

## Virtual solution

How a bullying prevention video game is helping Canadian kids become better citizens

By JOANNE RICHARD, SPECIAL TO SUN MEDIA

Kids learn by doing and that includes beating bullying.

A new interactive computer game lets kids role play in the safety of an exciting virtual world and practise preventing bullying at their school and ways to make it a fair, safe place.

Quest for the Golden Rule is bullying-prevention software and the first of its kind -- the classroom video-game simulates experiences where students, grades 2-5, practise and rehearse pro-social skills by intervening in bullying situations.

Children get to choose different adventures, including Bark Academy, Mission to Mars and Ghoul School, and try out new social skills that are hard to practise in the real world -- and safely learn from their choices. It's based on the golden rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated.



Computers make learning fun, and in this case, effective, says Steven Brown, developer of the Canadian-based software (practiqest.com). Students exhibit significant shifts in attitudes, skills and knowledge after each 30-minute Quest for the Golden Rule simulation, shows PREVNet research. The scientifically studied role-playing software has proven effective in its extensive studies in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and the U.S.

According to Brown, when children have fun, they learn better and open up more - and computers are an engaging medium. Plus, video games are "disarming, personalized and surprisingly great for teaching relationship-building skills and empathy," says Brown. "Isn't it ironic that antisocial computer games can teach social skills?"

Even better, says Brown, is that children think they are playing video games, but in fact they are completing a deep curriculum of social skills and bullying prevention. "Children love being able to direct virtual characters and are empowered by the impacts of their actions."

The software curriculum, designed by bullying prevention researchers Wendy Craig and Debra Pepler and based on their 20 years of research in the area of bullying prevention, also encompasses multiple exposures, including good deeds practice, class discussions and parent home activities, so new skills and strategies become habit.

Bullying causes children tremendous pain, says Brown. "For some, childhood is very difficult, especially if you were bullied. These early experiences have a lasting impact and definitely shape the way many of us view our world and interact with each other."

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### CHILDREN AT RISK

Children and youth who are victimized are at risk for a range of emotional, behavioural and relationship problems including:

- Low self-concept
- School absenteeism
- Depression
- Stress-related health problems (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
- Social anxiety and loneliness, social withdrawal and isolation
- Aggressive behaviours and bullying

- In the most extreme cases, suicidal thoughts and suicide

Courtesy of PREVNet bullying prevention research

Pro-social behaviour

Pro-social behaviour occurs when someone acts to help another person, particularly when they have no goal other than to help a fellow human.

Source: [ChangingMinds.org](http://ChangingMinds.org)