Coping with Peer Rejection at School
From Research to Application

A. The research summary

A Phenomenological Aspect of Peer Rejection among Socially Competent Pupils in Elementary and Junior High Schools
Binstock (2003), doctoral dissertation submitted to The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Background:
Studies dealing with the implications of peer rejection on later development indicate that pupils experiencing harsh and continuous rejection over the years are inclined to dropping out of school, becoming criminals, vagrancy and joining street gangs in order to fulfill the basic need to belong, the need for security and the sense of capability that the group gives the child. These children may reach a stage of despair, a decline in their self-image, loneliness and seclusion, and behavioral difficulties, and they may also suffer later from serious emotional disturbances and lack of ability to create meaningful relationships as adults. Likewise, research shows that rejected social status is connected to a broad spectrum of negative social behaviors, such as conflicts, aggression, hyperactivity or immature forms of social and cognitive play.

Description of the research:
The research was conducted according to the narrative-qualitative approach, adopting the salutogenic point of view for observation of rejection along the continuum from social competency to problematic competency (chronic rejection) and the ecological approach. The focus of observation was in the context of normative relations among socially competent people, while considering interpersonal relationships, formation of the peer group and different social structures among the age cohort in the framework in which the rejection experiences occur. The analysis of the material collected focused on examining emotional aspects, using coping strategies and perceiving the role and the place of significant adults (caregivers, teachers and parents) in helping all of the pupils experiencing peer rejection.

Data:
Research findings indicate that socially competent children, as opposed to the chronically rejected, are capable of coping with relatively short-term rejection which takes

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place occasionally, even if it is relatively severe (such as a peer ban). A range of effective coping strategies and advice for effective coping were drawn from them. Further significant data indicated that teachers and parents often do not have sufficient knowledge about the issue of rejection and they lack the tools to help and treat the matter, and socially competent children frequently refrain from turning to their teachers for assistance in situations of rejection, primarily because of their inadequate treatment of these issues.

**Conclusions and recommendations:**
Crucial guidelines were generated by these data to serve the purposes of treatment and educational work with peer rejection, and the need for training mental health professionals, educators and parents to provide assistance and treatment for rejection issues which are so prevalent among chronically rejected pupils and socially competent pupils.
B. Introduction to the Application Kit:
Social belonging is a basic need among all people, and its prevention or absence cause difficult feelings of loneliness and contribute to a decline in the feeling of self confidence and the feeling of self esteem. Children practice and get trained in social skills that will help them to fulfill this need from the time they are toddlers. Society, for its part, encourages children to belong to their peer group, and often undermines the importance of fulfilling the seemingly conflicting need – to be alone. The ability to enjoy the benefits of being alone is vital and complements social belonging, since it allows, among other things, for the development of other attributes, such as: developing internal speaking (what is comfortable for me and what is not, what do I want, how is it best to behave), self-calming and self-adjustment, developing creativity and imagination and even planning future social moves (who do I want to be friends with and who do I not want to be friends with, when and where is it best to meet, etc.).

In elementary school, extensive social learning occurs simultaneously to academic learning (both during lessons and particularly during recesses), in the course of which children adapt refined social skills to themselves, that will allow them to maneuver their way effectively in the company of their peers. Thus, they will be able to enter into social activity, primarily games, and identify the rules, maintain enthusiasm for the game and know how to behave when conflicts occur, make friends and respond flexibly when social situations are not comfortable for them.

This learning is highly accelerated at the elementary school age (grades 4-6) and the beginning of junior high school, when children demonstrate a growing level of independence and greater need to form their social lives without the mediation of adults. Therefore, children frequently adopt problematic social norms which invite experiences and situations of social rejection, such as: betrayal, verbal and physical injury, excommunication, ostracism or ignoring a child. Intervention at the beginning of this stage will help children develop awareness to basic needs, social hardships, their impact and the ways to cope with them in the present and the future.

Nevertheless, it has to be taken into consideration that in every classroom there are children lacking social skills, who find it difficult to join in and belong to the peer group. Or – the peer group, for its part, doesn't allow them to belong to the group due to the differences that are part of them, such as: difference in appearance (children with heavy movements or physical handicaps), difference in origin – immigrant children who have difficulty speaking the local language, or are unfamiliar with local customs, differences in behavior – especially among children who demonstrate aggressive behavior which is not pleasant for the children in the class. Such children need more than the classroom intervention proposed, and referring them to a professional (school counselor or psychologist) should be considered in order to help them and promote their control over social skills and competencies.
Background:
Following the study by Binstock (2003), The Psychological and Counseling Services of the Ministry of Education, Israel decided in conjunction with "Ashalim" of the Joint Distribution Committee – Israel to take it upon themselves to develop an educational treatment kit designated for all pupils, for the purpose of providing a response to the deficiency in the education system's help for both the competent and the struggling population alike, in coping with peer rejection, and directed towards providing differential needs of children and developing resiliency among all children in coping with rejection situations and experiences of rejection.

The kit is intended for school counselors and psychologists for the purpose of counseling and instructing teachers in educational work with pupils, counseling parents and treating rejected pupils.

Areas of application:
1. **Manual: Assistance in Coping with Social Peer Rejection Experiences** which includes extensive theoretical and empirical information and guidelines for treatment of rejection in conjunction with a **Guidebook for Instructing Educators** which include practical knowledge and workshops – this manual is designated for school psychologists and counselors. Written by Dr. Osnat Binstock (see Appendix A).

2. **Group role-playing CD facilitated by an educator** which invites the pupils to create a select imaginary reality while taking the difficulties along the way into consideration, and while making points of view on desirable social proceedings flexible. Design and production: Heidi Halevy, Pablo Ariel & Dr. Osnat Binstock (see Appendix B).

3. **Guide for Individual Coaching of the Child who has Experienced Social Rejection** with a cognitive-behavioral approach, as an auxiliary tool for the school psychologist or counselor's work with the rejected child. Written by Dr. Osnat Binstock and Pablo Ariel (see Appendix C).

4. **Work with movies**
   a. **Selected movies on the subject of rejection** - guided watching for adults. Written by Dr. Osnat Binstock.
   b. **Animation films** demonstrating frequent experiences of rejection (following the taxonomy by Asher, S.R. et al, 2001) – for pupils. Created by: Pablo Ariel and Dr. Osnat Binstock (see Appendix D).

5. **Lexicon of terminology** – for identification and consideration of issues of rejection, intended for counselors, teachers, parents and pupils (see Appendix F).

6. **Poster of the model of the social arena** which relates to the following parameters: location in the area, circles of consideration, social mobility (existing and desired) and products of coping with rejection. Created by Dr. Osnat Binstock (see Appendix E).

7. **The application poster** (see Appendix F).
Use of the Kit Components:

a. In lessons that deal with social issues - instructed by a teacher for the improvement of the social climate.

b. In a special room for social cultivation – an activity instructed by a group escort or professional for small group, whole class and individual treatment.

c. In the schoolyard or the hallways of the school – spontaneous social activity accompanied by ventilating to the extent needed at the beginning of the lesson after the recess and planning discussion activities and follow-up afterwards.

d. In the counselor’s or psychologist’s room – treatment and support for the rejected child.

e. In providing guidance for parents regarding the rejected child and in the context of improving the classroom environment.
APPENDIX A

The Ministry of Education

The Psychological Counseling Service

"A Place For Everyone"
Assistance in Coping with Social Peer Rejection Experiences

A Handbook for Mental Health Professionals

With an Instructional Manual for Educators

Written by: Dr. Osnat Binstock
(The Handbook is based on her doctoral dissertation, *A Phenomenological Aspect of Peer Rejection among Socially Competent Pupils in Elementary and Middle Schools*, The Hebrew University, 2003.)
Table of Contents:

Foreword

First Part - Theoretical Introduction
Chapter 1 - Conceptual Aspects:
  • Peer Rejection – phenomena or experience?
  • A salutogenic aspect of rejection – from a problematic to a normative social behavior

Chapter 2 - from a problematic to a normative social behavior:
  • What is the relationship between the peer group and the immediate surroundings?
  • What are the characteristics of the social interaction taking place within the peer group?
  • What major social structures related to social rejection can be identified in this group?
  • What are the characteristics of the sub-groups within the peer group that are related to social rejection?
  • What are the characteristics of the significant interpersonal relationships with respect to social rejection?
  • How does rejection manifest itself in the children's daily life?
  • What other factors are connected with the appearance of rejection?
  • What are the contexts in which social rejection appears?
  • What attempts have been made to explain the creation and occurrence of rejection?
  • What is the difference between dynamics in the process of acquiring social status and the dynamics of consistency in the identity of the "rejected"?
  • individual differences or history of socialization – where do special cognitive processes that are unique to a social rejection derive from?
  • What are the effects of long term rejection?
  • Why is rejection not only an objective phenomenon in its essence, but rather, primarily, a subjective experience?
  • What are the residual emotional effects left from the experience of peer group social rejection among children?
  • What are the characteristics of strategies for effective coping with rejection experiences?
  • How can experiences of rejection be observed from the salutogenic point of view on the continuum between social competence and problematic competency?
  • Why is it important to help socially competent children to cope with experiences of rejection, and what can be learned from their means of coping with respect to helping chronically rejected children?
  • Why can incidents and experiences of social rejection not be prevented and how can we coach and create resiliency that is applied in coping with them?
  • What is the role of educators and parents in the coaching and providing support for coping with experiences of rejection, and how can mental health professionals help them?

Chapter 3 - About the research:
• Research summary and findings
• Main conclusions
• Guidelines for three ecological circles: Rejected children, peers and parents

Second Part: The narrative of rejection
Chapter 1- listening to rejection stories in two circles:
• Stories of those who experience rejection
• Peer's 'rashumon' of one rejection case

Chapter 2 - Stories illustrating means of educational assistance for coping with rejection:
• Assistance of bartering social group for the rejected
• Granting social roles to enhance social status
• A new chance for severe rejected children - changing class or school

Third Part - Training the school team:
Chapter 1 – Teacher's place among the caregivers circle
Chapter 2 – Dealing with teacher's questions about rejection
Chapter 3 – Training program for teachers
Chapter 4 - Guidelines for working with animated films dealing with rejection
Chapter 5 – Guide for "Gaia" – a social role play game

Fourth Part - Individual coaching for the rejected child:
Chapter 1 – goals for individual coaching
Chapter 2 – Coaching a rejected child
Chapter 3 – "Roni is a jolly good fellow" - a coaching story
Chapter 4 – Stages and guidelines for coaching
Chapter 5 – Using the magnet chart technique
Chapter 6 – Tools for individual coaching

Fifth Part - Parents as partners in school intervention:
Chapter 1 – Inclusion of parental sensitivities and expectations
Chapter 2 – A systematic planning process before meeting parents
Chapter 3 – A background check of parental sensitivities and expectations
Chapter 4 – Suggestions for parental strategies in helping the rejected child
Chapter 5 – Stories which illustrate counseling parents of rejected children

References
APPENDIX B

The "Gaya" Social Role Playing Game

Written by: Heidi Halevy,
Dr. Osnat Binstock and Pablo Ariel

Application team in the Help and Prevention Programs Division of the
Psychological and Counseling Services of the Ministry of Education,
Israel

What is role playing?
Role playing is a game that functions differently from familiar board games. In
board games, the whole game runs according to certain rules and every
player has to abide by them, and operate them to his own advantage. Many
times, this form of a game encourages the participants to try to change the
rules of the game in order to place them in a better position.

Role playing places the emphasis more on the content than on the rules, and
this is by defining a framework story, guidelines for each character in the story
and the rules of the world in which the story takes place. The player puts
himself in the shoes of the character, and thus opens himself to new options
for coping with different situations.

Among other things, the open framework of role playing allows for:
- Emotional identification with the story which invites coping with
  emotional content matter
- Creating situations which simulate real world situations and produce
different degrees of directed social behavior.
- Stimulating creative thinking, and thus new solutions to situations in the
  real world
- Placing the children at the center of the stage as the "leading actors"
  responsible for the proceeding of the game.

Structure of the game
Application of the game is based on the preparation of a framework story,
tasks and challenges for the group and for the characters, defining the
characters and creating coping situations for the participants.

The game is like an ongoing story. At every meeting, one chapter of the story
is played. At the first meeting, the tasks are very structured. Thus, the
opportunity is given to the players to first become familiar with their characters
and the rules of the game. In the subsequent meetings, the game is gradually
transferred to the hands of the children; though very clear game limits within
which the game is played are always maintained.
The "Gaya" Game
"Gaya" is a unique role playing game with a twofold purpose: to be a fun and interesting game, as well as to serve as a framework that reflects and allows for reflection upon familiar social challenges from the children's daily lives.

Educational goals
1. The game produces different social situations requiring consideration by the participants.
2. The game includes different metaphors which serve as a tool for speaking about daily social situations.
3. Beyond the experience, the game essentially calls for creating products which themselves reflect the experience of the children throughout their journey.

"Gaya" – Role Playing Game: Facilitator's Handbook
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APPENDIX C

The Ministry of Education
The Psychological Counseling Service

Guide for Individual Coaching of the Child who has Experienced Social Peer Rejection

For use by school psychologists and counselors

Written by Dr. Osnat Binstock and Pablo Ariel
The Guide is based on data from the doctoral dissertation "A Phenomenological Aspect of Peer Rejection among Socially Competent Pupils in Elementary and Middle Schools" (Binstock 2003) and on guidelines which were generated by that data.
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Stages of Coaching and Guidelines for Doing It

Coaching According to the "Magnet Board" Technique

Tools Available to the Coach
  Spectogram – Use of aids for observing complex relations
  Chart for characterizing and getting acquainted with 'the inner group'
  Drawing a group – projection of 'the inner group'

References
APPENDIX D
On Animated Films for Objects' Theater
Written by Dr. Osnat Binstock, Pablo Ariel and Hana Shadmi

General goal:
To raise awareness to situations and experiences of social rejection by watching and discussing animation films which present rejection incidents.

Notes for the facilitator:
Children are constantly experiencing rejection by their peers (during school classes, at recess time and on their way home), however, they do not always confide in any peer or the teacher regarding these experiences. The animation films describe frequent rejection incidents that take place in the schoolyard and in activity outside of the school, and invite putting feelings into words and checking effective and ineffective ways of coping. It is important to allow children to watch the films without any introductions and only afterwards to hold a discussion in the classroom. Following the work on the films, it is also possible to have the children write personal journals in which they can tell about an incident of social hardship that they experienced and how they dealt with it. It is not recommended to encourage children to point out other children in the classroom who have experienced rejection by them, but rather to speak in general about children and how they feel, think and act.

Goals of the meeting
1. Raising awareness among children to frequent situations which result in rejection experiences.
2. Recognizing the dynamics among the different participants in the incident – the rejecters and the rejected, and the bystanders.
3. Relating to the feelings that such incidents cause for the rejected and his strategies of action.
4. Experimenting with problem solving in rejection situations.
5. Locating sources of help – a friend, a teacher, a parent.

Instructions for working with animation films dealing with daily situations of rejection.
The films are constructed like puppet theater without words, and the puppets are not real characters, but rather the palms of hands representing children. A social rejection incident and the way of coping with it are presented as the main point of each film. The films invite the viewer to get to know and identify with the different characters (a rejected child, a child bystander hesitating to help the rejected child, a popular leader, a band of children, etc.) and in effect, each child creates his own story. It is therefore important to give legitimacy to different opinions and different stories that the pupils create after watching the films. The film serves as a trigger for discussion and the continuing creativity of the viewers regarding the subject.

It is recommended to show the film twice:
• Following the first screening, it is recommended to allow the pupils to tell the framework story of the film.
• Following the second screening, leading questions can be used to help the pupils construct the story and the message that the film creates. The second screening will be influenced by the things said in the discussion after the first showing and will allow pupils to see things that they did not see beforehand.
APPENDIX E
(From the doctoral dissertation by Osnat Binstock, 2003)

The location in the rejection arena (See below the research model which illustrates the story line):

The assumption is that everyone in the peer group has a part in the incidents of rejection and the experiences occurring because of it (following Coie 1990). Therefore, metaphorically the location in which the social rejection occurred is considered like a wrestling ring, in which four groups of participants in the event (the interviewees) are observing: at the center of the wrestling ring, on one side of the ring are those same pupils personally experiencing the rejection; on the other side are those "active participants" – at times they themselves are the rejecting party and at times they are friends helping the one rejected or the one rejecting; in the balcony are those pupils who are the "bystanders" during the rejection; outside of the ring area are the "significant adults" who are parents and teachers.
Coping with Social Rejection – From Research to Application

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Lexicon of Terminology

Social Role Playing
"Planet Gaya"

Social Role

Toolbox

Mapping closeness degree

The Rejection Arena

Training Space

Social Mobility

Discussion of Problematic Social Situations

Animation Films

Individual Coaching

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