



TIP SHEET



Understanding Bullying: A Guide for Parents



Bullying is a form of cruelty that affects not just the bullies and victims, but those who witness the behaviour and the distress of the victim. Bullying is widespread and most commonly found in schools. Schools have a responsibility to create an environment where children feel safe and in recent years schools have taken steps to develop policies against bullying. However children can be bullied anywhere. Bullying can have a very bad effect on the child who is being bullied and on the child who is allowed to go on bullying. Bullying needs to be taken seriously by adults.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is deliberate. It is the desire to hurt, threaten or frighten someone. It can be with words or actions. It can be by one person or more, and can vary in the degree of severity. It can be a 'one off' incident, but usually involves repeated actions by a child or children. The differences in power make bullying possible.

Bullying can take many forms, including:

Physical bullying: hitting, kicking, punching, taking or damaging belongings, pinching, pushing, and violent physical attacks

Verbal bullying: name calling, insulting, racist remarks, obscenities, telephone harassment, and sexual harassment

Emotional bullying: spreading rumours and nasty stories, exclusion, threats of harm, threatening gestures, and isolation

It happens at school - in toilets, change rooms, locker rooms and playgrounds. It happens outside school - at bus stops and train stations, on transport, in parks, walking home and at sporting clubs. As long as the bullying gives satisfaction and no one does something about it, the bullying will continue.

Prevalence

Research in Australian schools has shown that approximately one in every six children is bullied once a week or more. However, the rate of bullying differs across genders and ages.

Gender: In Australia, studies have shown that approximately 20% of boys and 15% of girls are bullied at least once a week. More boys than girls experience physical bullying, whereas more girls suffer from emotional bullying.

Age: Bullying typically decreases with age. In addition, as children grow older, there is a gradual increase in the proportion of bullying that is verbal and a general decrease in the proportion that is physical

Children who Bully

There are many reasons why children bully. Children who bully may pick on just anyone, or choose their victim. They may find that bullying pays (get what they want or get admired by others) or they enjoy the feelings of power they get from bullying others.

Children who bully are more likely to grow up to bully their partners and their own children.

What Parents Can Do

If you think that your child may be bullying others, it is important to take it seriously. Some strategies that may help reduce the bullying behaviour include:

- ✓ Make it clear that bullying is not acceptable. Decide on non-violent consequences that will occur if the behaviour happens again (e.g. losing TV privileges for a week). Physical punishment should not be used as this will send the message that violence is acceptable.
- ✓ Explore the bullied child's point of view. Talk to your child about how they would feel if they were in the other child's shoes.
- ✓ Reinforcing positive, social behaviours by praise or rewards.
- ✓ Model the behaviours you want your child to display. If you show respect and acceptance of others, your child is likely to learn these behaviours from you.
- ✓ Communicate with the school in order to gain further information about the bullying problems, plan



how to deal with the problem, and monitor your child's progress.

Children Who Are Bullied

Any child can get bullied. Sometimes children who are popular, smarter or attractive can be victims of bullying. *Being bullied is very distressing for the victim and needs to be dealt with.*

Signs of Being Bullied

Children who are being bullied may not always tell adults. They may be afraid or ashamed. They may think it is their fault. They may think it is 'dobbing'. They may have been threatened with something worse if they tell. Some signs of being bullied may be:

- not wanting to go to school
- finding excuses for not going to school, e.g. feeling sick or being sick
- wanting to go to school a different way, e.g. changing the route, or being driven instead of catching a bus
- being very tense, tearful and unhappy before or after school
- talking about hating school or other children
- showing bruises or scratches
- show damage to or loss of personal belongings
- showing problems with sleeping, eg not sleeping, nightmares, bedwetting
- not having any friends
- refusing to talk about what happens at school.

These signs may not necessarily mean your child is being bullied, but you need to check out what is worrying your child.

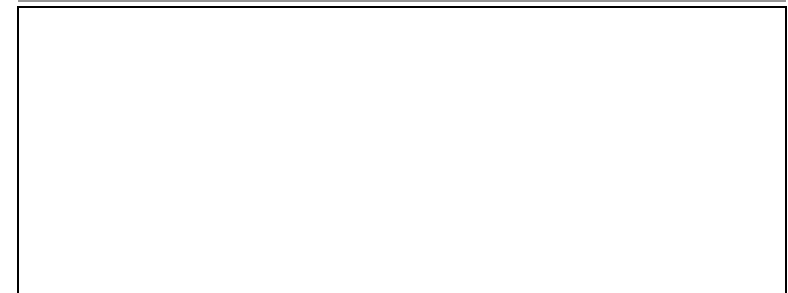
The Effects of Bullying

Being bullied can damage lives. The long-term effects of on-going bullying can damage a person's health and well-being that lasts well into adult life. It damages self-esteem, increases anxiety and can cause serious depression. Bullying can make children feel afraid, petrified, lonely, angry, distressed or physically ill. Children who are always 'on guard' are often checking where the bully is and wondering when it will happen again. When children are 'on alert' like this, they are less likely to concentrate or to learn. Their friendships may suffer as they are often worried and not ready to have fun. Children may begin to feel they deserve the treatment and become withdrawn, isolated, and feel less able to fit into their world.

What Parents Can Do

- Listen to your child and take seriously their feelings and fears.
- Try not to take everything into your own hands, unless it is an emergency, because this is likely to make your child feel less in control. In extreme cases action must be taken without your child's approval.
- Help your child to work out what ideas they have about coping with the problem. Write them down. Include a few of your own to get started. Then talk with them about which ones might help or not help and why. Choose an idea that they would like to try and then check out how it works.
- Don't call your child names eg "weak" or "a sook" and don't let anyone else do so.
- If the bullying is verbal teasing you may be able to help your child to learn to ignore it, so the child who is doing it does not get any satisfaction out of it.
- You could practice at home ways to help your child gain confidence, e.g. the way to walk past with their head up.
- Help your child think of ways to avoid the situation, e.g. by going a different way home, or staying with a group. (Your child needs to feel safe, but should not have to change their life to avoid being bullied.)
- Work on improving your child's confidence by concentrating on the things they can do well.
- Most importantly, if the bullying is happening at school, contact your school. Talk to the Principal about the school's way of dealing with bullying and what steps the school will take to prevent it happening again to your child. Talk to the teacher about what can be done to help your child. Keep in contact until the problem is sorted out.

FOR FURTHER HELP: If you have any questions or need further help contact your GP or the number detailed below. Psychologists employed by Queensland Psychology Centre have at least six years of education and training to equip them to provide a professional and timely service to you in the area of bullying.



Reference: Parenting SA. Government of South Australia, 2004. *Bullying in Schools: A Guide for Parents.* Produced by Amanda Duffy, Griffith University/Marymount Student and Family Support Centre