

BULLYING

Bullying

Every person has the right to feel safe at school and to learn without fear of harassment. Bullying is the wilful, conscious desire to hurt, threaten or frighten someone. A bully is someone who repeatedly uses their power to harm or scare others less powerful than themselves. Bullying and harassment can be done by an individual or group and can affect a child physically, emotionally or psychologically. Bullying is an unjustifiable behaviour that can be direct (e.g. physical contact) or indirect (e.g. spreading harmful rumours).

Bullying needs to be dealt with whether it occurs in the school, outside the school or within the home. Problems resulting from bullying can have far reaching effects on all involved, including the victims, the bullies, the bystanders and other family members. Effective school programs will target the needs of all concerned. Bullying can affect your child's willingness to attend school.

Who do children tell?

Most children will tell a friend. If they tell an adult, it is more likely to be a parent. Teachers may be unaware that there is a problem. Often parents suspect that something is happening but are unsure what the problem is. When parents discover that their child is being bullied, the most common response is a combination of outrage, anger, frustration, sadness, guilt, disgust and confusion.

What to look for

There are many things that children do or say which could be taken as warning signs that they may be being bullied, but they are not proof. Some warning signs include:

- Less interest in or not wanting to go to school
- Complaints of headaches or stomach pains
- Frequent damage to or loss of items of clothing, property or school work
- Frequent injuries such as bruises or cuts
- Sleeping difficulties
- Asking for extra pocket money or lunch items
- Coming home hungry even though you sent them to school with enough food for the day
- Not being invited to parties or other social activities with peers
- Generally unhappy
- Not wanting to talk about school
- Moody or irritable

Of course, these indicators may be related to issues other than bullying and need to be followed up.

What can parents do?

Ask your child about any abnormal behaviour. Listen carefully to your child and show concern and support. Tell them they have a right to feel safe at school.

Give sensible advice – don't encourage your child to fight back, as this will most likely increase the bullying.

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IT'S COOL
TO BEAT SCHOOL

Ask your child the following questions to understand if there is a repeated pattern:

- What, where and when did the incident happen?
- Who was involved on each occasion?
- Did anybody else see it, and, if so, who?
- What solutions have been tried so far?
- The names of any teachers who are aware of the problem

Work with your child's school to solve the problem. Schools take their responsibilities in relation to bullying behaviour very seriously and they have more success when parents work with the school to solve the bullying problem.

Remember, if you were not aware that your child was being bullied, then perhaps your child's teacher(s) did not know about it either.

You should:

- Make an appointment with your child's teacher and make notes of the points you want to discuss before the meeting
- Try to stay calm at the meeting and present information in a way that makes it clear to the school that you and the school are working as partners in trying to fix this problem
- Work with the school to establish a plan for dealing with the current situation and future bullying incidents. Before you leave, ask for clarification about the next steps in the plan

The school will need time to investigate and to talk to teachers and perhaps other students.

You can make a follow-up call to see what has been done or alternatively ask the school when you can expect them to get back to you.

Encourage your child to report any further bullying incidents to a teacher they trust at the school.

What I should NOT do if my child is being bullied?

- Do not directly approach any other student who you believe may have been involved in bullying your child
- Do not try to sort the issues out with their parents. This usually doesn't work and makes the situation much worse

What if my child is bullying others?

- Respond calmly and non-defensively, and commit to working with the school to manage the problem in a helpful way
- See the situation as an opportunity for your child to learn important developmental lesson
- Do not directly approach the bullied student or their family or try to get other parents to take your child's side