

Bullying and the role of anxiety in school children:

What we know and what we can do about it

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Children who are bullied report:

- › increased psychological symptoms and disorders
- › physical ill-health
- › poor peer relationships
- › school avoidance

Children who bully others report:

- › increased psychological symptoms and disorders
 - › a range of antisocial behaviours
 - › poor academic achievement
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A specific type of aggressive behaviour

- › unprovoked
- › intent to cause harm
- › occurs repeatedly
- › involves power imbalance

“a type of proactive aggression in which aggressive acts are ...[used to gain]... interpersonal dominance” (Crick & Dodge)

- › direct physical
 - › direct verbal
 - › indirect - often social manipulation or relational victimisation
 - › new phenomenon - SMS, e-mail or internet based bullying
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How many young people report being bullied?

- › 24 - 33% in large samples of 12-14 year olds (Bond et al., 2001, Haynie et al., 2001, Nansel et al., 2001)
- › lower rates in younger samples (11%, Kumpulainen & Rasenen, 2000)

How many young people report bullying others?

- › 23-25% report bullying others “once or twice”
 - › 7-8% report “weekly”
 - › boys have been over-represented in these surveys
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The main interventions that have been promoted use a “whole-school” approach.

These interventions include strategies such as

- › education;
- › curriculum activities;
- › policy development and procedures
- › safe school environment

Outcome has been mixed

A recent meta-analysis of school-based programmes (Campbell review; Farrington & Ttofi, 2009)

Overall programs reduced bullying by 20-23% and reduced victimization by 17-20%

We probably need to pay attention to a range of factors

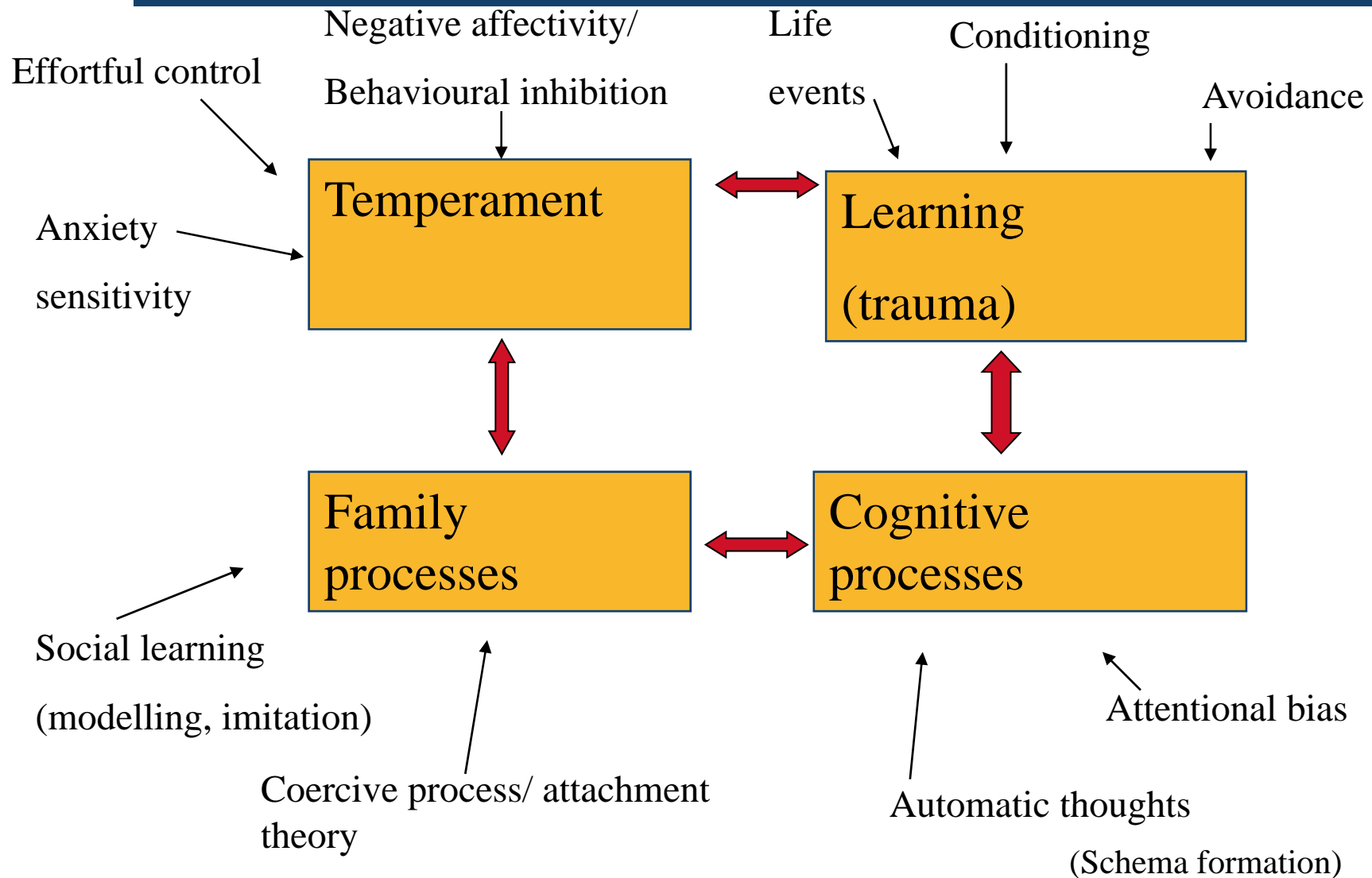
A social-ecological model of bullying/victimization

<u>Individual</u>	Depression?	Anxiety?	Impulsiveness?	Lack of problem solving?	Other?
<u>Family</u>	Poor supervision?	Abuse?	Aggression in the family?	Lack of parental involvement?	Other?
<u>Peer group</u>	Bullying is accepted?	Bullying is done by a group of students?	Bullying is done by the athletes?	Bullying is mostly done by individuals?	Other?
<u>School</u>	Adults bully others?	Adults don't intervene in the bullying?	Students who bully are punished? (versus being helped)	The school climate is negative?	Other?
<u>Community</u>	High level of aggression in community?	Are there few community resources?	Do community-school partnerships exist?	Is the school an integral part of the community?	Other?

From
Swearer,
Espelage
&
Napolitano
(2009)

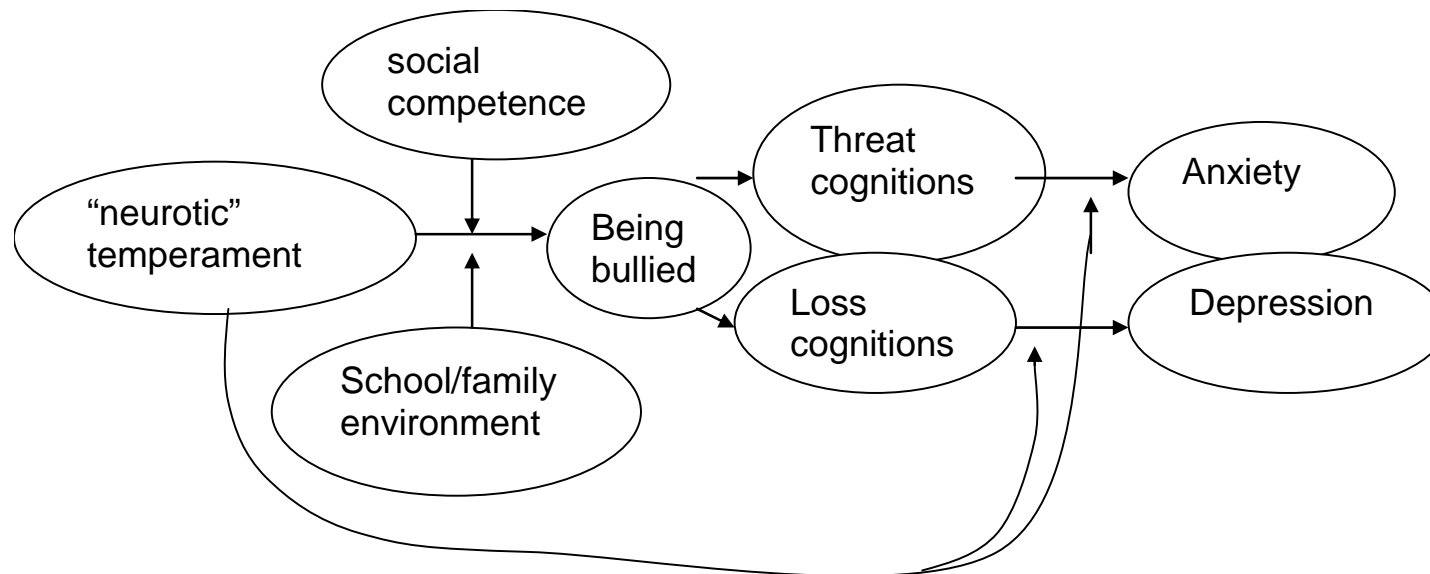
Being bullied has been associated with:

- › internalising disorders (anxiety, depression)
 - › externalising problems (oppositional behaviours, conduct problems, ADHD)
 - › difficulty making friends, fewer friends (having friends is protective factor)
 - › use of internalised coping (eg I just worry) or avoidance
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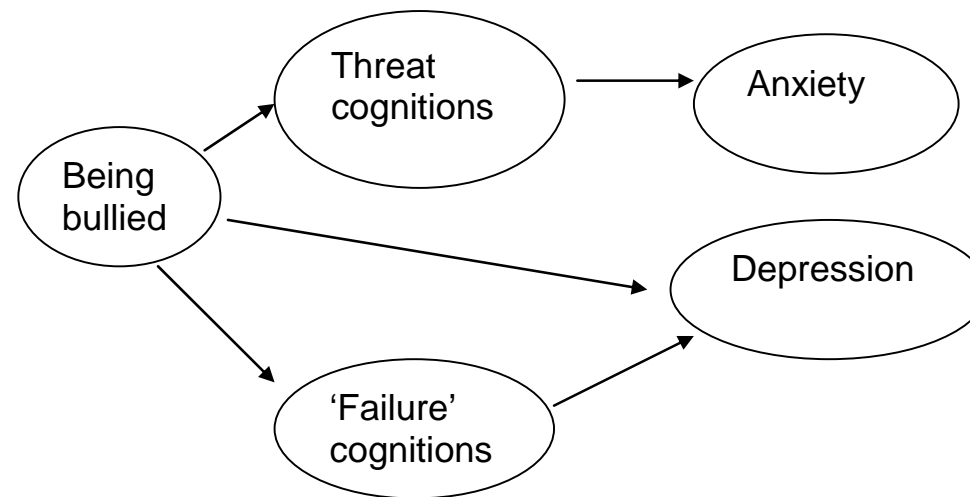


A conceptual model of bullying, anxiety and depression

(Hunt, Rapee & Peters)



The final model



Lack of moderation effect of temperament

- › Once bullying occurs, temperament appears to have little influence on development of emotional symptoms

Role of threat-related cognition

- › Significant role for children who have been bullied in their experience of anxiety symptoms

Role of 'personal failure'-related cognition

- › Appears to play a significant role, but experience of being bullied appears to have a direct effect on depressive symptoms
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64 young adolescents aged 12-15 (mean age 13 years) attended a group program within their school

Inclusion criteria was the self-reported experience of being bullied at school and clinically significant symptoms of anxiety

Students were assigned to groups of 5 – 8

Groups were randomly allocated to the treatment program or a wait-list control

The majority of participants were male (n = 55) (85.9%)

Berry, K. & Hunt, C. (2009) *Journal of Adolescent Health*

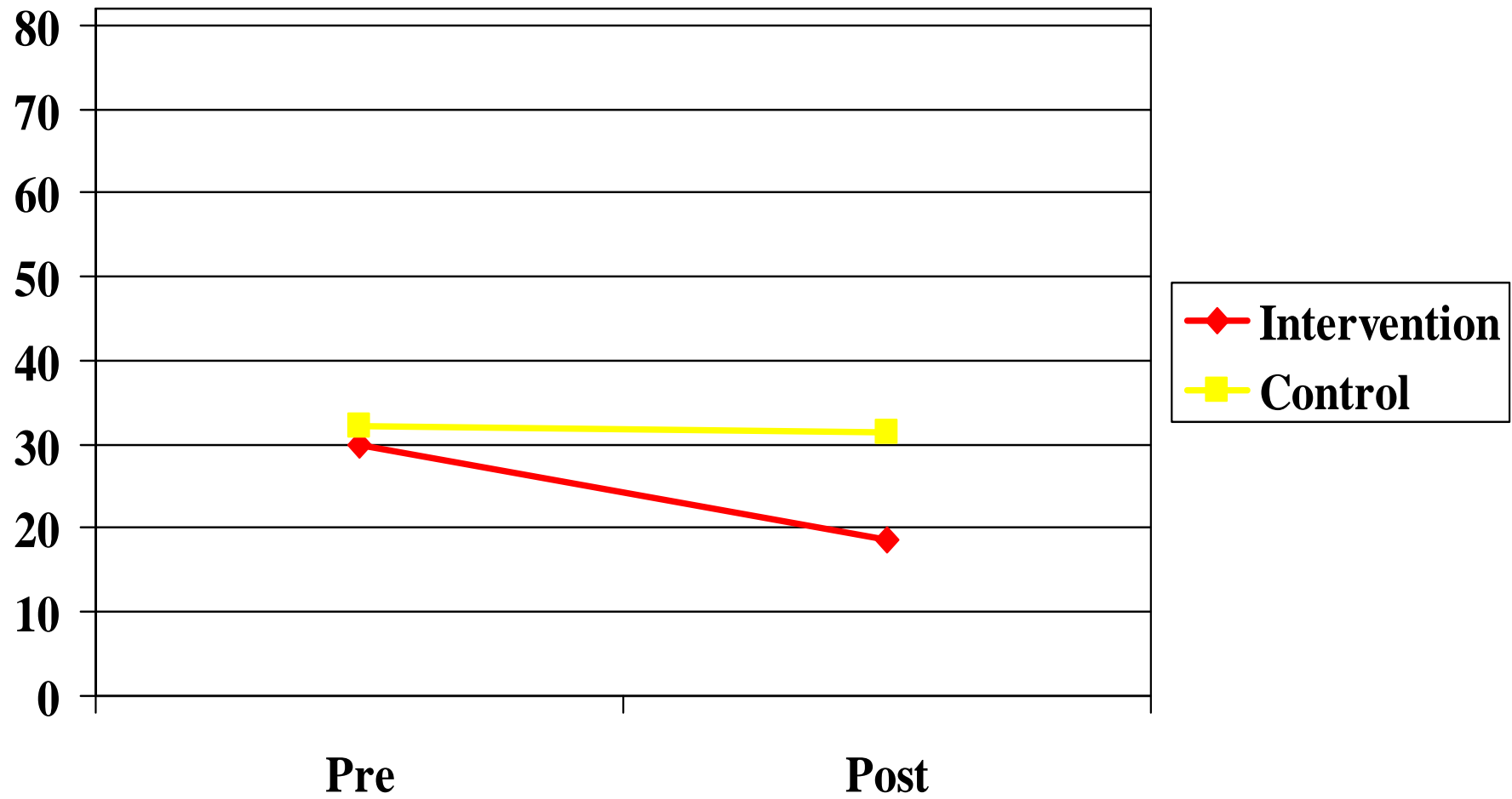
MEASURES

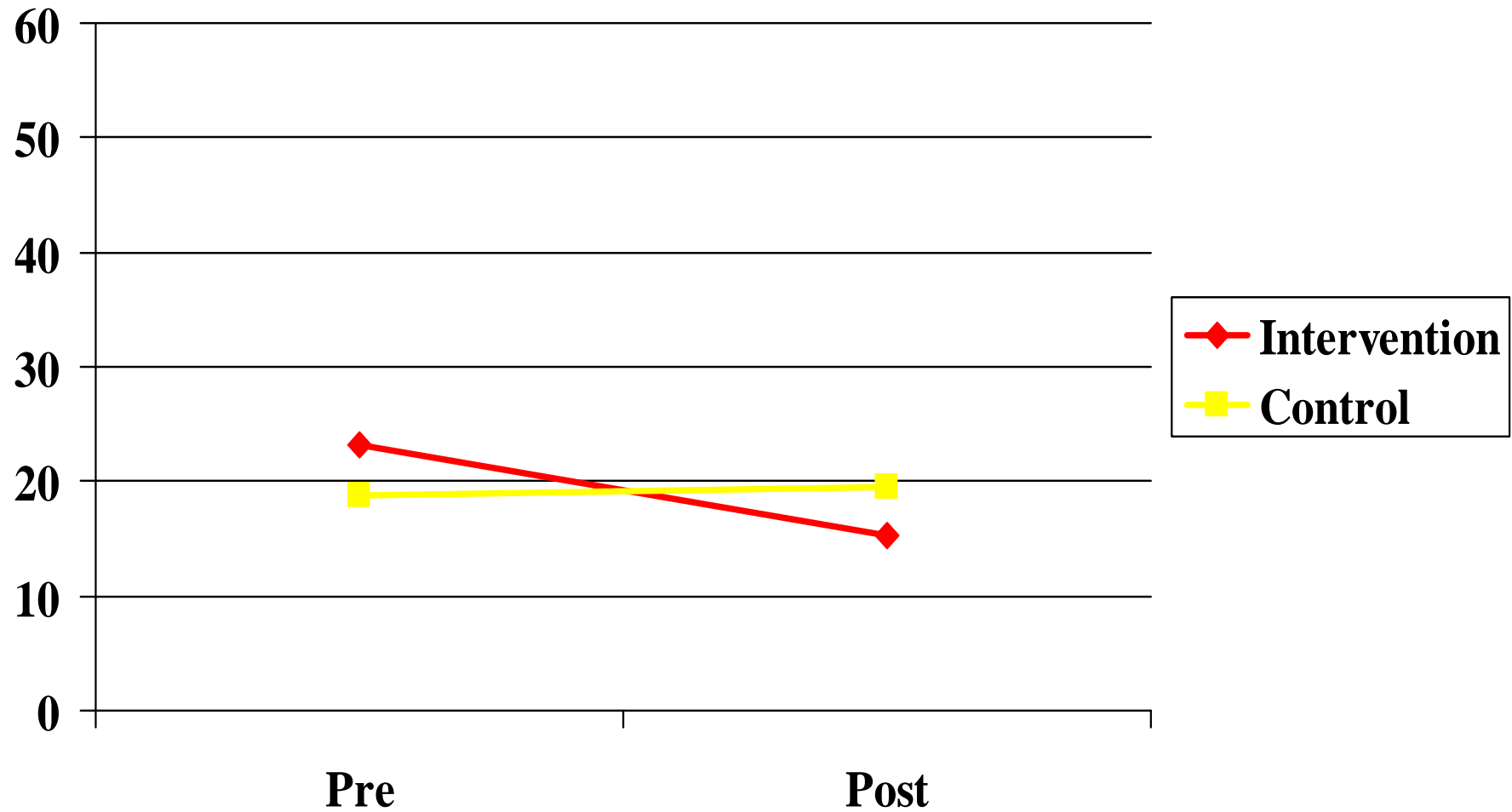
- › SCARED (Birmaher et al., 1997)
- › CESD-C (Fendrich et al., 1990)
- › Structured Interview for Bullying

Self-report interference rating (0-8) and a “blind” clinician’s severity rating (0-8)

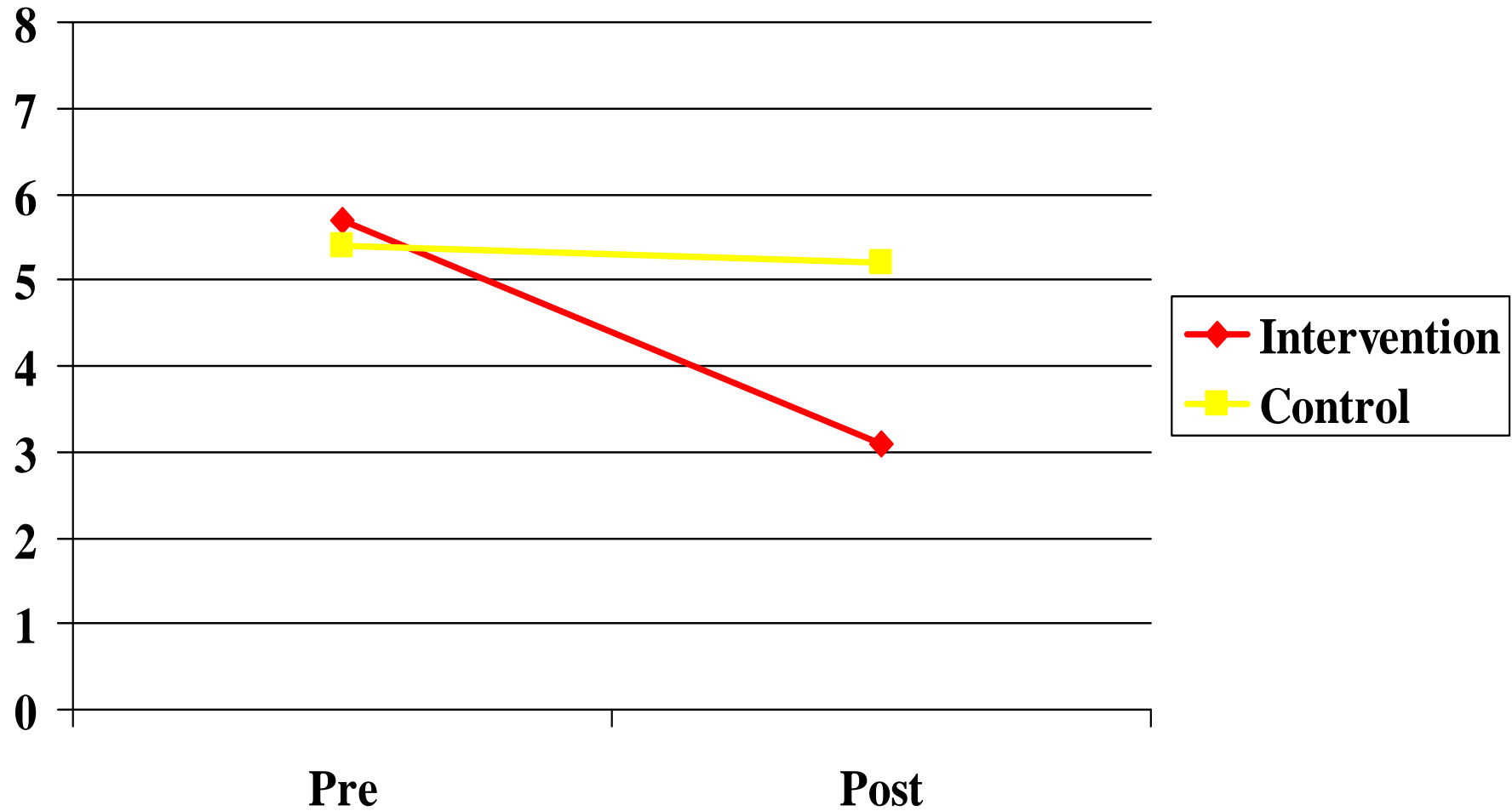
Significant differences in pre-post change:

- › SCARED total ($F = 24.8$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$)
 - › CDES-C total ($F = 14.9$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$)
 - › SIB Bullying Interference ($F = 43.4$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$)
 - › SIB Clinician-rated severity of bullying ($F = 55.5$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$)
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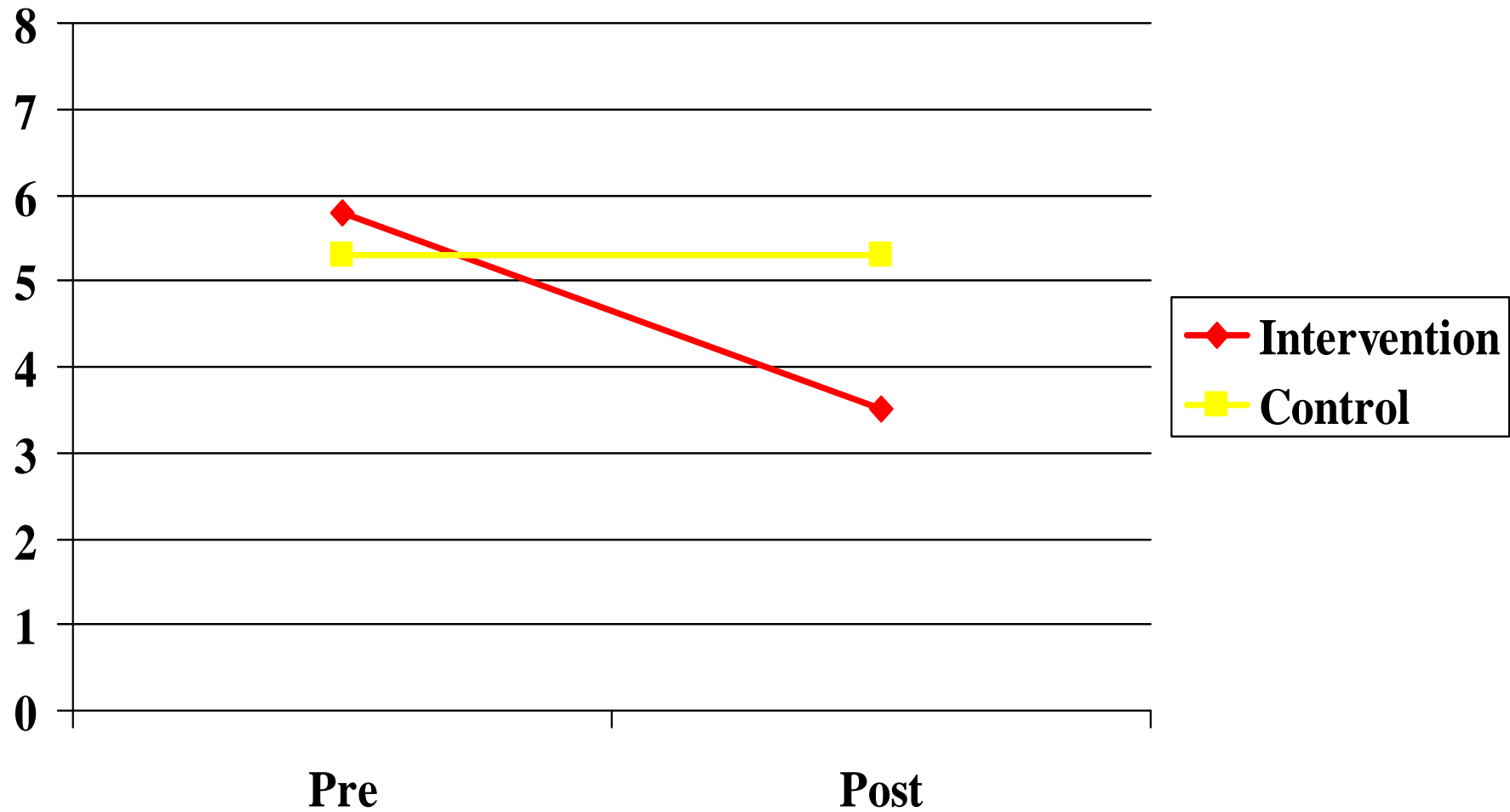




Bullying Interference rating



Clinician rated bullying severity



- › There is preliminary evidence that a cognitive-behavioural intervention will improve anxiety, depression and the impact of being bullied in the short term in boys who have been bullied
 - › We are now hoping to be able to assess the efficacy of 'Confident Kids' in a broader range of school students
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1. Education about bullying and emotional responses
2. Cognitive restructuring
3. 'Victim Signals'- social skills training
4. Specific coping skills for bullying situations
5. Friendship and assertive skills
6. Self –esteem training
7. New component: anger management, learning to be less reactive in response to provocation

Two meetings with parents to:

- › Educate them about the programme so they can support their children
 - › Provide further advice about dealing with bullying
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WHO ARE POTENTIAL TARGETS FOR BULLIES?

Bullies look for targets who they think they will be able to upset easily, get under their skin, or who will not offer much resistance. There are many different reasons why a student might be a target

- › You might be in a minority (the only girl on the footy team, the only boy in the dance class, you might come from a different country, ...)
- › You might be different to other students in some way (taller, shorted, mature, immature, ...)
- › You might have had an embarrassing moment that was witnessed by the bully
- › No reason in particular - a bully just picked you at random and other bullies followed their lead

Can you think of any other reasons ???

WHY ARE THOUGHTS IMPORTANT?

- › Thoughts are important because they lead to feelings and behaviours.
- › Sometimes we have calm thoughts that make us feel good and make us behave in ways that cause good things to happen BUT
- › Other times we may have worried thoughts or angry thoughts that make us feel bad and behave in ways that don't allow good things to happen.

Here are some examples.

- › **THINKING** that other people might think you are silly may make you **FEEL** very worried or anxious when you are out with your friends. What you **DO** is stay quiet and not talk very much.
 - › **THINKING** that other kids are always picking on you may make you **FEEL** angry. What you may **DO** is give up trying to get on with other people.
 - › **THINKING** that things will turn out OK because they usually do may make you **FEEL** calmer. What you may **DO** is to go and find something fun to do.
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Steps to think like a detective

- › **What am I thinking?**
 - What is making me feel scared or worried?
 - What bad thing am I expecting to happen?
 - What worried thoughts am I having?
- › **Look for evidence that the thought may not be true:**
 - What has actually happened in the past?
 - What else could happen?
 - What are the facts?
 - What might someone else think or feel in the situation?
 - What would you think about someone else in your situation?
- › **Judge the evidence:**
- › **Based on all the above evidence: how likely is it that the bad thing will happen?**
- › **Helpful Thought:**
- › **What could you say to yourself that would be more helpful?**



Some things we can do when we are bullied



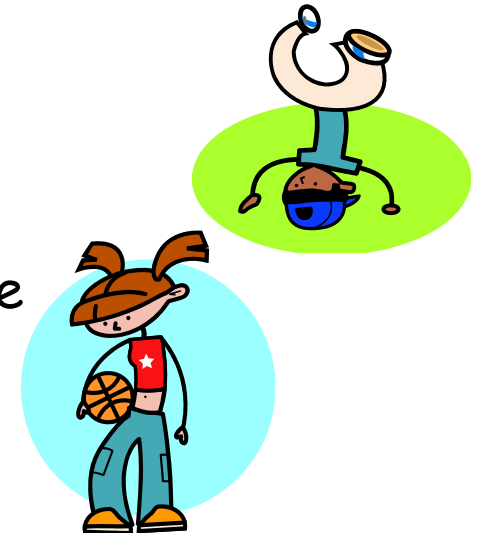
- Fogging

- › The trick with fogging is that you don't believe the remark, you just agree with what the bully says to take them by surprise and to give them nothing to bounce off. It is your secret defence against attack!
- › You can either agree with the bullies comment or make a general comment like "you could be right about that" or "that might be so" in a calm, neutral voice

How to be a more confident person

Being able to talk and communicate to other people is essential in becoming a confident person because it helps us make friends, understand situations and helps others to understand us. If we have good skills, then we will be able to be confident in social situations and be less likely to be a target for bullies.

- › The important communication skills include:
 - › 1. good eye contact, confident posture, friendly face
 - › 2. a strong voice
 - › 3. saying hello and having a conversation
 - › 4. friendship skills (giving compliments, offering help, asking to join in)
 - › 5. assertive skills (asking for help, saying "no")



KEEPING COOL IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS



There are four common strategies that are helpful in controlling our anger or frustration:

- › Self Talk
 - › Distraction
 - › Relaxation
 - › Visualisation
-

The Confident Kids Programme

- A description of the programme and topics covered

Some strategies that can help your child in a bullying situation

How to react as a parent

How to help your child to cope with being bullied

- Helpful and less helpful ways to cope

- › Berry, K & Hunt, C. (2007). Evaluation of an intervention program for anxious adolescent boys who are bullied at school. Journal of Adolescent Health, 45, 376–382.
 - › Farrington, D. P., Ttofi, M. M. (2009). School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization. Campbell Systematic Reviews 10.4073/csr.2009.6 (www.campbellcollaboration.org)
 - › Swearer, S.M., Espelage, D.L. & Napolitano, S.A. (2009). Bullying prevention and intervention: realistic strategies for schools. The Guildford press; NY.
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