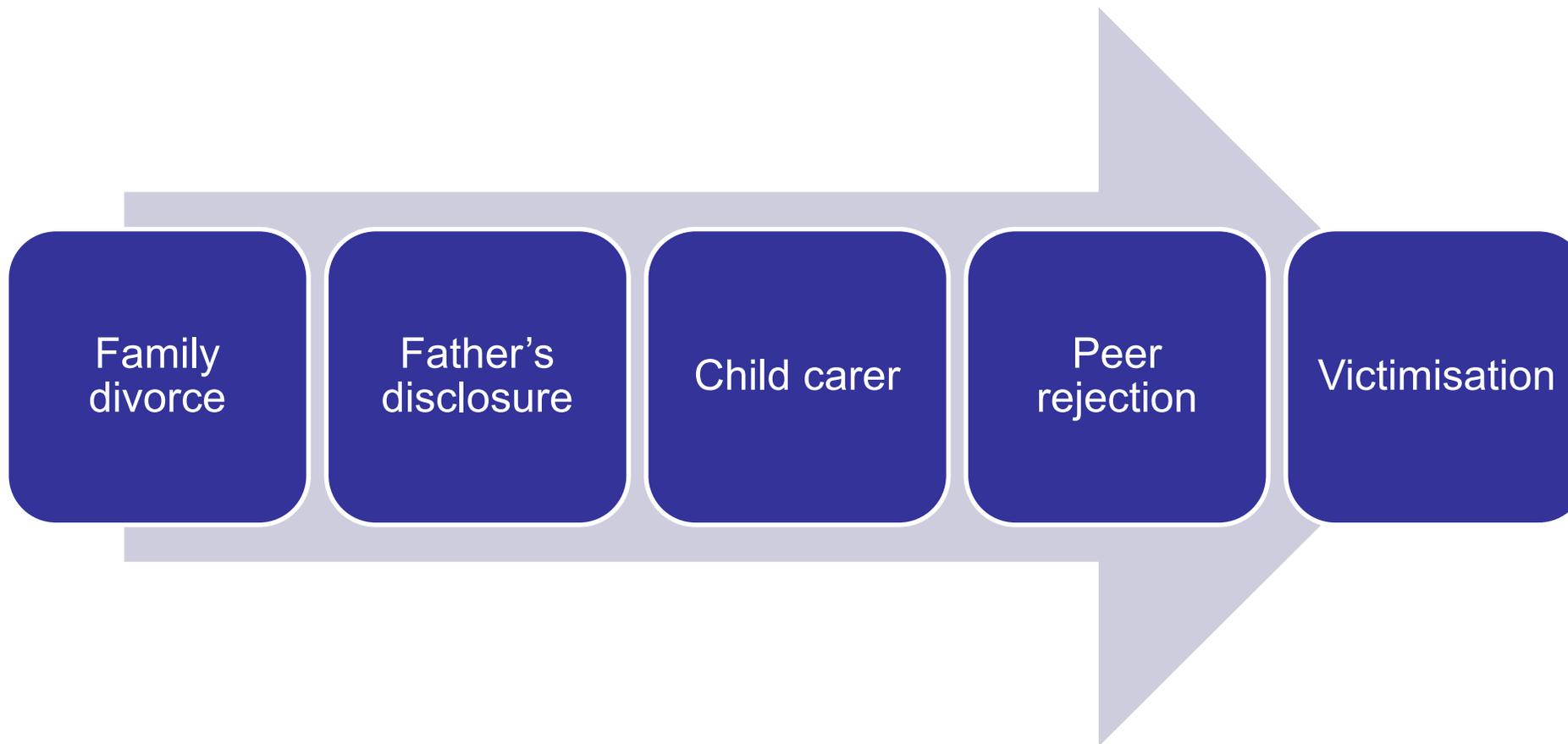


Potential turning points: Brooke's life





Potential chain reactions



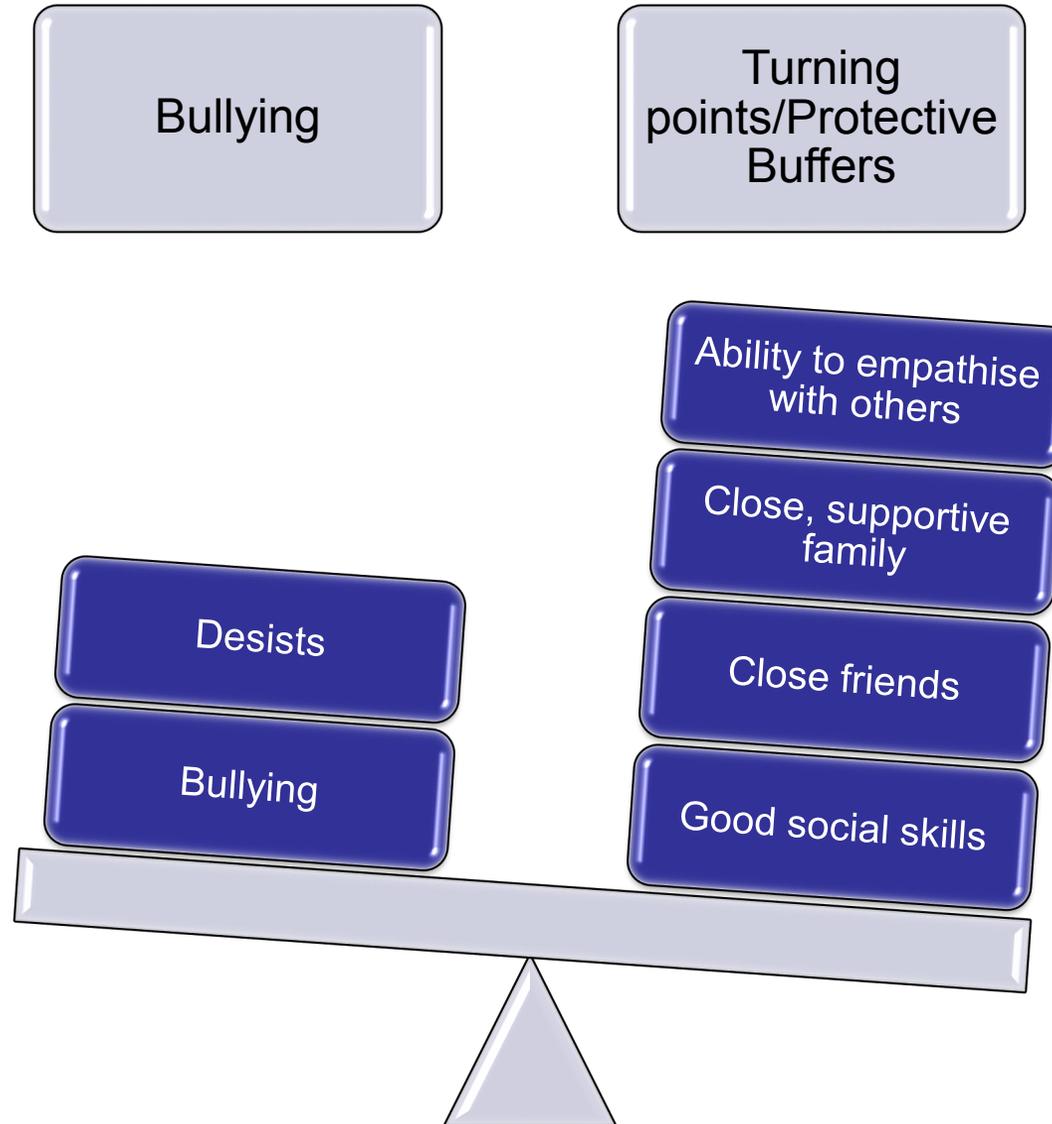


Samantha's life

- 27 year old pre-service teacher
- Large Government primary school and co-educational Catholic school
 - *There was a real sense of community*
 - *Proudest moments – academic achievements*
 - *Biggest regrets – ‘getting ‘into the drinking and taking drugs when I was pretty young’*

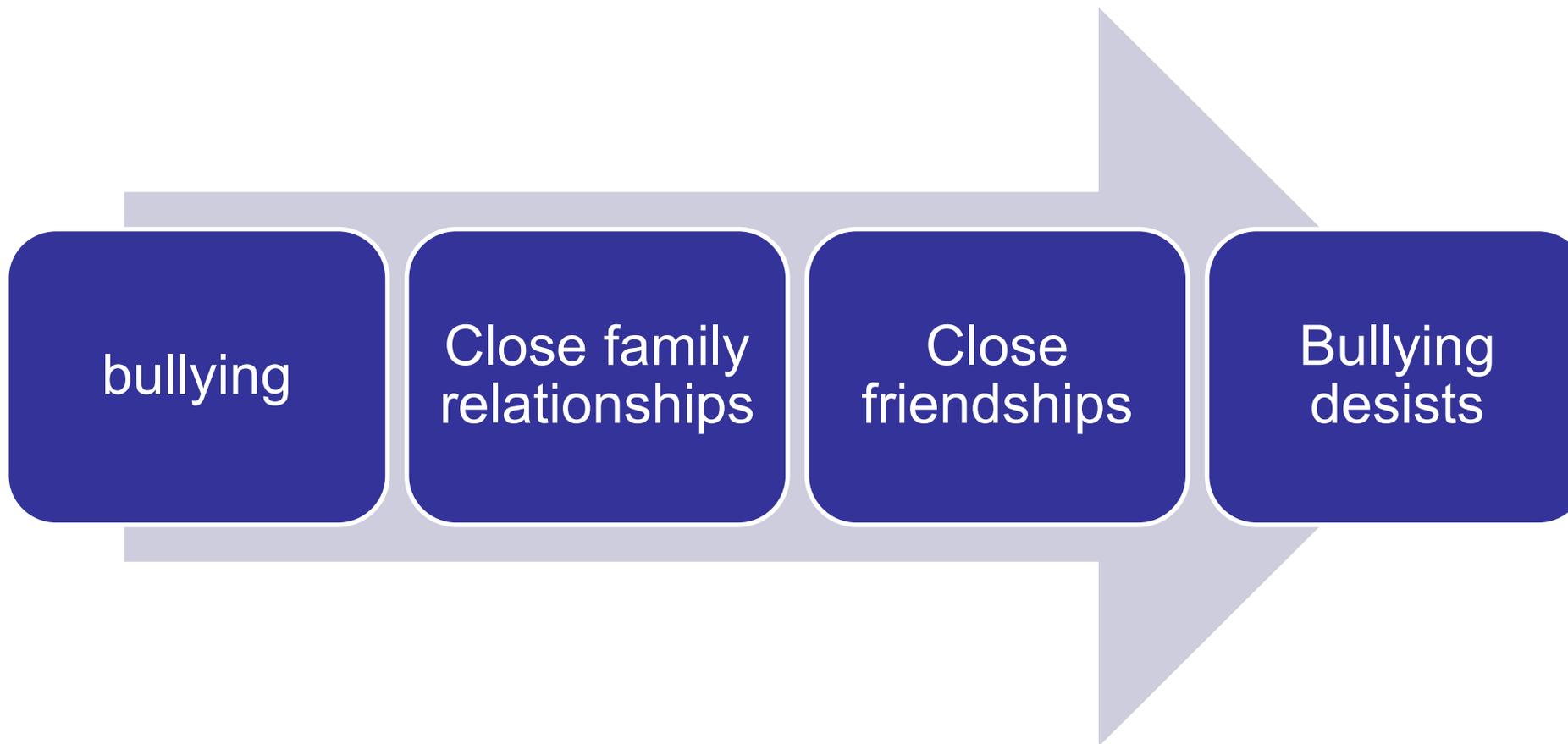


Potential turning points: Samantha's life





Potential chain reactions





John's reflections

My whole schooling life was just trouble ... one point the deputy head master expected me in his office so often that he would have a pile of work for me to do and he wouldn't even ask me what I did wrong ... he would just say 'Oh [John] take this and' ... (John, 26 years old)

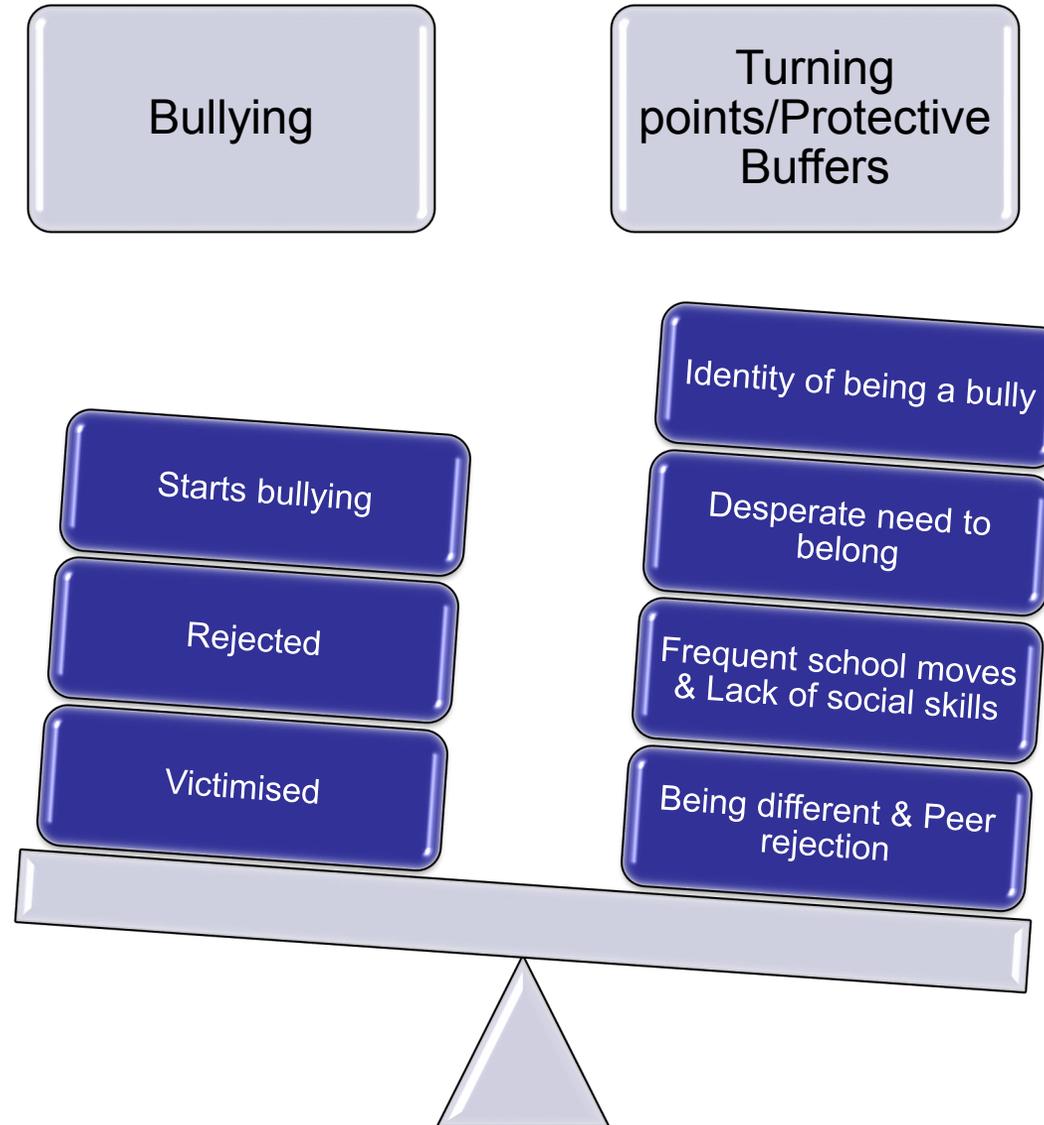


John's life

- 26 year old pre-service teacher (postgraduate program)
- Mothers was a teacher
 - Although she never taught him he was '*sent to her room when I was misbehaving*'
 - He changed schools whenever she moved schools
 - Found transitions very difficult
- John did not enjoy school
- Struggled with peer relationships and was rejected by the peer group throughout his school life
 - Lacked a sense of identity and belonging

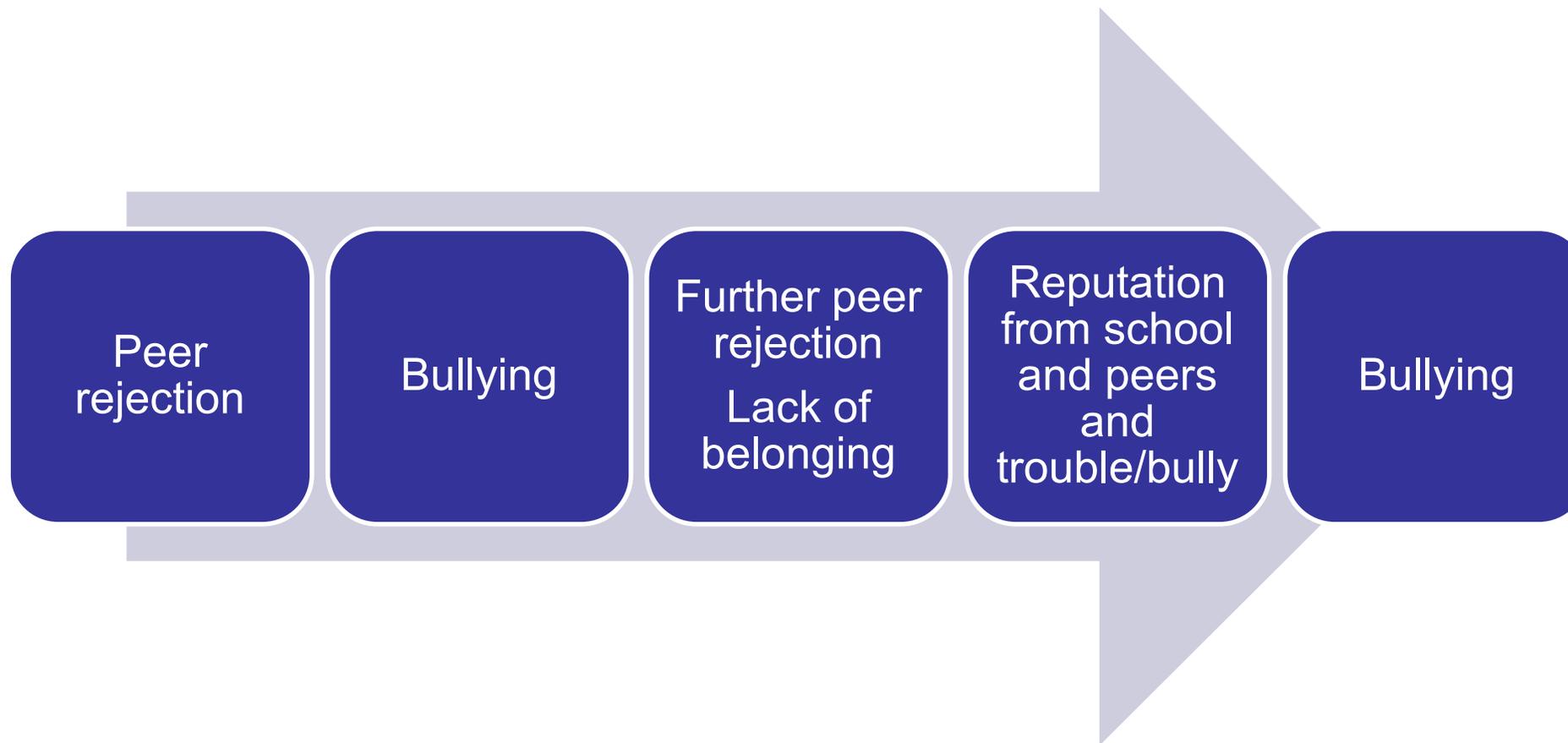


Potential turning points: John's life





Potential chain reactions





Considerations

- Brooke, Samantha and John's case studied provide insights
 - Protective mechanisms
 - Turning points
- What would John's life trajectory be like if he had acquired successful group entry skills and other social skills?
- Would John's behaviour have differed if the school community, and particularly his teachers and parents, had viewed him more positively, identifying and highlighting his strengths as opposed to his perceived shortcomings?



Implications

- Need to access the voice and lived experiences of those who engage in bullying behaviours, are victimised or are bystanders
- Adopt proactive strategies which recognise potential turning points that may reduce persistent bullying
- Advocate for fostering positive turning points in the lives of young people
- Strive to ensure that students develop a sense of belonging and the social skills necessary to succeed
- Support and nurture protective mechanisms



Implications

- Use inclusive approaches that are centred on social justice
- Employ culturally religious and responsive pedagogies that value the lifeworlds of all students
- Advocate for and support a whole school approach to wellbeing for students and staff



Provocation

- What role does faith-based contexts play in fostering positive turning points in young people's lives?
- In your context, what protective mechanisms may help:
 - Persistent bullies change their behaviour positively?
 - Support victims who are persistently bullied?
 - Support bystanders to positively act?



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Green, D. & Price, D. (2017).
Multiple perspectives in persistent
bullying: capturing and listening to
young people's voices, Routledge,
United Kingdom.

