

Bullying: A Calm, Practical Guide for Parents

The reality is sobering: Australian children face some of the highest bullying rates in the developed world, with 7 out of 10 kids aged 12-13 experiencing harassment within a year—worse than nearly every other English-speaking country we're compared to.

International studies rank us among the worst performers alongside only a handful of nations. And evidence shows bullying starts in Early Learning Centres and continues right through school. It's not isolated to one age group, or one identity. Bullying is a huge challenge in every learning context throughout this country.

(Note. Many behaviours are unkind, but not all are bullying. Teasing, conflict, being left out, or one-off nasty or unthoughtful incidents—while hurtful—don't meet the definition of bullying.)

Bullying is:

- **Repeated**
- **Intentional**
- Aimed at causing distress or harm
- Involves a **power imbalance**

There are four types:

1. **Physical** – pushing, hitting, intimidating
2. **Verbal** – name-calling, mocking, insults
3. **Social** – exclusion, rumours, reputation damage
4. **Cyber** – online harassment via messages, posts, or apps

Is Your Child Being Bullied?

Children often don't speak up about bullying. They might feel embarrassed or fear making things worse. They often feel that when parents and teachers get involved, things blow up.

You can ask your child if they're being bullied. Sometimes they'll say yes. But it can be easier to start broadly with questions like this:

- "Bullying happens at every school—do you see much of it at yours?"
- "Has anyone in your year been picked on or left out?"

This non-confrontational approach helps your child feel safe to talk. If they do open up, stay calm and listen. Bring it closer to home as the conversation progresses. "Have you or your friends been bullied?"

The Best Response

1. Stay Calm: As hard as it is, take a breath. Your child needs your emotional steadiness.

2. Explore Gently: If your child discloses bullying, recognise their courage. Ask gentle questions to obtain more information. Don't offer solutions. Just listen, understand, and explore.

3. Obtain Evidence: If bullying is leading to damage to your child or their property, document it with photos, explanations, and time/date information. If bullying is occurring online, take screenshots as evidence.

4. Speak With the Responsible Adults: Bullying will usually be happening at school (or a sport club, church, or other structured context). Approach the teacher, year advisor, wellbeing staff, or responsible adult. Share what your child has told you and ask:

- “Were you aware that this was occurring?”
- “What support can we put in place?”
- “How can we help all the children involved learn from this?”

Aim to work *with* the school or organisation, not against it.

5. Support and Coach Your Child: Help them problem-solve. Role-play responses or safe ways to seek help. Older kids might value more autonomy; younger ones may need more scaffolding. Use questions like:

- “What do you think would help?”
- “Is there someone at school you trust?”
- “What would you like me to do?”

6. Don't Rush to Confront the Other Parent: Even if you know them, approaching another parent rarely goes well. It can become defensive or combative, and it rarely solves the problem.

When to Escalate

If bullying continues or the school isn't responding, it's okay to push for more action. Keep records of communication and meetings. Go to [esafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au), contact the board, go to the education department. Agitate for a response. Protect your child.

If the environment remains unsafe and you have the resources and options, consider other schooling alternatives. Your child's mental and emotional safety comes first.

If Your Child Is the One Bullying

It can be confronting, but it's also a valuable learning moment. Stay calm. Focus on **teaching**, not punishing. Guide them towards empathy and responsibility. Ask:

- “What happened?”
- “How do you think the other person felt?”
- “What can we do to make this right?”

Handled well, bullying doesn't have to define a child's school experience. With calm, supportive adults guiding the way, kids can learn resilience, boundaries, and compassion. Step in when needed. Step back when it's safe. Most importantly, stay connected.

For more resources, go to [Bullying No Way](https://www.bullyingnoway.org.au) - a national week of action uniting schools across Australia.



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