

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING

An Academic and Personal Perspective



Dr Zach Greig

As someone who **personally experienced bullying**, I understand that bullying is frequently misunderstood as a normal part of growing up. In reality, it is a serious social issue with significant, lasting impacts. As an academic who has **extensively studied bullying behaviour**, I've witnessed firsthand the profound effects it can have on young individuals, families, and entire school communities.

THE IMPACT OF BULLYING

Research indicates that approximately 1 in 4 young people experience bullying, and rates have notably increased since COVID, with 80% of students nationwide identifying bullying as a significant issue in their schools.

80%



of students say that bullying is a problem in their school.

3 in 5

school students have been bullied.



That's 2.3M+ students nationally!

Bullying severely affects social, physical, and mental health, contributing to heightened anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, and disruptions in academic and social performance. Notably, research shows that individuals experiencing bullying are often more distressed by the inaction of peers than by the bullying itself. Additionally, bystanders who witness bullying incidents also experience significant emotional impacts, further highlighting bullying's pervasive reach.

A 2022 study by Vaillancourt and Palamarchuk provides compelling evidence

of bullying's impact on brain development. Brain scans of bullied children revealed different developmental patterns compared to non-bullied children, with the frontal cortex being thicker, making them more prone to interpreting stimuli as stressors. Such changes affect their ability to process social cues, manage emotions effectively, and think clearly.

1 in 7

students who are bullied do not speak to anyone.

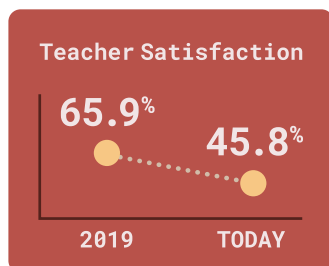


That's **340,656** students in Australia who stay silent.

PREVENTING BULLYING: BUILDING SAFER SCHOOLS

Effective prevention involves the entire community. Schools can foster safe and inclusive environments by educating students about empathy, respect, and diversity from an early age. Initiatives promoting emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and assertive communication

equip students with the skills to actively resist and respond to bullying, creating cultures of support and Upstander behaviour. The role of teachers has significantly evolved over recent decades, adding new responsibilities and challenges. Alarming, up to 70% of teachers have considered leaving the profession, with only 14% reporting their workload as manageable.



Teacher satisfaction has also dropped dramatically, from 65.9% to 45.8% since 2019. These immense pressures underscore the need for student-led initiatives, such as The Stand-Up Project, which aim to support educators by sharing the responsibility for shaping school culture with students themselves.

SUPPORTING THOSE EXPERIENCING BULLYING

Support is vital for those impacted by bullying. Research from New Zealand illustrates that effective parental responses—calm, supportive, and involving the child in decision-making—can transform negative bullying experiences into opportunities for personal growth and strengthened family bonds. One parent shared, “My daughter realised we were really in her corner and began opening up to us again.”

My daughter realised we were really in her corner and began opening up to us again.

Effective handling of bullying also enhances students’ connection to their school communities and builds resilience.

Parents often experience intense emotions such as anger and guilt when their child faces bullying. However, when parents engage constructively, offering emotional support and involving their child in positive decision-making, bullying experiences can lead to meaningful, positive outcomes.

STUDENT-LED CHANGE

The Stand-Up Project acknowledges the limited capacity of teachers and parents amidst current pressures. Genuine, sustained changes in behaviour and school culture are most effectively driven by students themselves. Young people possess immense capacity to create positive school environments through peer leadership, advocacy, and active Upstander behaviours.

Indeed, our work consistently demonstrates that a thoughtful and committed group of students, supported by engaged parents and dedicated teachers, can profoundly transform their school community into a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment. Never doubt the incredible impact students can achieve when empowered with the tools and trust to lead.



- ✓ Understand what bullying IS and ISN'T
- ✓ Work with teachers
- ✓ Value home conversations
- ✓ Avoid using labels
- ✓ Teach young people how to respond
- ✓ Acknowledge information limitations
- ✓ Empathise with other parents
- ✓ Strengthen relationships

