



## *Saying ‘No’ to Bullying: The ‘Guets-Apens’ game*

### ***Introduction***

To prevent youth violence and reduce the rate of crime, it is important to address early signs of antisocial behaviour among young people. Bullying may be one early sign of such behaviour.

The impact of bullying extends beyond the bully and the victim to the peer group, school and community. Repeated bullying can cause great psychological distress for victims and adversely affect their lives in many ways. For bullies, aggression may persist into adulthood and lead to criminal behaviour. In the broader context, bullying can create a climate of fear in which children constrain their activities in an attempt to avoid victimization.

Although bullying is a problem across the country, many teachers have been frustrated by

the lack of tools to educate children about it. With assistance from the Community Mobilization Program, the *Centre Option-Prévention T.V.D.S.*<sup>1</sup> (a nonprofit community group in Montreal) has developed the prototype for a board game that addresses this important issue.

*Guets-Apens: Qui osera parler* (‘Bullies: Who dares to speak out?’) aims to educate children about bullying and encourage the development of effective personal and social skills for dealing with intimidation. It is aimed at children between 10 and 12 – the age range in which surveys indicate children are particularly likely to engage in bullying. The game targets both potential victims of bullying and those who may be bullies. According to Manon Lacroix, coordinator of *Centre Option-Prévention T.V.D.S.*, a board game is an innovative and effective way to reach young people, and seems to help them better absorb and remember the information.

*This publication is part of the Caledon Institute’s crime prevention series of community stories, produced in collaboration with the National Crime Prevention Centre. The series documents promising approaches to crime prevention through social development.*

### ***Who dares to speak out?***

The *Guets-Apens* game sets the stage right at the beginning: “For weeks, a small band of bullies has been terrorizing the students of an elementary school by stealing their money,

clothing and personal belongings. The principal, the teachers and the parents are at wit's end. When will these punks be caught? Two boys and a girl, aged 10 to 13, make up the gang. They're called the 'Ambushers' because they lie in wait and terrorize the most timid children in the school. Who will dare tell their parents and the police? Why don't some of the students report the bullies? Who are their victims? What are they afraid of? How would you react if this gang stole your money on the first Monday of every month by shoving and threatening you? Would you be able to stand up to them and resist their threats? Would you tell your parents or the principal? Could you report them to the police? Do you know the legal consequences these bullies could face? Imagine if these young punks chose you and some of your friends as their next victims ... ." These are some of the questions raised by the game.

The board game is designed to be played by two to six children. The board is a map of the neighbourhood with the school, local stores, the police station, a house with a 'Block Parent' sign and a youth centre. Each player gets a pack of 15 cards representing different objects such as money, a Walkman, boots, a cap, a lunchbox, and a watch. There are also 80 game cards divided into four different categories: challenge, solution, protection and justice. A number of squares on the board represent these categories. Other squares represent various objects that a player may lose or recover.

The players have pawns that they move along the board after throwing the dice. Players follow the instructions that correspond to the squares where they land – they must surmount various obstacles, and can win or lose game cards. Through mime, improvisations, guessing

### **National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention**

The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention aims to reduce crime and victimization by addressing their root causes through a social development approach. Social development is a long-term, proactive approach directed at removing personal, social and economic factors that lead some individuals to engage in criminal acts or to become victims of crime.

With an investment of \$32 million annually, the National Strategy enables the Government of Canada to help communities develop projects and partnerships that will prevent crime. The strategy focuses particularly on children and youth, Aboriginal people and the personal security of women and girls. It includes the Safer Communities Initiative, a Promotion and Public Education Program and the National Crime Prevention Centre. The National Crime Prevention Centre is responsible for implementing the Strategy.

The Safer Communities Initiative is designed to help Canadians undertake crime prevention activities in their communities. It includes four funding components: the Community Mobilization Program, which helps communities develop approaches to crime prevention and undertake activities that deal with the root causes of crime; the Crime Prevention Investment Fund, which aims to establish reliable information on what works and what is promising in reducing the risk factors associated with crime and victimization; the Crime Prevention Partnership Program, which supports the involvement of organizations that can contribute to community crime prevention through the development of information, tools and resources; and the Business Action Program on Crime Prevention, which involves national and provincial/territorial business and professional associations in helping communities prevent crime, share information and encourage community mobilization.

games and multiple-choice questions, the children identify situations of bullying/extortion, talk about their reactions to witnessing such situations and discuss the consequences of bullying for both victims and perpetrators. The game ends when a player rolls the right number on the dice to reach the square called ‘arrival at school.’ The players then add up the number of cards they have left in their hands and the player with the most cards wins.

*A fun way to learn*

*Guets-Apens* was tested in five schools in the Montreal area in late 1999. In all, 243 students in grades 5 and 6 played the game under the supervision of a teacher-monitor. To measure the impact of the game, participants were asked to complete a pre-game and post-game questionnaire. To facilitate data compilation, and to minimize possible bias in the students’ understanding of the questions and the data collectors’ interpretation of the results, most of the questions were multiple choice. Although the results were not statistically significant, they indicated important trends, as shown in the table below.



*The game board.*

Perhaps most importantly, all the children reported that they enjoyed playing the game (87 percent greatly enjoyed it). This was confirmed by the observations of researchers and teachers.

Before: Pre-test	After: Post-test
More than half of the participating students (52%) were afraid of being bullied.	A majority of students (97%) felt they were ready to say ‘no’ to bullies and almost as many (96%) were ready to report them.
34% of the students indicated they would like to tell bullies to stop intimidating and bullying.	The proportion reached 97%.
13% of the students (victims or potential victims of bullying) said they would not talk to anyone about their problem.	96% said they would want to talk to someone.

The game appears to provide an effective way to teach children about bullying and about appropriate responses to it. The structure of the game allows each student to live the experience of extortion and to identify its negative impacts. The developers of the game believe that the role-playing opportunities help children practise self-esteem skills that can be used to withstand bullying. By experimenting in the safe environment of a game, children learn the value of standing up for themselves, and the importance of talking with someone when they witness or are subjected to bullying. The game also educates children about the negative consequences of bullying for the perpetrator, and discourages those who might tend to be bullies.

According to Manon Lacroix: “Teachers say that bullying is an issue rarely raised by students. Testing the game offered a great opportunity to discuss the issue and have kids voice their fears.”

### **Looking ahead**

After the game was tested, a few modifications to *Guets-Apens* were proposed in order to make it even more useful. At the time of writing, the *Centre Option-Prévention T.V.D.S.* was actively seeking financing to update the game, test it more widely and translate it into English. Once this second phase of work is complete, it is hoped that the game can be made more broadly available, so that children across the country can learn to say ‘no’ to bullying.

*Ann Simpson*

*Ann Simpson works on the community stories series for the Caledon Institute.*

### **Endnote**

1. T.V.D.S. stands for *Toxicomanie, Violence, Délinquance, SIDA* — drug addiction, violence, delinquency and AIDS.

For more information on the development of the *Guets-Apens* game prototype, contact Manon Lacroix at the *Centre Option-Prévention T.V.D.S.*, (514) 849-8889.

For more information on the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, call (toll-free) 1-877-302-6272, or visit the website at [www.crime-prevention.org](http://www.crime-prevention.org).

Limited quantities of this publication are available in alternate formats (Braille, disk and audiotape).

*Cette histoire communautaire est également disponible en français.*

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1600 Scott Street, Suite 620

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

K1Y 4N7

Ph: (613) 729-3340    Fx: (613) 729-3896

e-mail: [caledon@caledoninst.org](mailto:caledon@caledoninst.org)

website: [www.caledoninst.org](http://www.caledoninst.org)