

# Bullying



**Bullying is ongoing verbal, physical or social abuse that intends to hurt, frighten or threaten. It is a form of violence and a way of having power over others. Bullying can be face to face or online, sometimes both. It can happen to any child or young person anywhere, at any time.**

**Parents/caregivers can help by listening, supporting and working with children to find solutions. Children or young people who engage in bullying also need support to make a positive change and learn new skills.**

## What is bullying?

Bullying can include:

- repeated taunting/mocking, name calling, insults, threats, spreading rumours
- social exclusion, eg ignoring or not letting people be part of a group
- ganging up, playing cruel jokes, preventing someone from going where they want, or taking away their belongings
- pushing, poking, hitting or other physical abuse.

It can happen in front of others or be hidden. The person engaging in the bullying behaviour may or may not know their target. It can even occur within friendship groups.

Bullying is not about single hurtful acts. While these may need to be addressed, bullying is when one person or group tries to have ongoing power over others. It can be hard to identify as bullying often happens out of sight of parents and teachers. Children may fear reporting it could make things worse.

## Where does it happen?

Bullying can happen anywhere. It happens most where children and young people spend lots of time:

- at home
- at school or on the way to or from school
- in sporting clubs, recreational or interest groups
- online.

## Cyber bullying

Technology has increased the ways bullying can happen, eg mobile phones, messaging, emails, social media. Cyber bullying can:

- include making fun of someone, spreading gossip, sending nasty or threatening messages, posting embarrassing or damaging information/videos/photos
- quickly escalate and involve a lot of people
- happen any time of the day or night. It can feel like there's no getting away from it, even at home.

It is important your child or young person doesn't keep cyber bullying a secret. It helps to:

- talk regularly about their online activities and how they can stay safe. They will be more likely to come to you if there is a problem
- find a solution that doesn't involve taking away their phone or other device. Technology can keep them connected to friends and free online support, eg Kids Helpline, eheadspace.

See Parent Easy Guide 'Cyber safety' for more tips.

**Bullying needs to be taken seriously as it can have long-term effects on the person being bullied, the one doing the bullying and those who witness it.**



## Children who experience bullying

While anyone can be bullied, those targeted most often are children or young people who seem vulnerable or easy to hurt. They can be:

- different in some way, including their physical appearance, live with a disability, be from a different cultural group or not fit sexual or gender stereotypes
- stressed, anxious or lacking self-confidence
- struggling with sport, schoolwork or sitting in class
- shy and keep to themselves, or find it hard to mix and make friends
- younger, smaller or not as strong and seen as less likely to fight back

or they can be:

- good at something
- very smart
- attractive
- popular.

## Signs of being bullied

Children or young people may not always tell adults they're being bullied. They may be worried about your reaction, feel ashamed, think it's their fault or that it's wrong to tell on someone. They may have been threatened with something worse if they tell.

They might have:

- unexplained bruises, scratches or torn clothing
- damaged or lost personal belongings
- sleeping problems, eg not sleeping, nightmares, bedwetting
- physical symptoms, eg appetite changes, headaches, stomach aches

- mood or behaviour changes, eg more withdrawn, teary or anxious, less confident, angry, not doing as well at school
- a loss of interest in things they usually enjoy.

They might mention problems at the place they're being bullied, or try to avoid going there. They may:

- refuse to go to school/sports or find excuses not to go
- want to be driven rather than walk or use public transport
- be upset after going to the venue
- say they don't have any friends or dislike others there
- not want to talk about their day.

If it's cyber bullying they may also:

- hesitate or avoid going online
- be nervous of new messages
- be upset after using a device
- spend more time than usual online in a tense manner
- hide their device or device use.

These signs don't always mean your child/young person is being bullied but it's important to check out what's worrying them.

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**Talk to children and young people about what bullying is and what the signs are. Encourage them to tell you if it is happening. Let them know you will support them and together you will work out how to deal with it.**

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## The effects of bullying

Bullying can make children/young people feel afraid, lonely, embarrassed, angry, physically ill. If it's not stopped it can affect their health and wellbeing into adult life. Someone who is bullied can have a higher risk of developing mental health problems such as anxiety or depression.

**It's important to take children's fears and feelings seriously. It's normal to feel embarrassed, scared or hurt if you're being bullied.**

Children who are bullied learn to always be 'on guard', checking where the bully is and wondering when it will happen again. This can:

- make it harder to concentrate or learn
- affect their friendships as they're often tense, worried and less able to have fun.

They may begin to believe they deserve to be bullied and become withdrawn, isolated and feel unable to fit in. They can self-harm and even think about suicide (see Parent Easy Guide 'Young people, feelings and depression'). If they have a suicide plan get help immediately.

## What you can do

It's not always easy for a parent to know when and how to step in. Your child's age, maturity and safety all need to be considered.

- Listen and respond calmly. Validate their feelings and let them know you are there for them.
- Don't let anyone blame them for the bullying.
- Make sure they're safe. If you need to take action talk about your reasons and how it may help. Consider ways to put them more at ease, eg talk to teachers outside class hours.

- Ask what they would like to see happen and how you can support them. Try to give them as much power as possible to find solutions so they can feel more confident and in control.
- Act to stop the bullying where it's happening:
  - ask about the school or organisation's bullying procedures. Provide clear details of the behaviour and its impact on your child. Ask what steps they will take to stop the bullying and prevent it happening again. Stay in contact until the problem is resolved. It's okay to take another adult for support
  - don't confront the person who is bullying or their family. This can make things worse.

If it's cyber bullying:

- discourage any engagement with the person who is bullying or retaliation
- help keep a record of the behaviour – texts, voicemail, videos, screenshots, print outs
- strengthen device privacy settings, unfriend, block
- report offensive material directly to the site or service. If they don't remove it within 48 hours, contact the eSafety Commissioner (see last page of this Guide)
- talk to the school principal if anyone from school is involved.
- Report serious threats or harassment to your local police. They may be against the law.

**Make sure children and young people know being bullied is never their fault. They can do things to feel more confident but it's the person engaging in the bullying who needs to change and stop the behaviour.**

You can also:

- encourage your child/young person to keep up their usual activities or try new ones
- stay connected, warm and open so they know they can trust you



- make sure there are other responsible adults they can talk to if they find it hard to talk to you
- get professional help if they need it. You could ask your GP for a mental health care plan. As a caregiver you may want some support too.

Children and young people with additional needs may benefit from extra support.

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**Strong relationships with family and friends can help prevent bullying and lessen the impact when it does occur.**

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Help your child/young person work out ways to deal with the bullying that fit for them and support their confidence. Some possibilities include:

- talking to an adult who can do something about it, eg a teacher, student wellbeing officer, coach, group leader
- practising how to respond confidently so they're better prepared when the bullying is happening
- staying calm, acting like they are unimpressed or don't care
- being true to themselves, focussing on their strengths - how can these help in this situation?
- staying connected to friends
- finding activities away from the bullying and making new friends.

It is important they don't react physically to the bullying which can end up in them being hurt or blamed for it. Keep an eye on how things are going. Check regularly if the bullying has stopped.

If bullying becomes assault, discrimination or harassment you may need to involve the police.

## Children who witness bullying

Witnessing bullying can be very distressing and your child/young person may need support. It can help to talk about how they feel and learn what they can do.

It's important all children understand bullying is never OK, even if they're not involved. Speaking up for one another can play a part in stopping it. Other strategies include:

- telling a responsible adult such as a parent, teacher or coach
- refusing to join in and ignoring the person who is bullying
- letting them know their behaviour is not okay if it is safe to do so
- talking with the person being bullied and helping them get support
- refusing to forward any negative or humiliating comments/photos/videos. Only share something if the person says it's okay
- inviting others to join activities. Befriend newcomers to school or a club.

Talk to your child/young person about how they might support someone who is being bullied. If it does happen, encourage them to seek help from a trusted adult. It can be a big emotional load to carry alone.

## Children who engage in bullying behaviour

There are many reasons why a child or young person might bully others. They may never have learnt the skills to:

- control impulses or manage their emotions
- reflect on their own behaviour
- take responsibility for their actions
- build self-confidence and resilience
- develop respectful friendships.





Without these skills they may:

- seek power over others to feel important, admired and accepted. This often makes up for feeling scared, alone or not in control in other areas of their life
- think that bullying makes them popular or 'cool'
- see bullying as fun and believe some people deserve to be bullied, eg because of how they look or they're from a certain group
- be easily influenced by aggressive 'models' (in real life, online, movies, games)
- bully others as payback for some 'unfair' treatment
- feel detached from their target's distress.

Some children/young people may:

- experience conflict at home
- be bullied themselves
- have had extreme, or sometimes limited, discipline or boundaries
- have had developmental trauma
- be competitive in ways that lead to bullying behaviour (sometimes supported by adults, eg in sports)
- not know what they are doing is wrong.

Intervening to stop the bullying and offering appropriate support gives a child/young person the opportunity to make a positive change.

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**Bullying is a learned behaviour which means children and young people can learn other ways of dealing with things.**

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## How you can help

It can be hard to find out your child is bullying others. Whatever the reason for the behaviour, it is important to make it clear that bullying is never OK.

- Stay calm and connected to your child/young person. They need your love and support now more than ever.
- Ask them to help you understand why they bullied. What did they want to see happen? How did they feel? Have they ever been bullied?

- Talk to them about why bullying is not OK.
- Be clear it needs to stop immediately and that you will check it does. If it's cyber bullying you can set up parental controls (see eSafety Commissioner website) to regularly check devices - be open and honest about why you are doing this.
- Make sure they understand that what they say online cannot be unsaid, can last forever and be seen by anyone.
- Work together to develop a different plan for any similar situation. They may need help to understand and learn how to manage their feelings.
- Help them build empathy and kindness. Ask how they think the person they bullied must have felt. How would they feel if it happened to them?
- Explore ways they can make amends with the person they bullied.
- Talk together about a fair outcome for their behaviour, eg taking a break from social activities while they work out how to make a positive change and show they can relate more respectfully to others.
- Link with their school for any support they need with school work, group activities, making friends.
- Acknowledge positive behaviours, strengths and personal qualities. How could these help their relationship skills?
- Spend quality time together.
- Role model respectful, caring behaviour in your relationships, including when there is conflict.
- Look at whether any underlying problems need to be addressed.
- Connect them with professional help.

You are your child/young person's best resource but you don't have to deal with this situation alone. Work with their school and/or other responsible adults to help them learn how to get on with others, manage conflict and feel good about themselves.

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**If there is bullying or violence in your home, get help and support to stop it.**

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## Looking after yourself

Finding out your child or young person is being bullied or bullying others can be very distressing. While it's important to be actively involved, your health and wellbeing are a priority too.

- Take time to do things you enjoy.
- Find ways to relax and recharge.
- Acknowledge the skills you are helping your child learn.
- Be kind to yourself if you feel overwhelmed at times.
- Ask for help and support, eg family, friends, school, services.

**Note:** The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people, eg parents, caregivers, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, foster or kinship carers.

### Want more information?

#### Support for children and young people

##### Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 551 800 anytime

Free telephone and online counselling for anyone aged 5 to 25

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

##### Headspace

Information and free, confidential support for anyone aged 12-25

To talk face to face find your local centre at <https://headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/>

Call 1800 650 890 to talk by phone or chat online at [www.eHeadSpace.org.au](http://www.eHeadSpace.org.au)

##### Youth Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636 anytime, chat online 3.00pm-12.00am

Support for young people feeling depressed or anxious [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

##### Suicide Call Back Service

Phone 1300 659 467, 24 hours

Phone or online counselling for anyone aged 15 and over affected by suicidal thoughts (any younger callers will be referred to an appropriate service)

[www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

#### Family support services

##### Anglicare SA

Phone 1800 569 094, 9am-1pm, Mon-Fri

<https://anglicaresa.com.au/children-families/parenting/family-support/>

##### Centacare

Phone (08) 8215 6700, 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri

<https://centacare.org.au/service/counselling-services/>

##### Relationships Australia

Phone 1300 364 277 or 1800 182 325 (country callers) 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri

<https://www.rasa.org.au/services/post-separation/support-services/>

#### 1800 Respect

Phone 1800 737 732, 24 hours

Talk to someone about family violence or sexual assault [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

#### Information for families

##### Bullying no way

Information and resources including for children of all ages [www.bullyingnoway.gov.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.gov.au)

#### Department for Education

Information on bullying in schools

[www.education.sa.gov.au](http://www.education.sa.gov.au)

#### Australian Sports Commission

Bullying Factsheet

[www.aascf.com.au/files/Australian-Sports-Commission-Factsheet-Bullying.pdf](http://www.aascf.com.au/files/Australian-Sports-Commission-Factsheet-Bullying.pdf)

#### eSafety Commissioner

Online safety information and to report cyberbullying. They will tell you what they can do and if anything needs to be referred to the police [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au)

#### National Centre Against Bullying

Information for parents, children and schools

[www.ncab.org.au](http://www.ncab.org.au)

#### Parenting

##### Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100, 24 hours

Advice on child health and parenting

Talk to local Parent Helpline between

7.15am–9.15pm. After 9.15pm your call

will go through to the national Healthdirect helpline

#### Raising Children Network

Parenting information for children aged 0-18, including on bullying

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

#### Parenting SA

For other Parent Easy Guides including 'Sibling conflict', 'Living with young people', 'Family violence', 'Violence towards parents' [www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)



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#### Parenting SA

A partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

#### [www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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