

CHAPTER ONE:

A Community that Responds

Have you noticed a time
that you left someone out?
Oops, oops.
-- *Oops*, Song Three

As Julia stood in the line in the cafeteria for fifth grade lunch, she heard laughter ahead of her that didn't sound friendly. A new student stared down at the linoleum floor. Clearly he was being ridiculed; the girl and boy next to him commented in a mocking way upon his accent and the length of his hair, laughing at each other's cutting remarks. He felt unsure about what he could do to protect himself.

Julia knew immediately that she needed to do something to help. She took action by suggesting that the boy move out of his place in line and into a protected spot behind her. She led him out of harm's way, and went from being an onlooker to someone who stepped forward and intervened. Inside her, something had registered that what was going on was not okay, and she took an active role in responding to mistreatment.

According to the bullying prevention plan of the school, the principal met with the two students and also talked with their parents. The principal also met with Julia and her parents to affirm how she stepped in as an active bystander. Her actions reverberated in the school and set students and staff who heard about the event in new directions of thinking.

Gaining Understanding

Bullying and other forms of harm-doing are learned behaviors. One interpretation is that the person is embedded in the misunderstanding that it is necessary to dominate social situations to feel secure and get one's needs met. What makes it difficult to change is that: (a) changing bullying involves changing unconscious choices and impulses that have become familiar, (b) mistreatment instills fear and isolation, (c) some families foster dominating behaviors, (d) many adults and children have experienced directly the threat of violence and need help healing, (e) our culture gives messages that winners win by dominating others, and (f) violent solutions are rampant in the world at large.

Talking about bullying is only one part of the work. Activating changes, questioning cultural messages, modeling new group practices, and giving direct guidance to children are measures that take investment. These may happen one person at a time but they help exponentially, like the ripples from Julia's choices.

Hearing the Voices of Young People

One of the core facets of *Better Together* is that young people are themselves teachers and makers of knowledge about bullying prevention.

It's important to make our work on bullying prevention **youth-inclusive**. If we only think of this work as something adults do for children, then we miss the reality that young people are seeking ways to address unfairness and mistreatment every day. We need to, and we can, collaborate together across the generations.

When I first began leading the *Better Together* program at Leeds Elementary School in 2011, a group of fifth grade girls came to find me during their after-school time. They wanted me to hear what they thought. I wrote down the messages that they wished for adults to understand.

They said:

We kids also want bullying to change.

So much of this school wants to take it seriously.

We think bullying shouldn't just be ignored, but have consequences.

We think kids should make a list of people they feel afraid of and hand it to their teacher.

Bullying is way worse than having your feelings hurt. When you don't feel like you belong, or when you're afraid to come to school, it's serious.

For some kids, it's like a habit. They don't listen when we say stop. It feels like they've stopped using their hearts.

Rapidly I took notes on what they said, and then read them back to see if I'd captured on paper the essence of what mattered to them. I asked how their statements could be brought into an upcoming school event about bullying prevention. They decided to have their words read by a team of student narrators at the opening of our first *Better Together* assembly.

Peacemaking Discoveries

Their insight – that mistreatment is like a person has stopped using their hearts – shows a way to look at how to help. Let's go back to the story of Julia and examine the words she said. She had to make a choice on the spot. Descriptions of how young people make an intervention can inspire other students.

Thinking back on that day, Julia remembers that Alec, the boy being targeted, stood three people ahead of her in line. It looked like he was ready to cry. She went up to the classmates who were making fun of him, and said, "What are you doing?"

They told her, "Waiting for lunch."

She replied firmly, "No, you're not just waiting for lunch." Then she turned to Alec. She said, "Come stand behind me, and they won't make fun of you anymore. I won't let them."

She listened to her intuition and let her words come out. She had internalized a sense of what needs to happen in a community.

When we face an unexpected situation, as Julia did, we count upon something inside us to guide us to find a way to help. Our basic orientation in the world sets our intention, and this orientation is something we can help children develop. We have an inner touchstone. It's sometimes called that "still, small voice" and sometimes called our conscience. This is a capacity and a resource. Repeatedly I ask children to find their own constructive, friendly inner voice and learn to listen to it.

Gandhi, who inspired generations of peace educators including Dr. Martin Luther King, asserted that the strongest force available to us isn't violence. He said that Satyagraha (pronounced saht-yah-grah-ha) is the strongest force in the world, in the Universe even. It is translated as a combination of truth and love. It's truth-force or truthful love. Contacting this source of truth-force is a personal discovery process. Gandhi predicted:

*Undreamt of
and seemingly impossible
discoveries will be made
in the field of nonviolence.*

Such discoveries are not only things that happen in big arenas; they include everyday interventions that turn problematic situations into a new productive direction. People have the capacity to strengthen or diminish what is around them. In a sense, what Julia did in that moment increased the force of caring in the world, and her example spreads to others who hear her story.

We can encourage children to trust their feelings about whether what is going on around them is okay. They can also learn to be aware if they themselves are helping or hindering. This is one of the facets of social learning: figuring out what makes a situation worse and what makes a situation better. These simple words make up a foundational skill – "Right now am I making things worse or better?"

In creative play children know what to do if they are asked to play a constructive character. If they are asked to play the "good Queen" or the "good King," they can find those qualities. They have the inner framework, the inner encoding for peacemaking and fairness. When Gandhi said that truth-force is the strongest force there is, this means it's not something that is only in some of us. It's a universal resource.

During the nonviolent revolution in what is today the Czech Republic, a famous folksinger named Jaroslav Hutka wrote a legendary song called *Náměšť* (song 24) in 1973. In one of the verses, Hutka says this about truth-force:

Powerful is the weapon, more powerful is law.
Most powerful of all, most powerful of all
is the truthful word.

The song became an icon of peaceful change. Lenka Zbruz is the daughter of one of the people who sang Hutka's song in the square in 1989 as a huge crowd swelled, and the moment marked the turning point toward a peaceful resolution. Lenka says, "This song was the glue... By singing this song together, the people had evidence that the human freedom they were singing about was coming to be." On this

recording, Lenka leads her four-year-old son Filip in singing the song in Czech, just as she learned it as a twelve-year old. Filip carefully pronounces the words as he passes along this heritage.

The Legacy of Work on Human Rights for Children

When schools today develop bullying prevention programs, there is an active legacy of work to draw upon, learn from, and institute.

Going back to the years after World War II, efforts to train children in peacemaking were first in evidence. In the 1950's two sisters, Grace Contrino Abrams and Fran Schmidt, pioneered work on violence prevention, peace education and conflict resolution. Schmidt writes, "We began to write curriculums for teachers: *Learning Peace* and *Peace is in Our Hands* (1960) and articles on Peace Education for teacher magazines." In 1980 after Grace's death, her many friends along with her sister Fran formed the Grace Contrino Abrams Peace Education Foundation.

In the early 1970's in Norway, Dr. Dan Olweus did the first research study on bullying and his work was published that decade in Sweden. Today the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a leading organization and resource in the United States. Their book says, "As early as 1981, he proposed enacting a law against bullying in schools. He argued that it is a fundamental human right for a student to feel safe in school and to be spared the repeated humiliation implied in bullying."

In every state hundreds of schools currently use the Olweus methods. "At our school we have seen amazing results after the first year—increased attendance, increased student achievement, and decreased incidents that lead to suspensions," commented an elementary math and science coordinator at a school working with the Olweus approach.

The appendix has additional resources for teachers and parents. It includes information about the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, the Peace Education Foundation, as well as other organizations.

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How Adults Can Support Children who Ask for Help

What do you do when a student in your class tells you that they have been teased on the bus, or their lunch has been taken, or they were called names by older students in the hall, or harassed in the school bathroom? Each school has reporting procedures to follow, but *what do you say* right then and there?

I've found that it's helpful, first of all, to **validate their concern and engage with them**. Here are sample words that you could use to get this across:

I'm really sorry that happened.
I'm glad that you told me.
I want to help fix this.
I don't want you to be hurt by anyone at school.

In particular, I encourage myself to stand with them, to look them in the eye, and to feel myself caring. Even if I have just a moment of time, I know that children can sense when someone is sincerely responding. This kind of responsiveness helps to teach what it means to be a member of a caring community.

Our intervention is crucial. If it is tempting to add – “What did you do to make this happen? What was your part in it?” – hold back. Although we *do* want to encourage each person to learn how to assess and control his or her own actions, I’ve found that using these types of questions at this point in the interaction rarely increases accountability. Instead what they need initially is to know we have received their message that something upsetting has happened. Our first goal is to connect, so we mirror back to them – *I hear you*.

I suggest to teachers to think what it’s like for you if you are confiding in a friend about a problem you are having with a significant person in your life. You might later start to examine what you can do differently, but the first step you need is to feel heard. You don’t want someone you have trusted to shut the door on you. In our culture one of the things that blocks healing from experiences of violence is that phenomenon of “blaming the victim”.

Children are trying to find their place in a group, and they will absorb what they hear said about them. Mistreatment gives a child false messages about who they are. A child who hears negative words from peers, siblings, teachers or parents begins to feel that this could be true. It’s a mirror of diminishment. We can interrupt this. When harm is occurring, teachers and staff need to receive the information and respond effectively. This helps show that harm is not something “deserved.”

Secondly, in addition to following the other steps that are part of your school procedures, such as reporting the incident to the school principal, verbalize to the child who has come to you that you won’t just leave it at that. **Identify actions that you’ll take to improve the situation.** Let them know that you will make sure there’s a plan to help them, and let them know that you’ll follow up with them. Check in with the student later to see if a change has occurred. They need to feel your continued caring and your determination to make it better.

It makes a difference when people listen and respond. It helps build a child’s sense of self-worth and resilience that their concern is taken seriously.

This assertion is backed up by the findings of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) at Bridgewater State University and their colleagues in the field. At a MARC training in 2012, speakers Dr. Charisse Nixon and Stan Davis invited schools to look at the importance of building connection so that all students have several adults they feel close to in the school. They urged educators to make sure that adults know how to listen, respond, and not minimize. “When we can’t control how Johnny treats Susie,” said Nixon, “we can control how we respond.”

The Youth Voice Project of Nixon and Davis spells out which adult actions don’t help according to their research. Here are the four least effective adult strategies from the perspective of young people.

Children say it is unlikely to help and likely to make things worse if an adult:

1. Tells me to stop tattling.
2. Says it wouldn't have happened if I'd been different.
Tells me I should have acted differently.
3. Tells me to solve it myself.
4. Tells me to ignore it.

In a report from 2001, "*Protecting Our Children*" cited by Stan Davis, Christine Gregoire, then-attorney general and current Governor of Washington, said that "Seventy-one percent of students report that teachers or other adults in the classroom ignored bullying incidents."

When adults make explicit what the standards are, provide new skills, and follow-up on reports of harm, then changes do take place throughout the school. When an adult gets a report (whether from a bystander, the child affected, or a parent), it's recommended that the adult engages, connects, validates, and makes a plan about what kinds of intervention will be appropriate for the situation.

Along with clear consequences to prevent it from continuing, next steps can include:

1. Give support to the person harmed. Show them you understand and you take it seriously.
Talk with them and with their parent, both together and/or speak with each privately. Don't think of it as only a one-time conversation.
2. Check in. Choose a time to talk more later with the student who has been hurt to see if the situation is changing.

Reassure them that mean or biased remarks aren't true about them.

Connect them with other young people to do activities together if they are isolated.

3. Talk privately with the student or students who are doing the harmful behavior to give them clear feedback, and hold them accountable. Follow the steps in the plan outlined by your school for responding to unwanted and harmful behaviors. Include their parents in the conversation.
4. If a different child than the one harmed has reported the situation initially, let this person know that you have followed through. You can speak about this generally and still keep information confidential. They will care that you have taken it seriously.

Sometimes it may be appropriate at the outset to say to the person reporting, "Here's what I think would help – I want to check if there's other pieces of this situation that need to be addressed." This helps them see you are working on the different facets and that you respect their input as you go forward. Another factor is that the child reporting may fear retaliation and need to have adults look out for his or her welfare.

The ways that we do or don't maintain the social agreements will communicate to children every day what actual underlying ethos of the group is being upheld. We are sending a message that we don't care if we say to students that mistreatment in general is not okay, yet when we hear a report that it is occurring look the other way and dismiss the information. What the teacher reinforces is what is real for students.

Children are aware of adults who themselves do unwanted behaviors, those who scream at students at school, and those who ignore aggression and arguments on the playground. They also know which adults can set limits and hold people accountable, and which find language to talk about the nuances of social interactions. These adults model and maintain cooperation and connection.

In 2011 MARC director Dr. Elizabeth Englander studied the self-report of 20,766 children in grades 3-12 in Massachusetts. Her findings revealed that 37-40% of children in grades 3 to 5 reported being victims of bullying, while 14%-19% reported being victims of cyberbullying, and 7-10% reported being victims of both bullying and cyberbullying. Englander went on to comment that:

“Gateway behaviors’ that convey power and contempt, but do not generally break school rules (e.g. taunting, eye rolling) – are the most common type of bullying reported across all the grades. High rates of gateway behaviors being used against targets in the classroom (i.e., presumably while adults are present) indicate a need for training on responding to these behaviors.

The locations where bullying is the most frequent are those where supervision is frequently disputed or absent – such as the playground (in elementary school).”

Teaching Tips: Seven Ways to Foster Community

A staff member at Leeds Elementary School taught her daughter from a young age how to handle problems by working things out. Even as a three-year-old, her daughter took her seriously. One afternoon at play, Charlotte watched her friends becoming increasingly upset and applied what she had learned. She stepped in and said, “What can we do to solve this? We have to solve this problem.” She'd heard these words from her mother, and she had believed that they were important.

Parent educator Elizabeth Crary says that children need “nurturing” and “structuring.” Children need warm, responsive, interactions with the adults in their lives and they also need the structure of learning about social roles, limits, and expectations (*Kids Can Cooperate*, Parenting Press). Dr. Dan Olweus, who as we saw began his systematic study in the early 1970s, has been called the grandfather of research on bullying prevention. He found that children who showed bullying behaviors usually had parenting that lacked both the qualities of attentive nurturing and consistent structuring.

Here are seven ways we can offer both these elements of nurture and structure.

(1) Pay attention to the teasing that happens.

“Oh, they are just teasing. That’s what kids do.” Rather than dismissing teasing as a normal part of childhood, it’s important to listen to the content.

Let’s go back to the story on page one from a college student stopped from using Spanish in preschool by aggressive teasing. This underscores how detrimental so-called teasing can be. This story asks us to be alert, to keep an ear out for content, and check in on what’s being said. If you were the preschool teacher in that program, what could you have done to be aware of this harmdoing and intervene meaningfully?

A teacher might put an arm around both children and say to the boy, “I wonder if you’ve heard Spanish being spoken before. Did you know there are many languages that people speak? Let me teach you some of the Spanish words I know.” But if this nurturing approach didn’t help the child actually stop teasing, a firmer intervention would be needed until safety had been re-established.

When there is teasing, step in firmly but gently with curiosity about what is going on. Give guidance to help children learn. What is the teasing about? When there’s teasing, find out if it’s a fun game for both or if there’s an imbalance. Is one child physically dominating? If we jump in with punishment or outrage, it can actually prevent learning and drive the behavior underground. In that case we might no longer see the teasing, but the root of it hasn’t been reached and so it continues out of sight of adults. Take it seriously and give guidance.

(2) Talk explicitly about what it means to take part in a group.

When I work with children, I clue them in about how it works to be a member of a community, with details that show how I’m reflecting upon a situation and the needs of everyone who is present. I want them to hear my thoughts so that I can be a model for them.

Frances Moore Lappe calls this taking part in a living culture of democracy. In her book, *Getting A Grip: Clarity, Creativity, and Courage in A World Gone Mad*, she writes, “Humans are innately social beings, it’s true, but this doesn’t mean we’re necessarily born knowing how to ‘do’ democracy effectively...democratic skills must be deliberately taught – and practiced – just as are reading or cooking or dribbling a basketball.” (Lappe, p. 33) She lists inclusion, fairness, and mutual accountability as part of the set of system-qualities that make up a living democracy.

It’s the essence of democracy to be able to express yourself while also listening to and valuing others. To help orient toward democratic behavior, I like to say, “Part of growing up is learning how to think about the people around you. It’s important to notice what other people need. We can do both things – we can think about what we need and also think about how others are feeling.” I also look for ways to practice.

When I was teaching in a room where there was one large comfortable couch and a bunch of hard wooden chairs, not in a school but in a community setting, I talked about the differences and asked the children to think together about how we’d share the seating. **I named the reality and asked them to reflect with me how to address it.**

One child named Eric kept rushing for the couch. On a day when there were several very young new children, I met them outside the door first to prepare ourselves. I led activities that welcomed the new people. Then I asked Eric and another child his age to be the hosts, like in a restaurant, and to take the role of making sure all the younger ones had an enjoyable place to sit. They entered the room, and I

waited outside the door, as Eric helped arrange fair and comfortable seating and then announced they were ready.

Here is another example of what active assistance looks like. While working one summer as a nanny, Elizabeth Hight instructed two young sisters what they could do when they were overwhelmed by upset feelings. She said, “They really cared about each other, but they’d gotten into a habit of yelling and hitting when they were frustrated.” As a staff member at Leeds School, she had been exposed to the *Better Together* approach and said she wanted to try it out. Elizabeth described what happened: “I became a bridge between the sisters when communication broke down. I taught them another language, in effect. I’d say to them – ‘It looks like you are frustrated. You need to tell each other how you feel. Hitting won’t tell what you need.’ Step by step they learned how to sit with me and express themselves.”

Rather than saying, “Be nice,” or “Don’t do that,” when we offer children concrete instruction, they are able to try out new behaviors. We can give them a voice at their shoulder that tells specific ways to improve the situation.

(3) When there’s exclusion, reflect back what’s happening and give ways to change.

Patterns of interaction – reaching to link arms with one person while pointedly leaving out another, facing one person exclusively, groaning when placed in a pair with someone – set up immediate signals of who is wanted and unwanted. As we look at how interactions break down, we can help children who are “making it worse” become conscious of their actions.

For example, a six-year-old girl named Joelle told me that she felt left out and shunned by a tight group of four girls who had grown up playing together. I watched and decoded specific actions that the four were doing, and looked at how their actions in a daily manner left out Joelle. Then when something came up, I intervened and coached individuals who were excluding to help them make a new choice. Here are ways that I communicated where a break-down was occurring and coached children about noticing and including.

- * When you entered the room today, you said “hi” to three people by name but you didn’t look at and greet everyone. Let’s notice together who you left out. Let’s think together how you could do that differently. Could you go to each girl who is nearby and say to her “hello” so that no one is left out of your greeting?
- * When you were playing house at recess, I noticed you announced that you were the mother and you had three daughters. Joelle was playing house, too. When you set the number at three, she couldn’t be one of the daughters. She’s looking for a way to be someone special in the game. Could you let there be more daughters?
- * When you announced the kick ball game that you wanted to play, you looked at the faces of only some people but there were five of you outside together. Could you be sure to make the announcement to everyone who is in hearing distance?

(4) Don’t give a child the label of being a bully.

As we expand our language, we expand our thinking. Before the *Better Together* program began at Leeds School, there was an increase in children calling each other bullies. For instance, one fifth grader confided in private, “I’ve been called a bully since Kindergarten. I don’t want to be a bully. I’m different now.” As he described it, he was confused about what he could do to get people to stop putting him in a box. He wanted room to grow, and he felt frustrated.

On purpose, none of these song lyrics say the words, “bully” or “bullying.” Instead the songs focus on new possibilities. They do assert boundaries – like “When I Say Stop, I Mean Stop.” They ask what’s underneath the problem of mistreatment, and they identify what we are mending such as in *Help Comes* (song 6), “we make a circle that is strong.”

When we change the language we use to describe a situation, our perspective changes. Quabbin Mediation director Sharon Tracy says, “All of us have done harm, even if by accident. All of us have been the target. All of us have been bystanders. These aren’t just fixed roles. You can’t identify the “bully” and set them aside and think the problem is solved by labeling and isolating that person. If a person is doing harm, they can change. If a person is a target, that can change. These roles are transformable.”

The aim is to build compassion and foster growth. Tracy adds, “When we think broadly like this, if we’re witnessing harm, we can break the isolation. We can ask the question – if I was doing harm, how would I want someone to interrupt me?”

Stan Davis offered this advice in a conversation on the subject: “The definitions of bully and bullying are confusing and very difficult to apply – after all – how do we know someone’s intention or dominant status for certain? – and the noun ‘bully’ is stigmatizing and leads adults and peers to reject the person – which is not good modeling. The way that I talk about it is ‘actions with potential to harm.’ When you think about it, on a given day any one kid could be ‘a youth who called names’ and ‘a young who was called names.’”

(5) Reinforce being responsible for yourself.

Punishment and coercion are really only effective temporarily. When I start to work with a group of adults or children I explain that the goal is not for me to *make* people change. We can’t make another person change. It’s up to us to seek and take on our next step in growth. That time-worn phrase, “do it because I said so,” has a short term result. The problem is that it doesn’t invite a child to invest in the solution and carry that solution inside. Unless you take in the information and make it your own, you won’t be able necessarily to use it again.

We the adults can become a coach and guide a child toward new directions. It can be a big step to be asked to be more conscious of what we feel, what we do to get our needs met, or what we do when we’re upset. There’s a role that teachers, the principal, the school psychologist, and other staff can play in helping children take responsibility and gain more control over their actions. When a child faces the consequences of shoving someone in the hall or calling names on the bus, it’s important to provide guidance.

A six-year-old boy Lonnie was being called a bully by other children. A teacher took him aside and coached him, “Remember when you told kids this morning that the house they were making was ugly – what if you stopped to figure if it’s a good idea or not to say that? I’m noticing some things that are going on for you. It looks to me like if you watched a situation for a moment it would help. When you’re about to say something that might feel bad – could you try to take that moment to wait?”

I overheard the conversation and wondered what would happen. It turned out that she had spoken so kindly and specifically that her words were useful. Just ten minutes later Lonnie was seated in a circle watching something be passed, and he didn't grab for it before it was his turn. He went over to the teacher who had coached him and said, "I did it. It worked."

Jody Massa offers a perspective. "For some children their mental process pours out. It can be a result of anxiety or insecurity. I will say to children – '**that's an inside your head thought.**' That helps them screen. Another way that I coach children is to say, 'Tell me what's expected behavior right now.' For instance, if another adult is teaching and a child isn't listening, I'd sit next to them and say, let's look together at what your teacher is expecting. Show me that you can do it.'"

She finds it helpful to do close observation of children. She puts her assumptions and expectations out of the picture and lets her understanding develop from watching what they are actually doing.

Another type of approach is to use a reflection sheet. The wording and format can be revised to fit your situation. Working with third to sixth grade students, if a social mistake happened, the first time I gave a verbal reminder. However, if a person didn't regulate themselves, I handed the student an "Oops" form to fill out to underscore what happened and ask them to be more aware and responsible.

THE OOPS FORM

Name _____

(1) Oops! I made a mistake. What was the mistake about?

Respecting the space of others

Respecting feelings

Respecting materials

Letting the teacher teach

The mistake I made was:

(2) How I will fix it:

(6) Use clear, formative consequences.

When a person of any age has an ingrained habit of using power-over tactics of bullying, the awareness model is not enough. Whenever children do harming behaviors, there needs to be direct feedback and clear consequences that teach. A person who is entrenched in bullying needs serious intervention, consistency, and discussion with school staff.

Here's a perspective. If bystanders saw one man strike another man in a restaurant or a park, would people react? Some kind of intervention like phoning 911 would probably occur. However, when school staff members who are monitoring the lunchroom or recess see aggression, sometimes they look the other way. One of the things that keeps bullying going is the misunderstanding that aggressiveness is an acceptable way for young boys, in particular, to relate to each other.

In a school cafeteria I watched two children stand frozen in time right in the main flow of traffic. One child was pushing the other repeatedly. The other boy stared at him like a deer in the headlights,

unable to break away. I was leading a one-day residency, and had never met them before, but I needed to step in.

In order to direct him towards the other boy's facial expression, I asked the one who was doing the shoving: "What message do you think he is sending you?" I wanted the way that I addressed him to provide a chance to feel the reality of the person facing him. We paused together. As he looked, he may have seen that his friend appeared uncomfortable, looked afraid, and didn't want to hit him back. Without words, the boy he had targeted was silently saying very clearly – *I don't like this. I want you to stop.*

Then I added, "Can you show that you get the message?" My tone was even.

He blinked and drew back like he was coming out of a fog.

My aim in this instance was to guide them both to escape the stuck roles they were in. But I know that when we work with a student whose behavior is frequently aggressive, awareness and guidance aren't enough. Adults need to supplement guidance with firm agreements, consequences, and methods of accountability. In such cases, an awareness approach needs to be accompanied by specific information about how to hold students accountable for mistreatment.

Stan Davis has developed a method of accountability that effectively deals with bullying; a school has a written rubric spelling out small and consistent consequences for types of peer-to-peer aggression which the school has decided have potential to harm. These rubrics work best when students have been actively involved in defining potentially harmful acts by their peers.

Davis delineates three different categories:

- Name-calling and exclusion
- Hitting and pushing
- Severe hitting, threat of serious violence, and legally-defined harassment

Each category is addressed on the rubric. If that school where I met the boys in the cafeteria used a rubric-based discipline system, here's what would happen. Davis writes that, "An administrator would hear about the behavior and a clear, small, teaching consequence specified in the rubric would take place, followed by a discussion about the action in which the child would be helped to see the effects of the behavior and to find new ways to meet his or her needs without hurting others.

"For less severe behaviors, for example, the student would call home the first time he or she used that behavior, describe his or her actions, and the student and parent would learn which slightly larger consequence would apply if the behavior was repeated. Then the young person would have adult assistance in thinking about why that behavior is not allowed at school and in choosing new behaviors." (Davis, 2007)

In the story above of the boys in the lunchroom, both children were defending themselves – one by stiffening in retreat, one by blocking social messages while being aggressive. Social signals are tuned in or tuned out like sound waves. Here's an analogy. When sound engineers get ready for a concert, they help the performers in a band get the right mix in their monitor to be able to hear themselves and the other instruments and singers so they can be in coordination.

There's a joke among sound engineers that most performers will ask for "more me" in the sound mix, but being able to hear ourselves is a real need. What we are talking about here is making sure there's enough "us" in the social mix. To get a balance of information coming in, we need to hear ourselves – our needs and responses, and we also need to hear those around us.

A child who is feeling social confusion and disorientation, who tunes others out, may not be hearing their own needs either or feeling the reality of their own agency. One reason might be that they are living with trauma and violence, or have parents whose own negative experiences of authorities and distrust are being passed along.

A child who seems to say – "You can't tell me what to do" – hasn't placed themselves inside a social circle, and perhaps this is because they can't yet trust that circle or even experience how it operates. If a child is acting aggressively, clear consequences in combination with strong guidance bring the presence of community into the forefront.

Drawing a firm circle by backing up agreements lets each person in the community know – here's what can and cannot happen here. At the same time, nurturing contact can offer an experience of trustworthy people.

(7) Keep whispering the agreements.

What does the horse whisperer say to the young colt that is frantically running around a corral? This question can help us explore what children need as well.

Horseman Buck Brannaman, who is called a horse whisperer, is the subject of a documentary film called "Buck." If you see the film (or look up the trailer for the movie online), you'll notice that he isn't literally whispering, or even talking out loud. He approaches the colt with a respectful yet firm attitude as he teaches it how to interact. His manner sets expectations.

In a sense, a well-functioning group is continually whispering to the group members what the agreements and values are. These agreements act like an invisible glue that's keeping the group together. There is a way to work with children using the intention you carry toward them, while also teaching them specific skills for handling upsetting conflicts. It's an invitation to grow together. When we hold these expectations, we help children gain an inner template of the group agreements.

Making and Internalizing Group Agreements

How can we create a circle where new members are welcomed and where festering problems have an avenue to be worked through? When we are explicit about our expectations, we help to hold a group as if we have our arms around the room, saying: "here is what will and won't happen here."

As adults we activate the social agreements and help children stay inside them. We want places where new children are welcomed, not made to fight for their place in a pecking order. We want children to have assistance with the complexities of friendships, the inequalities in life, and feelings of hurt and upset. Standards need to be set clearly. Children need to know where they stand and how they can learn. In addition, they need to feel they are accepted and given room for growth. This is the embrace of community.

The work of Betsy Evans, a High/Scope trainer and the author of *You Can't Come to My Birthday Party* has been a source of inspiration in my teaching. Evans writes that, "I discovered not only that dealing with conflict could be a satisfying and enjoyable part of teaching, but also that children, when given support, were enormously capable problem solvers." She likes to emphasize, "We talk about our rules as reasons." This way, students are carrying the reasons inside themselves from their understanding that this is how a supportive community functions. In contrast, a punishment model implies that the main reason that you behave well is that if you don't, then you are in trouble.

It's not enough to have a poster on the wall of what to do. A word like "respect" is a good summary, but it doesn't say enough specific information to a young child. Spell out what actions support the feeling of respect. Make them living, breathing agreements that can help in many circumstances.

1. Co-create a clear and simple set of group agreements so that each person becomes invested in what they say and why they are there. Explain that every group needs to have guidelines to help people feel welcome and safe.
2. Review each guideline and ask for a response. There's a choice of three hand signals:
Thumbs up will signal agreement,
Thumbs down will signal disagreement,
Placing your hand out flat in the middle will show that you need more discussion before you can decide.
3. Ask for additional ideas. Here's an addition that was contributed by a member of Girls Week at Journey Camp: "We agree not to make fun of each other's body size or appearance." This idea prompted an important discussion. Pause and use the suggestions.
4. Engage children in creating pictorial symbols to accompany the agreements. This is helpful for all ages, not only for young readers.
5. As situations come up, refer to the specific agreement that isn't being followed. This way you are actively using them to provide direction. Expect that they will be tested. Whenever the agreements aren't kept, speak up and give guidance.

Recommended guidelines:

1. I agree to treat all people, including myself, in a friendly way.
2. I agree to talk out problems instead of fighting, calling names, or avoiding.
3. I agree to tell someone – a teacher, my parents, or another adult – about anything that's upsetting that I can't handle myself.

4. I agree to use the Stop Rule.

*If someone is doing something upsetting or unfair, I will say “Stop”
or I’ll go get help asking them to stop.*

If someone asks me to stop, I will stop myself.

5. I agree to pay attention to the needs of the whole group.

I will look for ways to compromise for the good of the group.

These five agreements are used at Journey Camp. The spotlight section of Chapter Two provides details of how they work; it gives potential scenarios and asks children how they’d handle them.

As we guide children, phrases like these are needed to help them live the agreements.

- Puppy play can lead to hurt. Be careful about play fighting.
- Careful how you use the stop rule. (See song 13 for more information).
- Hitting won’t tell what you need. Let me help you figure out what you need.
- When you need to say what you want, use your brave voice.

SPOTLIGHT:

Creating Better Together at Leeds Elementary School (Leeds, MA)

When a student or parent walks into Leeds Elementary School, they can expect a warm greeting in the office and feel an atmosphere of caring despite the large size, a total of eighteen classrooms, serving grades K-5. Leeds is part of the Northampton School District in western Massachusetts.

As I walk down the corridor of trees from the parking lot and push open the front door, I come into a community that is actively attending to both the academic and social curriculum. This is where the name, *Better Together*, was born, where the *Better Together* program was launched by three staff members, Karen Bryant, Janet Decker, and Roxanne Nieman, and where many of the songs and methods described here had a chance to be tested and integrated into the life of the school.

When Karen Bryant, Janet Decker, and Roxanne Nieman initiated the program at Leeds School, they chose a name that highlighted what they wanted to create. They called it *Better Together* to emphasize caring, including, and community building. Along with Principal Joseph Smith, then in his first year as principal, they created a multifaceted plan with classroom workshops, teaching assemblies, staff training, and an evening program for parents. Inspired by the videos from the Pacer National Bullying Prevention Center, they found a videographer and editor who would create short videos with students speaking.

That September of 2011, in the state of Massachusetts, every school implemented new methods of responding to bullying and harassment. In the few years prior, staff had witnessed escalating name-calling, bullying, and social exclusion and wanted to set up new directions that could be enforced.

Leeds School had put into place the state-mandated policies detailing what to do when bullying occurs. There were procedures for reporting bullying that school staff employed, as well as methods for follow-up with the parents of any child doing harm. Principal Joseph Smith described the kind of close community he wanted to foster, and accordingly he added other elements to reinforce the program, including staff training. Over the December holiday of his first year as principal, he spent hours writing up incidents of bullying at the school, dealing with events that needed to be addressed and changed.

This team of four realized that they needed to do more than respond to unwanted behaviors. Their goal was to change the climate in order to address the forces and factors that contribute to bullying. Placing emphasis on building the community provided a solid foundation. All adults in the school were asked to send a united message using their own teaching styles.

The Northampton district policy states: “Preventing bullying and/or harassment is critical for creating and maintaining a safe, secure, and positive school climate and culture, which in turn supports academic achievement, increases school engagement, respects the rights of all individuals and groups, and purposefully builds community.”

Bryant, Decker, and Nieman wanted to sustain behavior changes and reach students who learn through multiple modalities. As a first step, they decided to help students engage in music, creative dramatics and video technology to reinforce critical social-emotional skills. They stated in their grant to the Northampton Education Foundation that to learn empathy, problem solving, conflict resolution, and peace building, students needed visual, kinesthetic, auditory and interpersonal ways to transfer linguistic teachings.

When I began to work at Leeds to launch the *Better Together* program, I presented a menu of suggestions for talk-it-out procedures. We worked to introduce unified social agreements to students, teachers, and parents, and we trained staff on how to intervene when there is bias or harassment. I crafted new songs, skits, and teaching methods to fit what they wanted to address.

To involve students further, Bryant, Decker, and Nieman initiated videos made with students. Professional filmmaker Julie Akeret and editor Tricia Reidy along with Janet Decker created two videos, one for K-2nd and one for 3rd – 5th, which were shown at the first Community Gathering in the fall. In these videos, students were asked to respond to these questions:

What is bullying?
How does a person feel if they are bullied?
Where does it happen?

Poignantly they put into their own words what bullying means to them: “You tell them to stop, but they don’t.” And, “You disappear and crawl into a little ball and cry.”

Then students in the video told what they recommended. One phrase repeated from scene to scene: “Be a friend and lend a hand.” The video also emphasized the three steps of how to mediate conflicts (listed in Chapter Two), as well as other key messages. A group of children held up signs to emphasize the themes:

Include everyone.
Make it better. Don’t make it worse.
Speak Up. Speak Out.

Each video closed with this message: I can work it out. I can make it better. I can be a friend.

Roxanne Nieman described the change in the school climate that occurred during the *Better Together* work she helped launch. “What I see is a cognitive shift. The expectations of what is normal behavior have changed. What used to be excused is no longer excuse-able. There is enough of a consciousness of students doing the right thing to set a new norm.”

Better Together is a phrase we now give to you. You can use it for describing the work in your own school as you develop the kinds of nurturing and structuring that help children feel held in a vital community.

Evidence-Based Practice in Bullying Prevention

We had dramatic results in the first year of the Better Together program at Leeds Elementary School in the grade levels which received focus. By June, the school had documented that there was an 80% reduction in unwanted behaviors in the second grade and a 35% reduction in the fifth grade.

We gave children support - not only when there was hurtful behavior, but also during day-to-day problems in personal relationships. This approach is backed up by the research of Debra Pepler and Wendy Craig of the University of York in Canada. They write that, “School staff may inadvertently encourage bullying if they believe...children’s conflicts reflect play fighting and teasing which do no real harm.” Pepler and Craig emphasize it’s a myth that, “Bullying is a normal part of growing up.” It doesn’t work to believe that, “children are always best left to resolve their own conflicts.” (2000).

Janet Decker, one of the three staff who started *Better Together*, observed something similar, “Children need to have ownership of what they do and learn how to change. The time we invest in setting up the social climate in classrooms is valuable time spent that will be paid back the rest of the year.”

We modeled for children the “work it out” method of conflict resolution. We also involved students themselves in establishing directions so that the young people themselves could be makers of knowledge on how to prevent bullying. We listened to their ideas, and asked them to supply their own words for the concepts.

In five significant ways, the program we created together drew upon the research of Debra Pepler and Wendy Craig and the recommendations from the study by the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) of Canada called *Bullying Prevention in Schools* reflecting their work, that of Olweus, and other researchers in the field.

1. We took a whole-school approach, and focused on developing a positive school culture.

Dr. Dan Olweus, the Norwegian researcher who first pioneered research on bullying starting in the 1980's, emphasizes foundational steps including creating a "positive feeling tone." The NCPC study that incorporates his work states:

Research has shown that narrowly focused programs directed solely at bullies or their victims; situational deterrents (e.g., increasing supervision in bullying hot spots); and zero tolerance policies including school expulsion have limited effectiveness and may actually increase or exacerbate the problem (Fox et al, 2003; Mayencourt, Locke & McMahon, 2003; Pepler, Smith & Rigby, 2004; Shaw, 2001).

2. Students put the new norms in their own words and took part in leading assemblies to announce and underscore the agreements.

Advice from the NCPC states: "The approved policy should be formally introduced to students, staff, and parents to ensure universal awareness of its existence and its key components. It can be launched in various ways including presentations."

3. We trained students to be active bystanders who could step in and intervene.

The NCPC asserts, "Research indicates 85% of bullying incidents are witnessed by other students, yet bystanders try to stop the bullying only 11% to 22% of the time (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Craig & Pepler, 1997)... When bystanders do take an active stand, bullying is stopped within ten seconds over half of the time (Hawkins, Pepler & Craig, 2001)."

4. Instead of punitive consequences, "formative" consequences promoted growth.

The NCPC study explains: The best anti-bullying policies also outline formative consequences that can be adapted to fit the circumstances of particular incidents that have taken place at the school. Formative consequences provide opportunities for students who bully to learn more pro-social ways of interacting with others and to make amends to those affected by their negative behaviour (Heinrichs, 2003; Pepler & Craig, 2000)

5. We focused on building relationships and developing interpersonal understanding.

Pepler and Craig point out:

Through our research, we have come to understand bullying as a relationship problem, suggesting that this behavior arises from complex interpersonal dynamics rather than an individual child's problem with aggression or another child's inability to defend him or herself...A relationship problem requires relationship solutions. The goal of interventions, then, is to enhance children's interpersonal capacity in order to promote healthy relationships both in the present and throughout life. (2006).

When Pepler and Craig describe the role of adults in intervention, they underscore that, "adults are responsible for constructing environments that promote positive peer interactions." (2006) The words

that I use to articulate this are that we help children feel the embrace of their community, and we create a strong circle that holds them. I want children to experience social safety directly.

MUSIC OVERVIEW:

How to Use Songs in this Book in Language Arts

Better Together is specifically designed to support language arts by fostering reading, writing, and self-expression. The content of each chapter is followed by songs and activities to support the theme.

Why It's Worth It to Add Music to the Classroom

“When children repeat songs, they are *re-feeding* the message to themselves,” therapist Sydney Thorn explains. “That’s how songs help. When you sing words that give guidance, instead of saying them, they become encoded in your brain in a different way. They can be more digestible and have a broader emotional impact. Music creates a direct link with the unconscious.”

Debbie Rubenzahl, former family counselor at North Parish School in Greenfield, MA asserts, “Children need a non-threatening way to talk about feelings and basic values. Music is an ideal vehicle for working on personal and family issues. It appeals to children’s love of fun and also can speak to real-life skills. Songs can zoom in on important themes in childhood.”

Jill Person, producer of educational materials for publishers such as Scholastic, and founder and producer of A Gentle Wind recordings for children in Albany, NY, observed:

Kids are coming into school more upset and more vulnerable than ever before. At the same time, teachers have less time for anything besides the things that are on the test. There is less time to sing, and there is less time for addressing emotional crises.

Yet I’ve seen how introducing a song can make a difference in new understanding. It’s worthwhile to add in those three minutes and see how effective it can be. When we use songs, this *is* teaching.

Songs can boost social learning and help students grasp new ideas. For instance, Karen Bryant, Leeds Elementary School teacher, wrote me weeks after a workshop in her classroom, “We keep using what we talk about in the songs to negotiate the complexities of social interactions. Our second grade class learned the song, *We Won’t Leave Anyone Out* (Song 11). The meaning really sunk in when I noticed ‘boys rule’ and ‘girls not allowed’ stickers on the outside of someone’s locker. We processed the problem as a class, and agreed not to do that because it leaves people out. The song helped them focus on a new direction.”

To be human is to be a music maker. Music charges the brain; it helps us think in many dimensions, and it combines intelligences. When we engage with music we are developing our social self, our mathematical sense of patterning, our intrapersonal self-awareness, our interpersonal sense of community, and our linguistic intelligence. Music can be a kind of social medicine that bonds, nourishes, and promotes learning.

When we sing songs, we remind ourselves that our voices matter. Sharon Tracy, director of Quabbin Mediation comments, “People learn from music in a much more deep and visceral way.” Isobel Arthen, who sings on the last song, *Turning of the World* (Song 40, by Ruth Pelham) says, “When I sing that song I feel like right at that moment we *are* changing the world.”

Songs can be visitors. In a moment a new thought is expressed and a conversation is started. The rhythm holds the idea, and it’s easy to recall. Songs are like friends that sit down next to you to offer support. I’ve found that a child can receive comfort and understanding from phrases like “In that quiet place where nothing will harm you,” and “Here’s a hand pulling you on.”

For generations, song games were a standard way for children to learn about how to cooperate. It was common for children to sing throughout elementary school in the classroom with their teacher. In recent years it appears that the use of music by classroom teachers has become stigmatized, as if isn’t about real learning.

As a graduate school teacher in the Integrated Teaching Through the Arts Program at Lesley University, for fourteen years I’ve helped classroom teachers bring music directly into their curriculum. Teachers report that if they introduce singing without apology for their voices, that the songs strengthen the community. They use songs to teach science and social studies units and to give children assistance in developing the ability to negotiate social situations, handle strong feelings, and learn how to be a caring member of a group.

Basic Methods to Bring Language Arts and Social Skills Together

Reading and Writing:

Photocopy the lyrics to three songs of your choice and combine them into a book. To promote reading, use the lyrics.

After becoming familiar with a song by listening to it without reading, hold the lyrics and read them in unison. Review any unfamiliar words. Now read along as you sing. Another option is to ask students to copy the lyrics into their own handwriting.

Conversation and Songwriting:

Karen Bryant describes how she used a song from this collection to help students refocus. She said, “We had an episode where my class was disrespectful to the student teacher in Physical Education. They were silly, out of control, and uncooperative. Before we moved on to math lessons, we needed thirty minutes to process it. The way we did it was use the “Work It Out” steps (song 34), and this led them to decide to create a letter of apology to the student teacher.”

Expressive Writing:

The twelve song activities in Chapter Five provide methods of bringing social skills directly into language arts. Students engage with the topics using sentence starters, song patterns, and discussion investigations. The simple patterns invite new verses to be created.

The three songs that begin that chapter are particularly designed to launch creative writing.

- * *Follow the Voice*, song 29, offers a narrative about setting out on a path that is true to yourself.
- * *Fire Talk*, a 7 minute track, song 30, is about the time that a child comes of age. It provides a powerful visualization of a traditional vision quest with a narrative story and lyrical flute music suggesting the flight of birds.
- * *The Sun Inside Us*, song 31, can encourage poetry on the theme, “When you were born.”
- * Children of a variety of ages from K-6th can use *I Want to Know Your Name*, song 39, to celebrate people who matter to them.
- * Longer songs with more complex information work with grades 3-6 like *Turning of the World* by Ruth Pelham, song 40, the final song on disc two.

Two Types of Classroom Activities

A song can provide a building block for growth. The Activity Section of each song in the book shows ways to use these two techniques. With a short segment of time, even five minutes, young people can discuss the song or use it to inspire drawings.

1. Affirmation Drawing

2. Discussion Questions

The affirmation drawing suggestion for “Help Comes” (song 6) says:

Draw a person who the song could be referring to: a person who needs help, perhaps a person who is upset or sad, or who has had a loss.

The discussion question for “When I Say Stop” (song 13) says:

If someone grabs our hands or starts to play fight, how do we know if that’s okay with us?

AFFIRMATION DRAWING

For busy teachers: 5 minutes, or 10-15 minutes when possible.

PreK-3rd

Set up a four day unit. Play a different song each day on a related theme. At the end of the unit, replay songs children want to hear again.

Each day write the name of the song of the day on the board.

Draw, Listen and Affirm:

1. Fold a piece of paper in half to create a small book.
2. While listening to the song of the day, children draw a picture on one of the four sides of the paper. If time allows, play the song twice. See encouraging questions below.
3. If they are able, students copy the name of the song on the top of the page.
4. Option: Help students share their drawing with a partner each day.
5. Teach them the skill of social responsiveness while using these drawings. Students can point and say, "Tell me more about this," or, "I like how you did this." Have them practice making concrete observations. "I like the way you drew the boy's eyes." "I like this tree." "I like the squiggles that show how the person is upset."

Examples: Song 13, When I Say Stop
 Draw a situation where a child might want to say, "Stop."

Song 15, Earth, My Body
 Divide a circle into four parts. Draw earth, air, fire, and water in each segment.

Song 31, The Sun Inside Us
 Draw a time something changed in your life or you made a change.

PreK-6th: Other songs that lend themselves to meaningful drawings

1. Colors of Earth Song 4
2. That Quiet Place Song 16
3. Tree of Life Song 19
4. Follow the Voice Song 29 (CD Two, track 10)

Questions to Encourage Drawing:

Tell children that they don't have to draw realistically like a photograph to free them up for expressing things their own way. Many songs, not just those listed above, can give an opportunity for listening and drawing. If a child feels stumped, you can support their drawing process with questions like these:

- Can you make a doodle or a design that goes with the song?
- Can you pick a color that goes with the song?
- How do you want to move your pencil or marker—fast, slow, in circles, jagged?
- What expression could you put on a face?
- If you selected a different and unexpected color, what would you pick?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For busy teachers: 5 minutes, or 10-15 minutes - when possible.

Grades 1st- 6th

1. First, play a song to introduce a topic. Ask students to listen to the words and imagine the story of the song.

2. Pose a discussion question suggested in the activity section for each song, or ask a general question for exploration such as, “What stays with you from the song?”
3. Provide lyrics to read or sing-along. After the discussion, play the song again.

SONGS THAT SUPPORT CREATIVE WRITING Grades 3-6

1. Mama’s Weaving, Song 2
2. That Quiet Place, Song 16
3. Great Big Circle, Song 17
4. There is a Song, Song 18
5. Tree of Life, Song 19
6. Believe, (words by Isolina Leiva-Bowes) Song 22
7. Náměšť by Jaroslav Hutka, Czech Peace Song sung in Czech and in English, Songs 24 and 25
8. Follow the Voice, Song 29
9. Fire Talk, Song 30
10. The Sun Inside Us, Song 31
11. I am a Person, Song 33
12. I Want to Know Your Name, Song 39

Answers to Questions About Using the Music

How can you help students feel involved in singing?

- * Make an agreement to support each other’s singing voices and make it socially safe to sing. Don’t allow anyone’s voice – including yours, the teacher’s voice – to be criticized or judged. Let them know they are safe from having the way they sing evaluated.
- * Emphasize that music builds community. Identify that this goal is different than highly produced music on television and recordings. Let them know that at school we sing in such a way that everyone can be actively involved. This way music belongs to all of us.
- * Offer to listen to songs that they have created. Instead of pushing any wider performance of the song, validate it on its own and show that you feel songwriting is a valuable way to learn.
- * Use songwriting within your curriculum. Assign writing a song as a way to express what they have learned. For example, create songs about the rainforest as a way to digest the facts.

How is the final section of the second recording different?

The fifth chapter (and the corresponding songs on the recording) encourage songwriting. The format of the songs can be a model for adding thoughts relevant to your own classroom.

Sample song: **Better Together** (Chapter Five, Song 38)

Verse One:

When you start to whisper,
it's like you turn your back on me.
Let's not bring that into our school.
I wish you could see that we're better together,
Better together, better together.

Format for writing new verses:

When _____
It's like _____.
Let's not bring that into our school.
I wish you could see that we're better together,
Better together, better together.

Sing About Us (Song 32) also shows how to use the pattern of the song to create more verses. Other selections starting with Song 36 and in particular Song 39, *I Want to Know Your Name*, have a spoken conversation with the listener and tell how to add more words.

Can I photocopy pages of this book?

Yes, any portion of the book can be copied for classroom use, but not for sale.

Do I need to ask permission before singing songs in an assembly?

No permission is needed. The songs are offered to be sung freely and used widely.

In general, it's a recommended practice to give the source of any song you are singing by telling the name of the person who wrote it or the cultural tradition it comes from.

The copyright comes into play only if you are using songs to make a recording which you will be selling. If you are making a recording to raise money for your school, you can contact me and arrange to be able to record without payment needed.

How can I get the chords for the songs?

The chords aren't available in the book so that the pages stay straight-forward for teachers to photocopy and use for reading. You can find chords for selected songs listed on the website www.sarahpirtle.com

How do I locate the numbering of songs on the second CD?

A reference page is at the end of the book.

What is a good starting place for locating a song that will be relevant to my students?

A potpourri of styles and subjects are contained in this recording, organized by theme rather than by age. Each song has a suggested age range. For instance, a song for older elementary, *Knock on the Wall* (song 23) is a song about a friendship during the time of the Underground Railroad, which can be used to talk about people looking out for each other.

In contrast, *Two in the Fight* (song 10) is a finger-play aimed for ages three to eight, but can be humorously employed in upper elementary. Some selections have a wide age span. *Earth, My Body* (song 15) has been enjoyed as a song for people who range in age from five to fourteen years old.

Choose one of the five chapter themes. At the start of each song, the “focus” lists the kinds of conversations and skill-building which the song offers. As you look for a song that will be meaningful for you students, here are starting places.

Connection. Building community.

For K-3rd Oops Song 3
For 3rd-6th Mama’s Weaving Song 2

Communication. How to talk it out.

For K-3rd We Won’t Leave Anyone Out Song 11
For 3rd-6th Talk It Out Song 8

Including. Being part of a circle.

For K-3rd Make New Friends Song 14
For 3rd-6th Great Big Circle Song 17

Promoting fairness and respect. Support when something isn’t okay.

For K-6th My Mother and I Song 26, track 7
For 3rd-6th The Ballad of Juanita Nelson Song 21, track 2

Expressing. Sharing your own ideas.

For K-3rd Sing About Us Song 32, track 13
For 3rd-6th Fire Talk Song 30, track 11