

# Healthy Relationships for Healthy Schools

Social Exclusion, Physical Health, and  
the Invisible Hand of the Teacher



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# Key Questions

1. Do peer relationships, bullying and social exclusion impact on activity and eating?
2. Can teachers have an impact on these peer dynamics?
3. How can teachers best support peer dynamics?





# Social Exclusion

“Human beings are acutely responsive to how other people perceive, evaluate, and feel about them.”

(Richman & Leary, 2009)



Ignoring, teasing, bullying, ostracism and discrimination can result in children being left out and threaten their sense of belonging – a fundamental interpersonal motive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)





# Bullying

Bullying involves aggression...

It can take the form of

- Physical Aggression
- Verbal Aggression
- Behavioural Aggression
- Relational or Social Aggression
- Online (Cyber) Aggression

*“Our school isn’t like any school in the movies. Jocks don’t dunk nerds’ heads into the toilet. Bullies aren’t people who punish physically, but are mostly just people who ignore or exclude others”*

...**repeated** aggressive behaviour within a relationship characterized by a **real or perceived imbalance of power**, in which the student exposed to the aggressive actions **cannot adequately defend him/herself”**



# The Impact of Exclusion



People respond with hurt feelings – even if that hurt expresses differently: sadness, anger, distress

With the hurt feelings come drops in self-esteem

But these psychological responses are not the only consequences of social exclusion





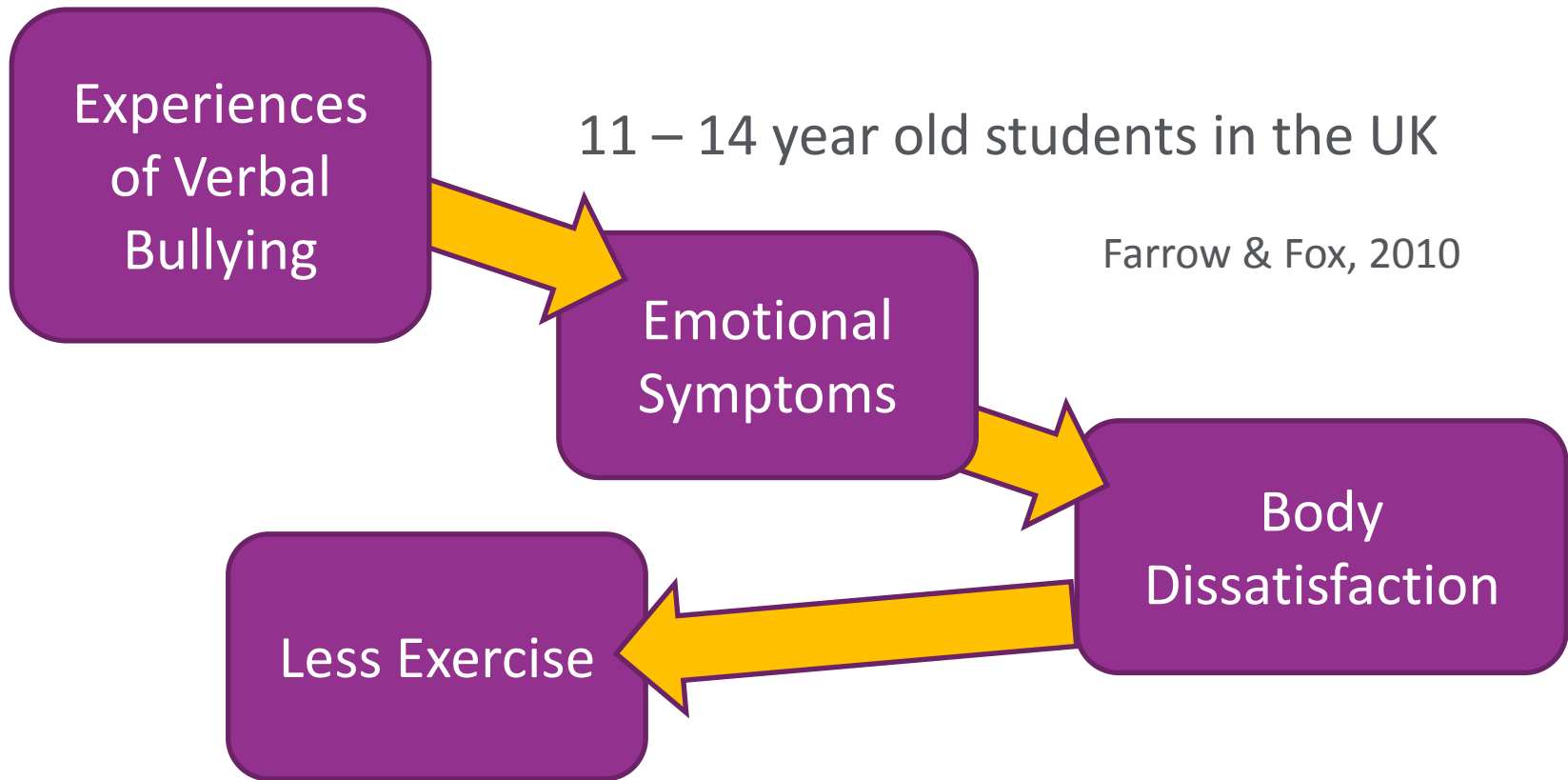
# Weight Criticism & Activity

“Verbal comments directed toward a child, in sports or physical activity settings, that condescend or ridicule the child’s weight.”



Kids who report weight criticism are less likely to be physically active and enjoy sport less (Faith, 2002)

# Bullying and Body Dissatisfaction Amongst Girls



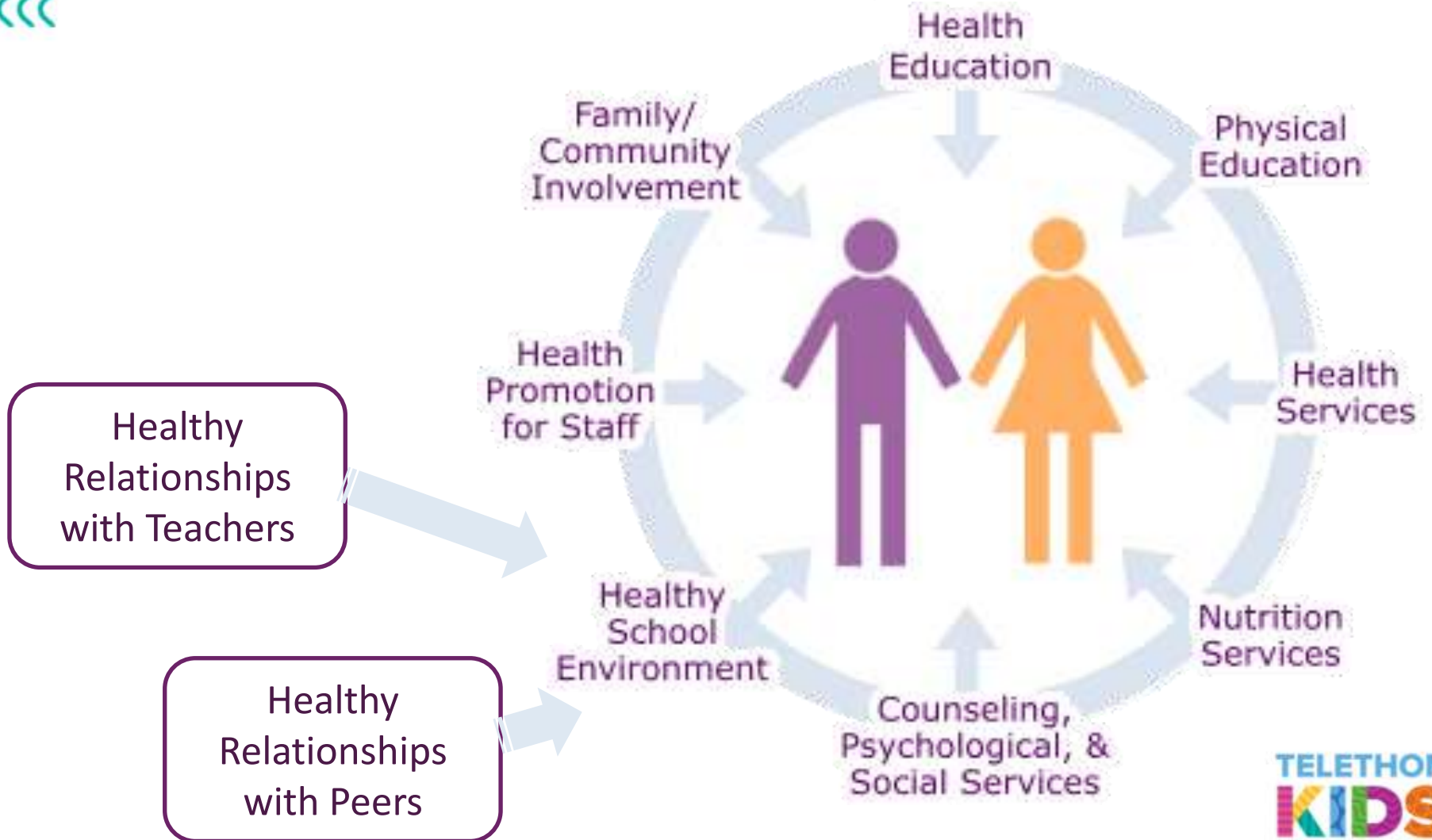
11 – 14 year old students in the UK

Farrow & Fox, 2010

10 – 11 year old students in the USA

Jensen & Steele, 2009

# Health Promoting Schools







# Teacher-Child Relationship Quality

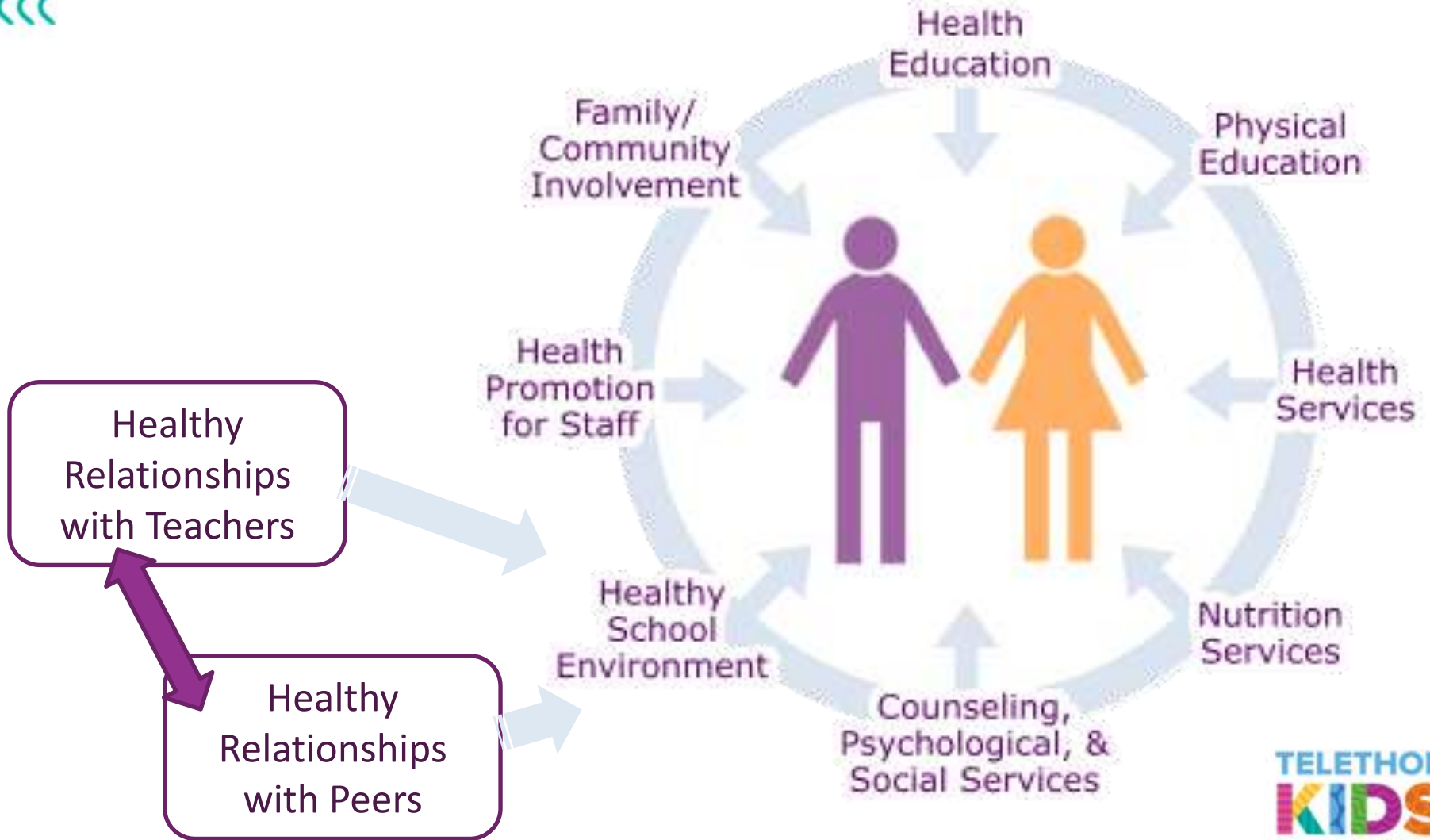
Conflict, closeness and dependency of the child on the teacher matter for children's development.

Conflict between teachers and students in Pre-Primary predicts increases in the severity of physical aggression problems by Year 1  
(Runions, Vitaro, Cross et al. 2014)

Aggression, especially undercontrolled aggression – is a risk for rejection by peers



# The Teacher's Hand in Peer Relationships



# Teacher-Child Conflict and Risk of Victimisation

“Teachers often interact, intentionally or not, with students in ways that contribute to classroom social dynamics”

*(Farmer et al., 2011)*

Conflict between a child and her (or his) teacher in Pre-Primary predicts their risk of more severe peer victimisation in Year 1  
*(Runions & Shaw, 2013)*



# Dependency and Peer Victimization



Dependent kids tend to have more problems with anxiety and social reticence (Birch & Ladd, 1998)

As kids get older, they are expected to be more autonomous;

For American children in Years 4-5, being too dependent on the teacher (according to the teacher) predicted more victimisation from peers later on (Troop-Gordon & Kopp, 2011)

# The Teacher and Victimised Children

“Children fared worst when they experienced a combination of victimization from peers and a poor quality teacher-child relationship”

- Troop-Gordon & Kuntz, (2013),  
p. 1192



At a minimum, maintaining a positive, age-appropriate relationship with students is important



# What Do Teachers Do?

When bullying happens, **half of students report that telling a teacher about bullying made the situation worse, not better** (Smith & Shu, 2000)

*Teachers may not always know how best to respond to bullying or victimisation*



Their advice may be well-meaning, but counter-productive: Eg., counselling ‘ignoring’ the bullying is linked to poorer outcomes in victims (Visconti & Troop-Gordon, 2010)



# What *Can* the Teachers Do?

Less peer victimisation takes place in classes where the teachers knows who is being victimised

Because teachers occupy a unique role in the classroom, they are likely able to provide multiple forms of support to peer victimized youth (e.g., tangible aid, re-appraisal of stressful situations, emotional support ...

# What Can Schools Do?

Whole-school programs that work toward a **supportive school culture** have been shown to be efficacious against bullying overall



Teachers may not appreciate the power that their relationships with students have. Workshops to support them in wielding that hand to the benefit of their students may help





# Conclusion:

## Social Relationships for Healthy Schools

How students interact socially at school – and whether they are included or excluded – can make a genuine difference to their physical health

Teachers have more power – for better or worse – in this social sphere than they think

But they need support to wield that power mindfully

