

What is bullying?

Bullying is when people with greater power repeatedly expose another to negative words or actions intended to cause distress. It can occur in all settings, including the family, school, online or via mobile phone, workplace, sporting field and broader community. Examples include:

- Physical (punching, shoving, damaging or stealing property);
- Verbal (teasing, put-downs, threats);
- Covert, or emotional and social (spreading rumours, exclusion, humiliation, blackmail, stalking);
- Sexual (suggestive comments or signs, touching or groping, showing offensive material); and
- Cyber or online (creating “hate” web or social media pages, trolling, spreading revealing or embarrassing photographs).

Why is bullying awareness important?

Bullying can have serious effects on the mental health and wellbeing of young people who are bullied, those who bully, and bystanders, both now and later in life. Problems may develop after bullying starts or be present before bullying begins as a vulnerability that attracts bullying. People who are bullied often show:

- Poorer self-esteem, low assertiveness, social exclusion, and other social and emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, anger and withdrawal;
- Higher level of absenteeism and truancy, as students feel unsafe and unhappy at school;
- Poorer physical health, such as a greater frequency of colds, headaches and stomach aches; and

- Poorer academic performance and changes in behaviour.

If a teacher notices these in the classroom, it is important to explore bullying as a potential cause.

People who bully others may also have social and emotional difficulties and adjustment problems, now and into the future. These include depression, externalising disorders, poor academic achievement, truancy, defiance, poor social skills, substance misuse, criminal activity, and being the subject of bullying and violence themselves.

Good mental health can buffer the impact of bullying and help prevent bullying.

Developing good mental health and the skills associated with resilience can assist with preventing someone from bullying others, mitigating the ill effects of being bullied or encouraging a bystander to support someone being bullied.

Encourage protective factors, such as:



What can teachers and schools do to prevent bullying?

There are important strategies that individual teachers and whole schools may employ to prevent and intervene in bullying, which support their duty of care to students.



Bullying interventions that target only individual students are largely ineffective. Evidence shows that a multi-faceted whole-school preventative approach is preferred, including:

- Examining school systems and policies;
- Developing effective whole-school anti-bullying, cyber safety and discipline policy that everyone is aware of and is consistently enforced;
- Delivering curriculum-based strategies to help students identify bullying, empower bystanders and develop general coping and resilience skills;
- Promoting a positive school climate, including teachers that promote mental health (e.g. use of the CHILD framework for students and preventing workplace bullying among school staff); and
- Managing the physical environment.

These prevention strategies complement management strategies for specific bullying incidents such as individual support and intervention for the bully and the person experiencing bullying.

To enhance acceptability, policy should be developed in collaboration with school leadership, teachers, students, parents and caregivers, and even the broader community.

Sources and Links

See your State Government Department of Education website for further ideas and policy information.

Bullying. No Way!: bullyingnoway.gov.au

Cyber (smart:): www.cybersmart.gov.au

Student Wellbeing Hub: www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au

Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Bully Stoppers Program: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers

ReachOut.com: au.reachout.com/tough-times/bullying-abuse-and-violence

National Centre Against Bullying: www.ncab.org.au

Levy, N., Cortesti, S., Gasser, U., Crowley, E., Beaton, M., Casey, J. & Nolan, C. (2012). Bullying in a networked era: A literature review. Berkman Center Research Publication No. 2012-17
<http://ssrn.com/abstract=2146877>