Excerpt from iheart book

Bullying behaviour

Case-study: Noah

Noah tells me straight up that he needs to gain some more understanding into what's going on with him. He tells me that he has been called 'a bully' at least five times, by five different people, in the last few months. He's well aware of the fact that he struggles with anger and aggression, but no amount of counselling and anger management techniques seem to do much for him, even though he's spent considerable time and resources on those. When I ask him how the anger manifests, he tells me that he has three broken relationships behind him, and his current wife is struggling to deal with his reactive moods and has given him an ultimatum. He tells me he has a high-profile, demanding job in banking, and that he knows his subordinates call him "The Rottweiler" behind his back. He is highly strung, easily angered, and verbally abusive when angry. He has zero tolerance for people making stupid mistakes or being out of line. Sometimes, he has to really control himself so as not to get physical.

We've quoted **Nelson Mandela** before as saying that: ***"Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, – perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished."*** What Mandela saw is so profound that it is worth mentioning again! Mandela had been imprisoned on Robben Island for more than a quarter of a century, in less than ideal circumstances and with pretty hostile guards, when he made this observation. He observed that the qualities of wellbeing are ***always*** within, and can and will reveal themselves, even for a second, when they're not being covered up by off-track thinking. Profoundly, **what this means is that no one is *born* a bully. Rather, bullying is a behaviour (a behavioural signpost) that arises as a direct result of the misguided or off-track thinking that accompanies**

attached-wellbeing. It is one of the ways we behave when we believe that our psychological wellbeing is being threatened.

Noah tells me he hates this behaviour in himself. Particularly since he has become a father (he has three young children), he is painfully aware of the fact that his behaviour is very unhelpful and possibly even harmful. With his children, he manages to "be himself" – a good, fair and responsible person – because he understands that no father must ever be mean to his children. He deeply understands that his children are innocent, beautiful humans, and he NEVER loses his temper with them when they make mistakes. But with his ex-partners and his current wife, as well as at work, and even with friends, he really cannot help himself. He lashes out whether he likes it or not. The more pressured work becomes, the worse it gets. He tells me that he feels almost like a pressure-cooker inside, and if the steam wouldn't burst out regularly, he would just explode.

Why people bully

Bullying is often seen as a personality trait or the result of circumstances, such as background; workplace or school atmosphere; or community or family dynamics. Some people believe that they, or someone else, have an aggressive, manipulative, or perhaps submissive disposition, and that once such a disposition has developed, through a combination of nature and nurture, there is very little that can be done to escape it, and once it has turned into a label, it quickly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We've said that bullying is a behaviour that arises as a result of the off-track thinking that accompanies attached-wellbeing. Thus, **the underlying reason or root cause of any bullying behaviour is always that we've attached or outsourced our wellbeing 'upstream'**. Unless these attachments are made conscious, challenged and exposed as untrue and illogical to us, the mind will keep navigating in the same misguided and ultimately very unhelpful manner, and will remain unchanged. **It might seem that bullies are motivated by the**

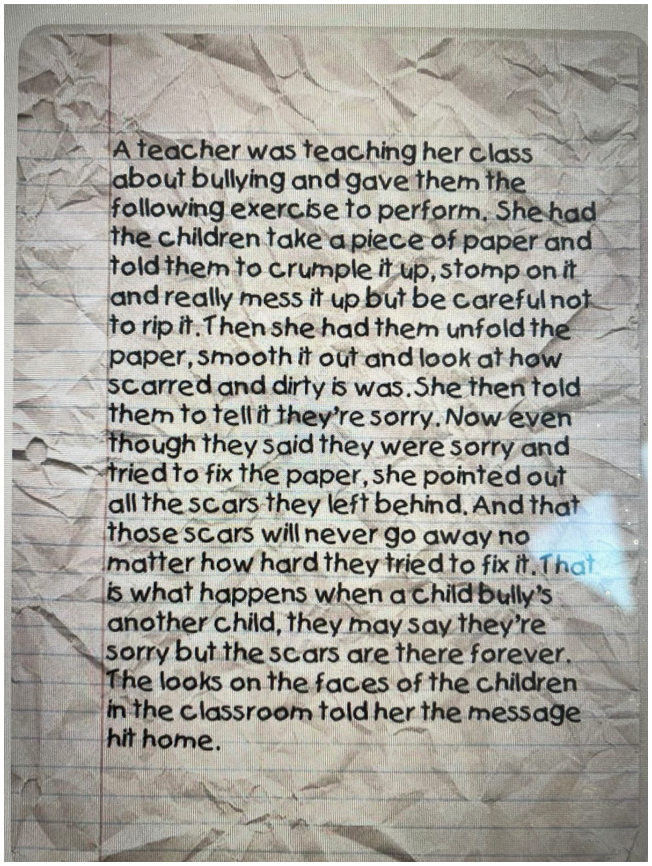
need for power and domination, but what they really want is to feel that they matter and are ok. They want to experience wellbeing. In a misguided way, they attempt to accomplish this by bringing others down. And by 'they', we mean 'us too'! We can also behave badly at times. As stated in the chapter on Attachments and again in the chapter on Relationships, the vast majority of our attachments relate to other people and our position in society. Very often, we attach our wellbeing to how others behave – how they greet us, speak to us, look at us, include us, take our wishes into account, pay attention to us. When people do not behave as we believe we ***need*** them to for our wellbeing, we often judge them as being insensitive, unfair, incompetent or misinformed (and that may be an objective fact at times, and not just our perception). But on the **Attached-Wellbeing Road**, we get frustrated and angry, we feel that our frustration is **justified** and possibly even **necessary**, and therefore we dwell on it a lot in our thoughts. We may react **aggressively** or display **passive-aggressive** behaviours, including withdrawal of affection, manipulation, exclusion, etc.

Noah is quite relieved when I tell him that his behaviour isn't due to his personality; that iheart recognises anger, reactivity and controlling behaviours as signposts of someone being off-track. This resonates deeply with Noah, because he absolutely knows that he is not 'a bully' and not a bad person. He knows that, really, he is gentle and kind and loving. With this shift in focus, Noah and I are able to explore his off-track thoughts, feelings and behaviour with curiosity. He came to see that he believed his wellbeing was completely conditional on keeping everyone safe. "Everyone I am responsible for must therefore stay in line and do things right". It makes perfect sense, then, that Noah is very angered by sloppiness or mistakes on the part of his subordinates. It also makes perfect sense that he tries to control his partners' lifestyles and gets very annoyed if they choose to do things that he sees as detrimental to their or his children's wellbeing. "I've been acting like Super-Cop", he says. He's intrigued by this exploration. It's interesting!

Why anti-bullying campaigns don't work

Noah was conscious of his behaviour. In fact, he was painfully aware of it and had tried his best to mitigate and control it. But none of that was ultimately helping him, not deeply. In the same way, every year, enormous resources are poured into anti-bullying (and anti-discrimination) campaigns worldwide. 'Anti-bullying week' has sprung up in many countries across the globe and there is an international anti-bullying platform aimed at combating this type of behaviour. Yet bullying, anti-social behaviour, and reactive and aggressive behaviours remains an enormous problem in schools, in the home and in the workplace.

Most anti-bullying interventions promote awareness of the problem, and try to alter bad behaviour by way of social pressure. A good example of this is the 'bullying lesson' below, which is rumoured to have originated in New York where it was used by a teacher to show her students the lasting impact that cruel or anti-social behaviour can have.



It serves to explain to the students that although saying sorry is the right thing to do, it ***still*** doesn't fix the mean words that were said in the first place! As much as the students might try to smooth out the wrinkled paper, the feelings from the mean words are the wrinkles that will ***always*** be there! The wrinkled paper is then hung up in the classroom as a reminder to the students of how their words can have a massive impact on their fellow classmates! In this way, students are shamed (dare we say bullied!) into trying to behave in an on-track way, even if or when they are off-track.

Whilst these kinds of approaches based on social pressure might diminish overt bullying behaviours, they do little to mitigate bullying online and covert bullying behaviours. Bullying is not less of a problem in society today than it was when awareness campaigning became common. Nor do approaches based on awareness and social pressure serve to resolve the disconnect between people. Whilst the 'bully' might adapt their behaviour, they will still not experience kindness, love and connection toward themselves or the one they are bullying. That is because they are still off-track! On a flat earth, it would not be useful to tell someone to 'relax and get over their anxiety about falling off the edge', because that's the thinking the mind will inescapably keep producing until the premise about the earth is corrected. In the same way, it is not at all useful, or possible, to just tell or even shame a bully into stopping bullying (or encourage the victim to be less sensitive and toughen up – but more on that later). If we are to be successful in educating adults and children not to bully each other, we have to deeply understand what's going on 'behind the scenes' or under the surface. Simply telling them to stop is trying to 'right' the problem downstream. It doesn't work because the issue has to be addressed and corrected at the source. It is our view that **awareness campaigns and social pressure is not an effective way of dealing with bad behaviour because it does not address the *root cause* of such behaviour.**

Once Noah can see this attachment in such simple terms, he immediately understands where it came from. It's not like he hasn't explored his background before – he has been in extensive therapy – and understood that the experiences he had from the age of around 9 has impacted on him

deeply. But the iheart Framework seems to offer him a new way of "fitting the pieces of the puzzle" together. When Noah was 9, his father died from a sudden illness. His mother was sickly, physically weak and not mentally strong, either. Noah, as the oldest of five children, fully took on the role of head of family. Understandably, he really did attach his wellbeing, and his entire 9-year old soul to keeping everyone under his roof safe, and getting them all to comply with whatever he felt was necessary for them to stay safe, too. As these puzzle pieces fall in place for him, Noah feels great compassion for himself. He can see that all the off-track, unhelpful behaviour is a very logical consequence of this premise. He can see that he, just like he already knew somewhere, is a good, kind and gentle person.

Noah's attachment to keeping everyone safe had been very strong. It took him some time, and quite a few explorations of it to see that really, the attachment was neither necessary, nor helpful. He understood that it was actually hurting the people he loved. The more he could see that his peace of mind, and his ability to love other people and be there for them, was unconditional, the less he found himself being reactive and controlling in different everyday situations. Over some months, the 'snow globe' of his mind began to be settled more of the time. His innate wellbeing was revealed, gradually more and more. People in his life commented on this to him. He was told that he seemed 'lighter', and 'happier', 'less bothered', and 'kinder'. Noah and his wife ended up staying together for now.

'Getting to the bottom of it' is where real change occurs

When we gain insight into the simple logic of ***why*** bad behaviour comes about, we can begin to facilitate deep change in ourselves. Anti-bullying approaches seldom help people identify and uncover their innate-wellbeing, which is a pity. Because when people connect to their innate-wellbeing, they will automatically think, feel and behave in a more harmonious, resilient and wise way.

Being bullied

As schoolgoers, many of us were taught the old adage '**Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.**' We've not been able to confirm the source of this playground chant but it is widely understood to be a response to an insult. It implies that whilst someone might be able to hurt us by physical force, they cannot do this by words and insults. On a deeper level, it has been suggested that if you're attacked by someone, you will only go through physical pain. Your body will eventually heal and it will not affect your personality.

Case study Mia

Mia is in her early 20s. She comes to see me because she's struggling with her self-confidence. Her social circle is extremely limited. She doesn't particularly enjoy being around people and finds it very difficult to make new friends. This is difficult for her, because she would like to enjoy social life at the college she's enrolled in. Mia is very dependent on the company of her boyfriend. He is a very loyal and kind person, but she's terrified of losing him, and she recognises that this is not doing her any favours in their relationship. She doesn't want to be so needy. But Mia defines herself as "an insecure person". When I ask her about the label "insecure" that she's clearly put on herself, she tells me that her self-esteem was destroyed after she was bullied in primary school.

I ask her to tell me about the bullying. Before age 12, Mia had no problems with friends. But one day, everyone in her group of girlfriends decided to turn on her – and because they were the 'cool' group, so did the rest of her year group. They began to ridicule her, exclude her, ignore her. At first, she was in shock. She felt hurt and angry, unfairly treated. She was sure that if they could only see that they were being unfair and mean, they would stop. She spent all her time trying to think about how to get it across to them that she was actually OK, that she didn't deserve this. And the rest of her time trying to figure out how to fit in better – was it her clothes? Should she speak more or less in class? Were her marks too high, or too low? But

nothing helped. They didn't stop. Asking an adult for help was not an option. She was absolutely convinced that the bullying would get much, much worse as a consequence. Nobody likes a telltale. She felt completely alone in the world with this.

As time went by, she gradually came to the conclusion that the problem had to be with her. She must deserve this treatment, because she was stupid, unattractive, clumsy. More and more often, she found herself looking in the mirror, whispering quiet insults at her own image. She dreaded going to school, her stomach was in knots every morning. The schooldays felt like they went on forever. She absolutely hated everything – them, school, herself. There was one straw she had to clutch at – a shy and quiet little girl from the countryside in her class. She was the only one who would still speak to Mia. And Mia didn't let her out of her sight, she was right beside her at every interval, every lunch break. For every exercise done in pairs in class. And Mia was terrified that this little girl would join the mob against her, too. If that was to happen, Mia's only option would surely be death. She even fantasised about how to do it. Make them all suffer and pay, be ashamed for the rest of their lives. Mia believes that this quiet little girl from the countryside was an angel in disguise. She quietly obliged Mia, and stayed by her side for the year that this continued.

Unfortunately, there are very few (if any) anti-bullying approaches that encourage 'the victim' of bullying to identify their innate-wellbeing and resilience. To the contrary, people are frequently told that bullies really ***can*** and ***will*** steal their wellbeing and traumatise them – for life. In this way, their narratives are perpetuated. This premise about wellbeing and resilience is not true and it is bound to make the downward spiral of a difficult situation all the more difficult to bear. We want to emphasise here that iheart's understanding of 'resilience' is ***not*** tantamount to developing a thick skin or just putting up with things – or even, learning to handle them. Rather, **it is about never losing sight of one's innate value and confidence, and never identifying oneself as a helpless victim of circumstances and of other people.** This, in turn, allows a person to respond wisely and in a measured way to challenges.

"***No one can make you feel inferior without your consent"***

– **Eleanor Roosevelt**

Fearful, aggressive and reactive behaviour has dominated human history. So much so that it is not very strange that we default to it over and over again. Rarely do we consider that another avenue might be available. In this sense, we've all been born into a 'flat earth' where we're convinced that our wellbeing ***is*** threatened by the behaviour of others. And we feel and act accordingly. **When we *believe* that someone is behaving badly towards us, whether in person or on social media, we conclude that we *must,* inevitably, feel hurt, insulted, rejected, worthless or left out**. Firstly, there's an emphasis here on the word 'believe' because it's always good to remember that our perception of a situation is just that – ours. Sometimes the 'bad behaviour' is not even intended as such. It might be perfectly innocent but because we can't see it as such, it may come across as mean and nasty. We become embroiled in the drama of victim and perpetrator. We can often perpetuate this in other relationships, too. It's all too common that people free themselves from one abusive relationship only to find themselves in a new abusive relationship later on. The same **attached-wellbeing** trajectory keeps playing out, over and over again. Secondly, there's an emphasis on the word 'must', because the inevitability of the hurt reaction appears to have nothing to do with us, but rather to be part and parcel of the whole dynamic. It's almost devoid of personal agency.

This is because reactive, abused and victim-perpetuating drama is the default in our culture. We are so conditioned to believe this is the only possible route for us, that it may never even have occurred to us that another avenue might be available. This conditioning is also fuelled and exacerbated by popular and social media culture. What chance do our young people have when the message they're flooded with on a daily basis is that other people can and will steal their wellbeing? In fact, buying into this narrative perpetuates the beliefs and the feelings. We commonly encounter young people who wholly identify the cause for their current psychological pain as having been bullied or treated badly in

the past. Indeed, these young people have innocently labelled themselves because of other people's actions in the past, and have kept travelling further and further away from their innate-wellbeing by losing themselves in the ever-growing number of groups who identify themselves as victims of abuse on social media platforms.

Dealing with being bullied from innate-wellbeing

This is neither helpful, nor based in truth. And it is certainly not empowering in a real, sustainable sense. Gaining an understanding of the mindset of a person who is behaving badly, or one who is repeatedly the victimised party, including ourselves, will help us understand why the mind keeps producing such thinking, feeling and behaviour. Learning that our security and wellbeing is innate and unconditional, as well as poking holes in our attachments, means that we can uncover more psychological security in ourselves and feel far less vulnerable in the face of other people's behaviour. It opens up a possibility of travelling on a different road with regard to real or perceived injustices, difficult people and unexpected situations. We can react from a secure place in a considered, wise manner. We are not compelled to define ourselves by the experiences we have been through. We recognise that nobody has access to our innate-wellbeing. This is a relief because it is not possible to control the way others behave. Recognising that no one and no thing can take away our wellbeing or peace of mind and make us angry or hurt, frees our minds to think logically and rationally with regard to injustices (real or perceived), difficult people and unexpected situations.

Mia and I began by exploring iheart's understanding of labels together. Mia was able to see that she had innocently labelled herself 'insecure', 'needy' and a 'bullying victim', and that this wasn't helpful to her in the least. She felt it very freeing to understand that those traits were signposts on the Attached-Wellbeing Road rather than personality traits. We then proceeded to think about the attachments that had been at play then, and that were still active today, as Mia had not been able to move on from the

unpleasant episode with resilience. As we explored her thinking, we were able to identify that Mia had attached her value as a human being to other people's approval and inclusion. We explored this attachment and its consequences for her thinking, feeling and behaviour, and Mia gained a lot of perspective on her life, both about the time in primary, and about her current difficulties. Because of her attachment, she herself had not interfered when the gang of girls that she was part of excluded other people. She had played along, just turning her back on several others. And then one day, the undesirable role of being the outcast fell on her. She had never quite realised what she had been guilty of, too. Mia felt compassion towards these other girls, and actually for people in general! For the first time, Mia also felt a lot of appreciation for the way that some of the girls she had been part of excluding had moved on and made new friends. Mia really appreciated that they had been far more resilient than the 'leaders' of the cool group, who were really very insecure and fearful themselves, and therefore picked on others to try and make themselves feel better. Mia actually felt quite sad for these bullies now. They had probably been living in constant fear of losing their positions as the 'leaders' of the cool gang. She also realised that the way she was around other people today was completely dominated by the mistrust she had developed as a result of her attachment, and as a result of the conclusions she had drawn around the bullying. She was held-back, closed-minded and suspicious of people! No wonder she found it exhausting to be around them, and difficult to make friends!

There was another really amazing insight that came to Mia as we continued our discussions. She realised that she had completely attached her survival to that little girl from the countryside that never stopped talking to her! In Mia's mind, the girl had been her saviour. Mia realised that she was repeating the same pattern with her boyfriend. She saw that it was deeply unhelpful to believe your strength derives from somewhere other than your own innate-wellbeing. As Mia's powerful insights percolated into her life, she felt much freer and was much more

approachable than previously. The labels she had had on herself came off altogether. She was uncovering much more independence and resilience within herself, and she was establishing new friendships with confidence. Some months later, her boyfriend did break up with her. Their relationship had been based on her neediness and victimhood, and her boyfriend wasn't ready to explore his own off-track orientation in the relationship. He felt left by the wayside by Mia.

Real change in victim-perpetrator dynamics will never occur through a solidification of such narratives. Real change occurs through insightfully uncovering the place in ourselves which can never be scratched or compromised my somebody else's off-track actions. Such insight can occur years after the events have already passed, with equally impactful results. That is the beauty of what iheart teaches. And that is why we have decided to use an updated version of the bullying lesson from New York mentioned above – a version written by an anonymous teacher who had deep insight through the iheart training.

A teacher was teaching her class about bullying and had them do the following exercise. She had the children take a piece of paper and told them to scrunch it up, stomp on it and really make a mess of it, but be careful not to tear it. Then she had them unfold the paper, smooth it out and told them to say they were sorry. She pointed out that even though they were sorry and tried to fix the paper, those scars would never go away, no matter how hard they tried to repair it.

Then she said, "Fortunately you are not a piece of paper. You are a human being with a beautiful spirit. Nothing anyone says or does can ever hurt or damage who you really are. You are far more powerful and resilient than you may have realised until now. Who you really are cannot be crumpled, scarred or messed up. Who you really are cannot be a victim in any way.

Bullies are suffering and filled with insecurity in the moment. Who they really are can't be damaged either, but sometimes they don't know that and start acting in a detrimental way. You can forgive them and feel compassion for them, but you don't have to accept any of their unhelpful actions". And the children laughed and smiled, happy their teacher didn't try to make them think they were fragile and weak, like pieces of paper; happy that she was kind, wise and honest. The end.