



Recognising bullying behaviour

Bullying can be stopped, but first educators need to understand the drivers behind and recognise the signs of this behaviour.

Factors impacting on bullying behaviour

Anyone can become the target of bullying, and it can happen for a multitude of reasons.

These reasons include being different in some way, being new to a learning community, when a relationship breaks up, or because of a perceived threat to the social status of a child or young person who has already demonstrated a pattern of bullying others. Read more about what [bullying](#) is.

Children and young people who are more likely to be bullied are also more likely to:

- feel disconnected from the learning community and not like it
- lack quality friendships
- display high levels of emotionality that indicate vulnerability and low levels of resilience
- be less well accepted by peers, avoid conflict and be socially withdrawn
- have low self-esteem
- be relatively non-assertive
- be considered different in some way.

You might notice children or young people with some of these characteristics in your day-to-day work.

Practical ways to assist include keeping a closer eye out for signs of bullying being directed towards these individuals, supporting their participation and inclusion in the classroom, and helping them to develop resilience.

Attitudes based on blaming the target (for example, suggesting someone is “playing the victim”) are unhelpful and dismiss the needs of both the child or young person who is being targeted and the individual who is bullying. Messages that promote positive and healthy relationships and highlight the inappropriateness of bullying will enable children and young people to raise concerns about bullying and ensure staff become aware and can respond to stop it.

Some populations are at greater risk

Although bullying is harmful to everyone, there are some children and young people who may be more likely to be at risk of being bullied. These include:

Children and young people from multicultural and culturally and linguistically diverse communities

These children and young people are often target of bullying and cyberbullying because of stereotyping related to their cultural, religious, linguistic or racial background.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

A number of factors, including discrimination, socioeconomic disadvantage and cultural differences, contribute to higher rates of both bullying and cyberbullying for this group of children and young people.

Same-sex attracted, trans and intersex children and young people

Levels of bullying of children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex (LGBTI) are as high as 65%. Other evidence suggests that intersex young people may also experience higher levels of bullying; however, more research needs to be done here.

Children and young people with disability

Children and young people with disability are more likely to be the targets of bullying. Recent research shows that more than 56% of students with disabilities had experienced bullying over a 12-month period.

Recognising bullying

Most bullying behaviour occurs out of sight of adults.

However, as an educator, you're well placed to notice behaviour changes in a child or young person, or changes within peer groups, which may indicate the presence of bullying.

Signs which may indicate bullying could include:

- a change in an individual's demeanour, engagement or attendance
- shifts in friendships which seem to leave one or more child or young person unhappy
- negative interactions between children and young people
- negative comments made about another child or young person
- a child or young person being ignored or excluded

- a child or young person avoiding certain parts of the school grounds, arriving or leaving school late or very early
- a child or young person seeming tired, daydreamy, or anxious, particularly around specific peers
- a child or young person appearing dishevelled, with torn or dirty clothing
- a child or young person with injuries such as bruises or cuts.

Next steps could involve:

- asking the child or person, privately, if they'd like to have a conversation to let them know about your concerns
- asking about any concerns they have in the learning community or at home
- discussing your concerns with your learning community's leadership, pastoral care or student wellbeing staff member to share concerns and what you've observed.

In a situation in which a child or young person is identified as a target of bullying, act quickly and follow your learning community's policies and procedures relating to bullying. Ideally, these policies will include multiple intervention models such as support groups or restorative practices.

Learn more about noticing changes to children and young people's behaviour and wellbeing in the [Notice](#) module.

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External links

[Bullying. No Way!](#)