

Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle's

Why Do We Bully?

**A Special
Curriculum**

**To Help
Young People
Understand
and Cope
with
Bullying**

**Twelve Lessons
Ages 9 - 14**

Teacher's Guide

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Youth Peace Literacy™

Preface and Personal Note to You from Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle

“That bully thinks I’m a wimp — and I am.”

“My mom hates me for letting her down.”

“I don’t fit anywhere. No one understands me.”

Thoughts such as these are not uncommon for young people. Like all of us, they are conditioned to think in certain ways that can lead them to question their own self-worth. The reason they, and we, think this way can be answered in a single word: **conditioning**.

Most of the thoughts in our brain are based on how we’ve been conditioned. Like a computer, our brain absorbs information that it’s fed, which it stores for further use. We learn that when a traffic light is green, we can go. We learn that it’s important to brush our teeth. We learn to read. All of this positive conditioning programs us to think and act in ways that are helpful to our well-being.

On the other hand, we are all conditioned in negative ways, as well. Since all of our conditioning comes from influences around us, we learn from other people who may have been conditioned in ways that are not healthy, or from frightening experiences that happen in life. If, for example, an unfriendly dog bites us, we may learn to be afraid of dogs. When someone we know speaks to us in a hurtful way, we may learn to feel guilty, wrong, angry, or worthless. These feelings can create different kinds of conflict inside us: “Do I ever want to speak with that person again?” “It must have been my fault.” “I want revenge.”

We all want to help young people resolve conflict peacefully. However, once conflict has happened — especially personally traumatic conflict — resolution can be a difficult process. Here’s why. When a frightening event occurs, we develop a thought/feeling about that event. That thought/feeling leads us to act in certain ways.

#1	#2	#3
Frightening event	Thought/feeling about the event	Actions I take

Most people think that the frightening event (#1) is what causes us to act (#3) in certain ways. But the truth is — it’s the thought/feeling about that event (#2) that leads to how we act!

**We think that the reason for our troubled actions
is due to something “out there” in the world.
But, in fact, it is our own thinking that causes our actions!
What we think is what we feel, and how we feel determines how we act.**

It's not our fault that we are conditioned by influences around us. We're not responsible for their occurrence. Negative things happen, and we learn to dwell on bad things rather than good things. We learn to believe people who put us down. We learn to hide feelings that are painful.

But while we are not responsible for our conditioning, we *are* responsible for what we do with it. We can't change what happened in the past, but we can change how we act in the present. We can learn to see why a person might want to unjustly put us down. We can learn to reveal painful feelings and discover that communicating them helps remove the pain. All it takes to change our conditioning is awareness and a willingness to see things in a new way.

**We often believe that what we're reporting is what's really "out there,"
when what we're reporting is a conditioned thought
that is lodged in our computerized brain.**

Because a thought is filed on our brain's hard drive, we keep projecting it, recreating it. What we continue to think influences what we continue to feel.

Furthermore, what we think not only stimulates the "feeling" center on our brain's hard drive, but also stimulates our "fight or flight" center. We THINK of a bully who frightens us, we FEEL scared, and we are DRIVEN to run away or fight — even if the bully is nowhere in sight. The THOUGHT of the scary bully, in our memory, triggers the response to get ready to either fight, or to flee. We say to ourselves, "That bully is really a threat! I am a wimp!" This belief is wired to our brain, and remains on our hard drive. Every time we think of that bully, our body gets ready to run.

Think of all the negative conditioning you've been exposed to in your life. Think of all the times you found yourself engaged in a verbal fight with someone, not even sure how the fight started. Could you have been conditioned to fight by a past event? Think of the times you've run away from a troubling situation, and can't recall what exactly triggered your desire to escape. Could you have been conditioned to run because of a previous experience? That's what conditioning does. It can cause us to believe what isn't real — and act on it!

With this curriculum, we want to help young people recognize their negative conditioning, and understand that they have the power to overcome it. While we cannot change our biological conditioning — the kind that causes our drive for food, water, sleep and shelter, we CAN change our psychological conditioning — the kind that causes us to have negative thoughts — about ourselves, as well as others. If you want to help young people you know overcome their sometimes distorted, skeptical, doubtful thoughts about themselves, we think you've come to the right place.

Respectfully yours,

Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle



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