

What parents should know about bullying

Bullying is a common problem in schools. It's when a child deliberately hurts another child or teenager either by physical violence, name calling, teasing or by making unkind comments about a person's appearance. It can include 'victimising' a person by excluding them from a group, or even embarrassing them by passing on confidential information or rumours about them to other students. Sometimes bullying involves sexual assault.

How does bullying affect children?

Some people say 'bullying doesn't really hurt children – it helps toughen them up.' This is simply not true. Remember that while some children are very resilient, others are more vulnerable. Bullying can harm children and young people in the following ways:

- It makes them feel isolated
- It makes them feel bad. Children readily believe what others say about them. If others say they are ugly or stupid, they may believe it, despite the good things parents say about them
- It affects their ability to learn at school
- It can contribute to depression in children and young people and, in some cases, even suicide.

What are some of the signs a child is being bullied?

Because the following clues can also be signs of other problems, it's important to talk (gently) to your child first before jumping to conclusions.

- Unexplained bruises, scratches or cuts
- Damaged clothes or belongings
- Loss of belongings
- Decreased interest in school
- Deterioration in school performance
- Reluctance to go to school or avoiding the school bus
- Being anxious, angry or aggressive
- Complaining of headaches, stomach aches or having frequent visits to the school sick bay
- General unexplained unhappiness
- Having few friends
- Sleeping problems, including bedwetting and bad dreams
- Reluctance to talk about school
- Feeling anxious or 'down' when it's time to go back to school after the weekend or holidays.

What if your child tells you he or she is being bullied?

Listen to what they have to say. Don't say 'don't worry about it' or 'punch them back'. Make it clear you love and support your child. If bullying continues, contact the school with the following information:

- what happened
- when and where it happened
- the names of who was involved and any witnesses
- when the bullying first began
- what solutions have been tried so far
- the names of any teachers who are aware of the problem.

Contacting the school

Let your child know you're approaching the school. He or she may worry that this will make things worse – but remember that bullying thrives on secrecy. If you're not confident about speaking English, ask an English-speaking relative, friend or neighbour to come with you. You need to:

- Make an appointment with the appropriate person. This could be a teacher with whom you or your child has a good relationship, the school principal or deputy principal, a school counsellor or (in high school) your child's Year Advisor (a teacher who looks after the welfare of students in a particular year).

What to do at the meeting

- Be cooperative – say 'what can we do about this situation?' rather than be accusing or angry.
- Ask the school what policies they have to deal with bullying
- Ask the school how they usually cope with bullying
- Ask what you can do to help
- Before you leave, be clear about what the school will do and when they will contact you.

How the Peer Support Foundation can help.

The Peer Support Foundation is an organisation which develops programs in schools to improve the wellbeing of young people and the community. The Foundation has programs to help schools become more aware of bullying and how to prevent it. If you're concerned about bullying in your child's school, contact the Foundation for more information on (02) 9905 3499.

If you need help making phone calls in English, ring the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450.

You can find more health information in your language on the Multicultural Communication website at <http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.