



Bullying

Bullying is behaviour that's intended to embarrass, threaten or intimidate another person. It causes distress to everyone, but we can stop it.

What's bullying?

Bullying is hurtful, aggressive and repeated behaviour that aims to embarrass, threaten or intimidate another person.

Bullying can be carried out by an individual or group towards one or more persons and is a complex social problem which can occur in environments such as schools. Researchers agree that there are five key features of bullying behaviour:

1. The person (or people) who engage in bullying behaviour intend to inflict harm or fear upon the target.
2. Aggression towards the target occurs repeatedly.
3. The targeted child or young person doesn't provoke bullying behaviour by using verbal or physical aggression.
4. Bullying tends to occur in familiar social groups.
5. The person engaging in the bullying behaviour is usually more powerful (either in reality or perception) than the person they're targeting. This power may be, for example, social, physical or age-related.

What bullying isn't

Behaviours that don't constitute bullying include:

- mutual arguments and disagreements (where there's no power imbalance)
- not liking someone or a single act of social rejection
- one-off acts of meanness or nastiness
- isolated incidents of aggression, intimidation or violence.

To effectively respond to bullying at a whole learning community level, it's important that staff have an agreed definition that's understood and applied consistently.

Types of bullying behaviour

There are several different types of bullying behaviours:

Face-to-face

Face-to-face (or direct) bullying may include damaging a person's belongings, kicking, hitting and punching, or verbal actions such as making threats, name-calling and insults. Face-to-face bullying is usually more easily witnessed.

Covert

Covert bullying is more subtle – it's typically non-physical and occurs out of sight of others. Covert bullying can include hand gestures, threatening looks, whispering, excluding, blackmailing, spreading rumours, threatening and trying to socially isolate someone. Other covert bullying behaviours may include trying to damage social relationships, playing nasty practical jokes, telling others' private information, criticising clothes and personalities, sending mocking or abusive notes, or intentional ignoring.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying, or online bullying, occurs via technologies such as email, social media, text messages, or instant messaging. Cyberbullying differs from offline bullying in that the perpetrators can more easily remain anonymous, the nasty content can reach a larger audience, and material can be difficult to remove.

The [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#) has some great resources on cyberbullying.

These different types of bullying can occur in combination and cause children and young people to feel they have no safe space.

Read more about [recognising the signs of bullying behaviour](#).

Bullying can have serious consequences

There are serious short-term and long-term psychological and social consequences of bullying for both the children and young people who are bullied as well as for those who bully them.

These consequences can include:

- feeling unsafe in the learning community
- increased likelihood of depression and suicidal thoughts (especially young people who are bullied)
- decreased self-esteem
- lower levels of academic achievement
- negative attitudes towards school
- high levels of absenteeism
- alcohol and substance abuse

- poor mental health in adulthood.

Bullying also has consequences for children and young people who witness repeated bullying of their peers, as they can experience negative emotional effects similar to those experienced by the victimised individuals themselves. Children and young people may feel distressed because they feel powerless to stop what's happening to someone else as well as fearing that they too may be unsafe or targeted.

Unfortunately, bullying is relatively common.

Here are some recent statistics:

- Approximately one in four Australian students are affected by bullying.
- Approximately one in seven young people have been cyberbullied, with research suggesting this number may be increasing.
- More than three-quarters of students who were bullied online were also bullied offline.
- Bullying is the fourth-most common reason young people seek help from children's help services.

Read about what [your school can do about bullying](#).

What causes bullying?

There's no simple explanation for bullying.

Bullying emerges from a complex interaction of social, personal and psychological circumstances. Underdeveloped social and emotional skills may lead to bullying behaviour. Children and young people who have poor self-regulation and anger management skills are more likely to engage in bullying behaviour compared to those with better-developed skills.

Children and young people who engage in bullying behaviour may feel disdain for their targets, find bullying others to be enjoyable, feel strong and in control when bullying others, and/or believe that bullying others will help make them popular. Bullying behaviour can also occur because of distrust, fear, misunderstandings and lack of knowledge or jealousy.

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External links

[Bullying. No Way!](#)

headspace - [Bullying](#)

ReachOut – [Research Summary: Bullying and young Australians](#)