

Safe Schools are Effective Schools

A Strategy For Parents

Discovering that your child is being bullied or that your child is bullying others is very stressful and upsetting. Most parents initially experience anger, confusion and guilt.

The following information has been developed to provide you with useful strategies in dealing with incidents of bullying.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is when someone, or a group of people, who have more power at the time, deliberately upset or hurt another person on more than one occasion. Bullying includes physical bullying such as hitting; verbal bullying such as name calling; and indirect bullying such as spreading rumours.

Bullying is Not

- a situation where there is mutual conflict – i.e. a balance of power where students are both upset and usually want a resolution to the problem.



- Social rejection or dislike (unless it is a repeated act and directed towards a specific person).
- Single episodes of nastiness or meanness or random acts of aggression or intimidation.

How do I know if my child is being bullied?

Some of the signs that a child is being bullied include:

- an unwillingness or refusal to go to school
- feeling ill in the mornings
- wagging school
- doing poorly in their school work
- becoming withdrawn, starting to stammer, lacking confidence
- crying themselves to sleep, having nightmares
- asking for money or starting to steal (to pay the bully)
- refusing to talk about what's wrong
- having unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches
- beginning to bully other children or siblings
- becoming aggressive and unreasonable

Adapted from *Kidscape*, available at www.kidscape.org.uk/parents/signsof.shtml



What can I do if my child is being bullied?

Step 1: Listen carefully to your child and show concern and support.

Step 2: Give sensible advice – don't encourage your child to fight back; this will most likely increase the bullying.

Step 3: Assist your child to develop positive strategies including:

- 'saying leave me alone' and calmly walking away
- avoiding situations that might expose them to further bullying
- making new friends.

Step 4: 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.

Step 5: 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 teachers 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.
- At the meeting try to stay calm and present information in a way that makes it clear that you and the school are working as partners in trying to fix this problem.

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

Step 6: 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.



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Step 7: 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.

Step 8: If needed, ask for the school counsellor to become involved.

Step 9: 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 lessons.

What I should NOT do if my child is bullying others?

- Do not directly approach the bullied student or their family or try to get other parents to take your child's side.

What I can do to reduce bullying at school?

- Report all incidents of bullying to the school, not just incidents that happen to your own child.
- Let your child know how much you disapprove of bullying and why.

- Any type of bullying at home should be avoided, and respect for others should be modelled and encouraged.
- Talk to your child about the qualities associated with caring friendships and discourage them from staying in 'friendships' where they are mistreated or not respected.

Useful websites

Safe Schools are Effective Schools
www.sofweb.edu.au/wellbeing/safeschools/bullying/index.htm

Student Code of Conduct
www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/welfare/conduct.htm

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



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