

The Physiology of Bullying

*Developing Trauma-Preventative Leadership in
Children & Young People's Nursing*

Work shouldn't hurt – Leadership shouldn't harm

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SELF
CARE
ISN'T
SELFISH

The Headlines

Workplace Conflict Costs **NHS £2.81 bn** pa (2018). **£10.9 bn** per year (2025)

National Bullying Helpline **9/10 calls from NHS staff**

2020 Investigation toxic end of bullying **80% suicidal thoughts**

23/24 **RCN data** shows a **76% increase** in just one year of nurses feeling suicidal. (*Sharp upward trend over the past two years*)

69% of nurses link suicidal thoughts to workplace pressures = workload, B&H, formal processes.

HSE 24/25 - 2.1 million working days lost to **work-related mental health**.
Equivalent to 5 million people off sick for a full working week

Psychological Safety??

Bullying is not a Culture or Behaviour Issue.

It's a Biological Event

Hijacked - Fight / Flight / Freeze / Fawn

Brain changes – Amygdala, Pre-frontal Cortex

Nervous systems are rewired

Neuro Biologically wired for connection (not threat response – PTSD)

Bullying Behaviour

Bullying is unwanted behaviour from a person or group that is either offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting.

It involves **misuse of power** that can make someone feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened.

Why This Conversation Matters

Cortisol rises, **thinking narrows**
Empathy and **connection reduce**
Survival replaces relational care



Small moments of connection Shape, build trust & feeling safe

When the Nervous System Detects Threat Care Changes

These are not soft skills

It's biology

Epidemic of Burnout?

Compassion Fatigue?

Resilience?

Dysregulated Systems Can't Sustain **Safe, Compassionate Care**

Communication breaks down

Trust erodes

Speaking up reduces

Errors and risk increase

Children Don't Just Receive Care. They Feel The Nervous System Delivering It

- Children co regulate with adults
 - Families sense safety – or the absence of it
 - Dysregulated staff = dysregulated environments
 - Relational care depends on regulated leaders and teams
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This is Where Leadership Becomes a Predictive Factor

“Leaders have just as much of an impact on people’s **mental health as their partner (both 69%)** (Workforce Institute 2023)

Leadership behaviour **regulates** or dysregulates teams

Safety is created through everyday interactions

Power must be used consciously

Trust is built in the nervous system



GOOD MORNING!



HELLO

EVERY INTERACTION



IS AN



INTERVENTION

DR KAREN TREISMAN 2017

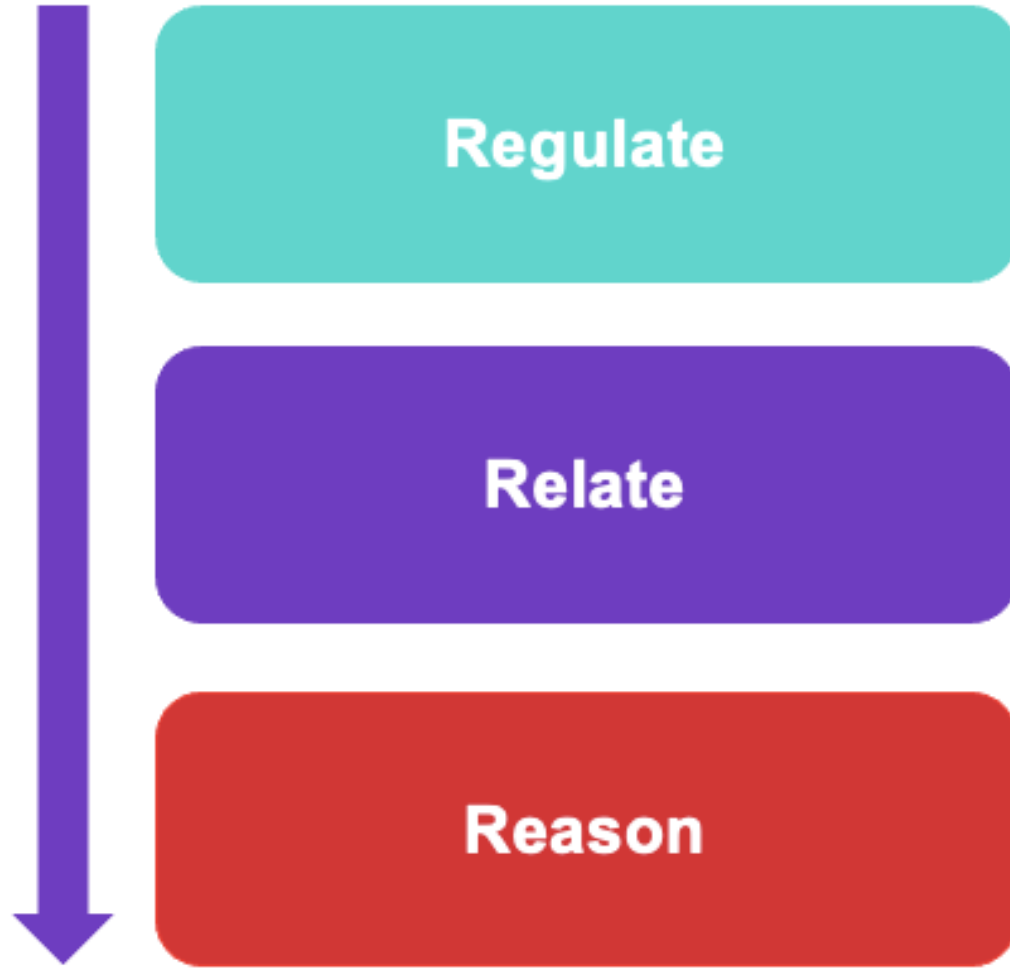


THANK YOU!

Don't Just Respond to Harm

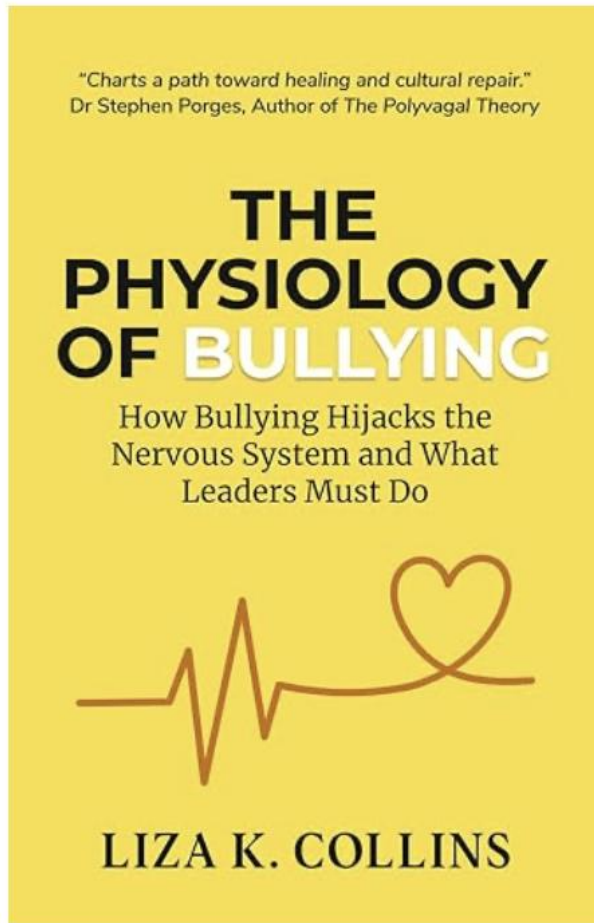
Prevent it.

- Create conditions for safety, not fear
 - Notice early signs of dysregulation
 - Prioritise trust, not just performance
 - Address behaviour before it escalates
 - Model regulation, reflection and repair
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(Bruce Perry's 3R's)

**If you want to change the
world – start by making
people feel safe**



www.lizacollins.co.uk