

Anti-bullying – how to encourage your child to be an effective bystander

A guide for parents and carers



Research shows that school is one of the safest places for children and young people. Let's work together to keep students safe.

What is bullying?

Young people often joke around with each other and name-call or push and shove. This type of behaviour is not necessarily bullying.

Bullying has some unique characteristics.

- There is a power difference between the person bullying and the person being bullied.
- There is an intent to cause distress or hurt.
- The behaviour is repeated over time.

Bullying behaviour can be:

- verbal eg name calling, teasing, putdowns, sarcasm, threats
- physical eg hitting, kicking, tripping
- social eg ignoring, excluding, making inappropriate gestures

- psychological eg spreading rumours, dirty looks, hiding or damaging possessions, malicious SMS and email messages, inappropriate use of camera phones.

What are schools doing to protect students?

The Department of Education and Training strives to make schools a safe place for young people. As such, any instance of bullying is unacceptable. Schools and families need to work together to ensure that children and young people have the strategies to form positive relationships.

Policies and guidelines

All New South Wales government schools are required to have a plan to counter

bullying and this is outlined in the *Anti-bullying Plan for Schools (2005)*.

This plan outlines strategies for parents, students and teachers to identify, report and deal with bullying behaviour. It can be accessed at www.det.nsw.edu.au by going to 'our policies' and searching 'Anti-bullying Plan'.

Programs

There is a range of programs available in schools that promote positive relationships and support students. These include buddy and peer support programs, mentoring and transition programs and conflict resolution programs.

Bullying behaviour is specifically addressed through curriculum areas such as Personal Development, Health and Physical Education. Child protection education and values education also promote strategies to counter bullying.

Who are bystanders?

In any bullying situation there is commonly the person being bullied, the person bullying and 'bystanders' (other students who watch or are in the area at the time the bullying takes place). Bystanders are people who may cheer the person bullying, stand by and silently watch, or walk away from the situation. This does not help the person being bullied, or stop the behaviour from happening.

Why are bystanders important?

Bullying is a difficult problem that only gets worse when it is ignored. Research tells us that in bullying situations:

- bystanders are present most of the time (85%), where as adults are rarely present
- most young people feel uncomfortable watching bullying, but very few know what to do to stop it happening
- bullying behaviour is reinforced where people watch but do nothing
- when bystanders do intervene, the bullying is more likely to stop quickly most of the time.

Why is being an effective bystander often difficult for young people?

It can be hard for young people to help stop bullying behaviour. They might be afraid that they might become a target of bullying; they might not know how to stop the behaviour; they may feel that they will make things worse for the person being bullied, or they may be afraid that other students will label them a 'dobber'.

Sometimes young people may think that the person being bullied 'deserves it'. However, bullying affects everyone, and silence only makes the problem worse. It's up to everyone to create a safe school environment and parents can help.

How can you help?

■ Talk with your child about bullying

Ask your child about what happens at school and keep the lines of communication open. That way they are more likely to confide in you.

■ Ask others for help

Bystanders far outnumber those who are bullying. Have your child ask others to help say 'stop' to the person bullying.

■ Tell your child to keep their own safety in mind and to tell an adult if they are worried about bullying

The important thing is to teach young people how to intervene appropriately so that they don't put themselves or anyone else in danger.

Telling an adult is not dobbing

■ Let your child know it's okay to tell

Make it safe for your child to tell you about what happens at school and how it makes them feel. Try to listen without rushing in with solutions.

■ Help your child to think about how the person being bullied would feel

Encourage your child to offer comfort and support afterwards to a child who has been bullied.

■ Help your child with strategies to help others who are being bullied

If gossip is being spread about someone they know, encourage your child to speak up and tell the truth. Tell your child not to join in bullying behaviour.

■ Know how to report bullying

Young people need to know that they can ask several trusted adults at school for help. Ask your child which adults at school they would report bullying to.

■ Show your child respect and kindness at home

If members of the family treat each other well, your child will most likely treat others the same way.

ACCESS SUPPORT

Contact your child's school

Resolving issues of bullying is important. If you are aware of school-related bullying it is important that your child notifies a trusted adult at the school, or that you notify the school. The school can provide advice and support.

When contacting the school:

- ask for a copy of the school's Anti-bullying Plan if you do not have one
- be specific about what has happened (give dates, places, names of pupils involved, if possible)
- make a note of what the school intends to do
- follow up with the school on the actions taken.

Helpline for parents and carers

For confidential support, call the Net Alert helpline on telephone 1800 880 176 or www.netalert.gov.au

Helpline for children and young people

Confidential counselling is available for children and young people from the Kids Help Line on telephone 1800 551 800.

Student Welfare Consultant

If you have contacted the school, but feel that you need more support or advice, contact the student welfare consultant at your local Department of Education and Training regional office. Find your regional office telephone number at www.det.nsw.edu.au/contactus/index.htm

Other useful resources and websites

Bullying. No way!
www.bullyingnoway.com.au

Kids Help Line
www.kidshelpline.com.au

Reach Out! www.reachout.com.au

Bullying Among Young Children: A guide for parents by the Australian Attorney General's Department.
To get your copy, call 1800 708 777.