

# Bullying



**Bullying is verbal, emotional or physical abuse which is repeated and intended to hurt, frighten or threaten someone. It is a form of violence and a way of having power over others. Bullying can happen to any child or teenager anywhere, at any time. Parents can help by listening, believing and supporting children. You can talk to people with the power to stop it, help children develop coping strategies and gain a sense of control and confidence. Make sure all children know that bullying is wrong and can be stopped. It is up to the child or adult who bullies to change their behaviour.**

## What is bullying?

Bullying can include:

- threatening, teasing, name calling, gossiping and spreading rumours
- ignoring or not letting people be part of a group (excluding)
- ganging up, playing cruel jokes, preventing others from going where they want, or taking away their belongings
- pushing, shoving, hitting or other physical abuse.

Bullying is not about a conflict that needs to be worked out; it's about one person or group trying to have power over others. It's important to develop a long-term approach which stops bullying at the source and permanently, rather than just blocking one avenue of contact.

## Where does it happen?

Bullying can happen anywhere. It happens most where children spend lots of time.

- In families, children can be bullied by parents or siblings. In some families there can be children across a broad age range living together. This creates power differences which can set the scene for bullying.
- At school, children can be bullied in the school grounds or whilst getting to or from school. All early childhood centres and schools in South Australia have a responsibility to protect children from bullying. You could ask about their bullying policies.
- Sporting clubs, recreational and interest groups are other places where children can be bullied. In sporting clubs, bullying can involve players, parents, coaches, umpires or spectators. It is common to hear parents and spectators yelling out hurtful or negative comments from the sidelines. Sometimes coaches use 'put-downs' to motivate players. Most sporting clubs have policies which address harassment, discrimination and abuse, as well as a complaints process. As organisations which involve children they're also required to have ways to protect them.

## Cyber bullying

Technology has increased the ways bullying can happen. Mobile phones, instant messaging, emails, chat rooms or social networking can be used to bully others. Cyber bullying can include repeated teasing, sending nasty or threatening messages, damaging information or photos. It's against the law to threaten someone this way. Cyber bullying can be very scary because it can happen any time of the day or night. It can feel like there's no getting away from it, even at home.

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

It is important that children don't keep cyber bullying a secret. They may not tell you as they may be afraid you'll take their phone or other device away. Try to find a solution that does not involve doing this, as children can also use them to stay connected with supportive friends (see 'Cyber safety' Guide).

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**Parents can help prevent cyber bullying by talking with children from a young age about what they are doing online. They will be more likely to come to you if there is a problem.**

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## Children who bully

Children who bully need to learn different skills so they are not limited in adult life. They can:

- be very self-focused and not good at controlling their impulses and aggression
- have limited self-awareness and take little responsibility for their actions
- need 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'
- want to win at all cost. They pick on children they know they can intimidate
- see bullying as fun and believe some kinds of people deserve to be bullied, e.g. because of how they look or because they're from a certain group
- be easily influenced by aggressive 'models' (in real life and in movies)
- come from a violent family background and be the victims of bullying themselves
- have had extreme discipline, or sometimes limited discipline
- bully others as pay-back for some 'unfair' treatment.

Children who bully might do it in front of others so they can get recognition. Sometimes they're part of popular groups. Or they might be more reserved, controlling and manipulate others in subtle ways. They're not usually affected by the distress of the victim and are likely to go on hurting others if they're not stopped. They often don't do well at school and can have trouble with the law as

they get older. As adults they're more likely to bully their partners, their own children and people at work.

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**Bullying is a learned behaviour which means children who bully can learn other ways of dealing with things. It's important though to not bully the bully so that children don't get mixed messages.**

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## Children who are bullied

Children who are bullied need to see that things can be done so they don't feel unable to protect themselves in the future.

Any child can be bullied. Sometimes those who are popular, very good at something, very smart or attractive can be victims of bullying. However, bullies most often pick on children who seem easy to hurt. Children who are picked on can often be:

- different in some way, including their physical appearance, have a disability, be from a different cultural group or not fit in with gender stereotypes
- anxious or stressed, or lack confidence to stand up for themselves
- not good at sport or schoolwork
- shy and keep to themselves, or find it hard to socialise with other children
- younger, smaller or not as strong and seen as less likely to retaliate.

## Children who witness bullying

Children who witness bullying may be traumatised by the experience and need support. They may feel powerless to stop someone getting hurt. They need to talk about their feelings and learn what they can do.

It's important for all children to understand that bullying isn't OK, even if they're not involved. They can play a part in stopping it by:

- telling a responsible adult such as a parent, a teacher or coach
- refusing to join in and ignoring the bully



- walking up to the person being bullied, talking to them and going with them to get support
- making friends with children new to a school or club.

## Signs of being bullied

Children may not always tell adults they're being bullied. They may be afraid or ashamed, think it's their fault or that it's 'dobbing' to tell someone. They may have been threatened with something worse if they tell. They might have:

- bruises, scratches or torn clothing
- damaged or lost personal belongings
- sleeping problems, e.g. not sleeping, nightmares, bedwetting
- changes in behaviour such as being withdrawn, teary or not doing well at school
- loss of confidence.

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

- find excuses to not go, e.g. feeling sick
- want to change the way they usually get there
- be upset after going to the venue
- say they don't have any friends or they hate other children there
- not want to talk about their day.

These signs don't always mean your child is being bullied, but you need to check out what's worrying them.

## The effects of bullying

Bullying can make children feel afraid, lonely, embarrassed, angry, upset or physically ill. If it's not stopped it can affect health and wellbeing into adult life. Children who are bullied can have a higher risk of mental health problems such as anxiety, stress, low self-esteem or depression.

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

Bullied children learn to be 'on guard' all the time, checking where the bully is and wondering when it will

happen again. When children are 'on alert' like this, they're less able to concentrate or learn. Their friendships may suffer as they're often tense, worried and unable to have fun. They may begin to believe they deserve it and become withdrawn, isolated and feel less able to fit into their world. They can even think about suicide.

Children who are being bullied need to know they have options. Younger children need to let an adult know who can do something about it. You can help older children work through what they can do. They may still need you to take action.

**Be careful children don't think that being bullied is their fault. Even though they can do things to feel more confident, it's the bully who needs to change and stop the behaviour.**

## What you can do

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

- Listen to your child and take their feelings and fears seriously. If children are traumatised they may need professional support.
- Don't call them names, e.g. 'weak' or 'a sook' and don't let anyone else do so.
- Make sure they're safe. Sometimes you may need to take action they're not happy with.
- Try to give them as much power as possible to find solutions so they can feel more in control. This can increase their self-esteem.
- Stop bullying where it's happening:
  - meet with the school or organisation and ask about their policy and procedures for dealing with bullying. Be clear and firm about the impact of the bullying and the need for them to stop it. Find out what steps they will take to prevent it happening again
  - be prepared to name the children who bully. Write down who, what, where and when
  - keep in contact until the problem is sorted out. If you find it difficult to be assertive, take another adult with you for support.

- If it's cyber bullying:
  - let children know they need to be open with you so you can make sure they're safe
  - be careful who knows phone numbers, e-mail addresses or other contact information. You may need to change these in the short-term, but remember you need to take actions which stop bullying permanently
  - contact your phone and internet providers to see what can be done to prevent calls or remove bullying material
  - talk to the school principal if cyber bullying involves students from school
  - report cyber bullying to the police if it doesn't stop (see 'Cyber safety' guide).
- Help children work out ways to deal with bullying and to feel good about themselves. This could include:
  - talking to an adult who can do something to stop it, e.g. a teacher, coach or group leader
  - ignoring the bully and walking away
  - practising being confident when not in the situation so they are better prepared to react when it's happening
  - staying calm so the bully doesn't win by getting a reaction
  - not getting physical which can end up in being hurt or blamed for the bully's actions
  - being true to themselves, focussing on their strengths and building these up
  - making new friends and doing things together.

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**If bullying becomes assault, discrimination or harassment it's breaking the law and you may need to involve the police.**

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## Want more information?

### Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52  
Advice on child health and parenting.

### Kids Helpline

Phone 1800 55 1800  
Provides free telephone and online counselling for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years.  
[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

### Reachout

ReachOut provides practical tools and support to help young people get through everything from everyday issues to tough times.  
<http://au.reachout.com>

### Bullying no way

A national coalition of educators working together to create safe learning environments.  
[www.bullyingnoway.gov.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.gov.au)

**Australian Sports Commission** has a range of resources and model policies to assist sporting clubs.

[www.ausport.gov.au](http://www.ausport.gov.au)

### National Centre Against Bullying

has information for parents, children and schools about bullying and what to do about it  
[www.ncab.org.au](http://www.ncab.org.au)

### Cybersafety Contact Centre

Australian Communications and Media Authority  
Phone 1800 880 176. Go to [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) hotline to make a complaint, and to [www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au) for safety information and Cyber Smart Kids.

**Think U Know, Australian Federal Police** To report online safety concerns. The search function will link you with a wealth of information  
[www.thinkuknow.org.au](http://www.thinkuknow.org.au)

## Local Services

### Goonellabah Child & Family Health Service

Phone 02 6625 0111  
9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

### Lismore Community Health - Child and Family

Phone 02 6620 7687  
8am – 5:00pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

### Headspace

National Youth Mental health service for 12 - 25 year olds.  
Phone 02 6625 0200

*Refer to Service Listing for contact details of other local services*

