

Building Respectful and Safe Schools

A fact sheet for parents and carers about responding to bullying and unacceptable behaviour

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

The following information has been developed to provide you with useful strategies in dealing with incidents of bullying or other forms of unacceptable behaviour.

What is bullying and unacceptable behaviour?

Bullying is when someone, or a group of people, who have more power at the time, deliberately upset or hurt another person, damage their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion. Bullying includes physical bullying such as hitting; verbal bullying such as name calling; indirect bullying such as spreading rumours and cyberbullying which includes the use of digital technologies to bully or harass someone.

Unacceptable behaviour refers to a wide range of behaviours that are not appropriate or acceptable, including harassment, discrimination and threats or acts of violence.

Bullying is NOT

- a situation where there is mutual conflict, that is 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, meanness or one off acts of aggression or intimidation.

How do I know if my child is being bullied or a target of unacceptable behaviour?

Some of the signs that a child is being bullied or a target of unacceptable behaviour include¹:

- an unwillingness or refusal to go to school
- feeling ill in the mornings
- frightened to walk to and from school
- 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- becoming withdrawn, starting to stammer, lacking confidence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
- reluctance to discuss cyberbullying in case their computer or phone is taken away.

What can I do if my child is being bullied or targeted by unacceptable behaviour?

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

Step 2: Congratulate your child for confiding in you.

¹ Adapted from Kidscape, available at www.kidscape.org.uk/parents/signsof.shtml



Every
child,
every
opportunity



Step 3: Give sensible advice – don't encourage your child to fight back; this will most likely increase the bullying or unacceptable behaviour.

Step 4: 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 or unacceptable behaviour
- making new friends
- using technologies safely and responsibly.

Step 5: 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 may be aware of the problem.

Step 6: Work with your child's school to solve the problem. Schools take their responsibilities in relation to bullying and unacceptable 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 or the target of unacceptable behaviour, 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 clam 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 7: Work with the school to establish a plan for dealing with the current situation and future incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour. Before you leave, ask for clarification about the next steps in the plan.

Step 8: If needed, ask for appropriate specialist staff to become involved.

Step 9: Encourage your child to report any further incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour to a teacher they trust at the school.

What should I NOT do if my child is being bullied or a target of unacceptable behaviour?

- Do not directly approach any other student who you believe may have been involved in bullying or targeting 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 or targeting 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 should I NOT do if my child is bullying or targeting others?

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

What can I do to reduce bullying and unacceptable behaviour at school?

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

Building Respectful and Safe Schools: A resource for school communities

www.education.vic.gov.au/respect

Safe Schools are Effective Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement/default.htm>

Bullying. No Way!

www.bullyingnoway.com.au

Learning On Line

<http://education.vic.gov.au/learningonline>