

FACT SHEET 16

Bullying

Bullying occurs when a person or a group repeatedly and intentionally use or abuse their power to intimidate, hurt, oppress or damage someone else. Bullying isn't a single incident but sustained or systematic activities.

Bullying can be inflicted upon children, young people and adults at any time of their life. Some experts suggest that bullying can happen to as many as one in five children or young people and more likely to occur during the schooling years.

Bullying can have serious consequences for children subjected to it. Victims of bullying are more likely to suffer from a range of issues which may include anxiety, low self-esteem and depression. Some parents also report feeling angry, helpless and frustrated if they discover that their child has been subjected to bullying.

This Fact Sheet explores issues related to bullying, including: types of bullying; signs of bullying; ways that parents can assist a bullied child; and, links to other resources and supports.

Types of bullying

There are different types of bullying – physical, verbal, social, psychological and cyber – used for the purpose of intentionally hurting or intimidating another person.

Physical bullying can include hitting, kicking, tripping or poking another person or intentionally damaging someone else's belongings.

Verbal bullying can include the use of negative words such as name calling, insults or slurs.

Social bullying can include the spreading of lies, rumours, social exclusion or conducting undesirable pranks.

Psychological bullying can include the intentional use of words or actions (eg. stalking, intimidation and manipulation) that can cause psychological harm.

Cyber bullying relies on the use of technology to verbally, socially or psychologically bully another person. It is a newer type of bullying that can occur through use of networking sites, mobile phones, cameras, emails or internet chat-rooms. Cyber bullying can include sending hurtful text messages, sending nasty or hurtful messages on networking sites, sending images of the victim to others, spreading rumours electronically, and setting up a fake profile of the victim.

Signs of bullying

Children and young people may sometimes find it hard to tell parents and adults if they are being bullied and some children may not exhibit any warning signs. Sometimes children feel ashamed, embarrassed or too threatened by the bully to tell anyone that bullying is occurring. However, some signs that may point to a bullying problem include:

- > Unexplainable physical injuries (such as bruises, scratches or cuts)
- > Lost or damaged personal belongings (such as clothing, books or electronic devices)
- > Reluctance to go to school
- > Lower academic performance or loss of interest in school work
- > Changes in eating habits (such as loss of appetite or over-eating)
- > Complaints of physical ailments (such as head-aches, stomach-aches) and particularly on school days
- > Major changes in relationships and friendships with others or avoidance of social situations

- > Changes in sleeping patterns (such difficulty sleeping or bed-wetting)
- > Refusal to discuss what is happening at school or in social groups
- > Self-destructive behaviours (such as getting into trouble, self-harming or talking about suicide)
- > Decreased self-esteem and increased levels of anxiety
- > Avoidance of the internet or telephone
- > Displays of unusual treatment towards other children (controlling / dominant / lack of empathy)

Parent support

If you become aware that your child is being bullied you should take your child's bullying seriously. Let your child know you are there to help, assure him or her child that the bullying is not their fault and that you will take action to prevent any further bullying. Key ways that you can support your child include:

- > Stay calm, positive and listen to your child. Listen to your child's experience and focus on identifying a solution with your child. Ensure that your child understands he or she is not responsible for the bullying. Remain calm, positive and confident as this will reflect on your child and reinforce that the situation can be addressed appropriately.
- > Discuss strategies with your child. Discuss short-term strategies with your child to see if he or she can resolve the bullying. Encourage your child to: walk away; appear unimpressed; say "no" firmly; or, speak to another adult (such as a teacher). If the bullying continues speak to staff at your child's kindergarten, pre-school, school or social/sporting organisation.
- > Do not advise your child to fight with the bully. It is important that you do not advise your child to engage in fighting with the bully. This can be a dangerous and inappropriate approach. This can exacerbate the situation and your child may be reported for engaging in a physical fight.

- > Discuss the bullying with your child's school or social/sport organisation. Your child's teacher or the leader at a social or sporting organisation may not be aware that any bullying is occurring, particularly if it is happening outside of the school or program times. Let your child know that you are planning on discussing the bullying with staff and remind him or her that the school / organisation is there to support. All schools are required to have a bullying policy and when you meet with the school you should ask what their policies are and how they will handle your individual situation. This also applies to social or sporting organisations that your child is involved in, should bullying occur in those environments.
- > Instil confidence and pride in your child. A child that has been bullied can be at greater risk of being bullied again in the future (even if the bullying has been addressed). A child that has been bullied may also lose personal confidence and pride. To assist in restoring it, encourage your child to spend time with other children that are a positive influence or join sports, clubs or groups that build personal strength and peer friendships. Foster a positive home environment and allow your child to talk about their limb difference, particularly if reference to their limb difference formed part of the bullying. Remind your child that we are all different and reinforce that he or she has many abilities and skills.
- > Seek professional support. If you find that the bullying has deeply affected you or your child you may want to consider seeking professional support. Consider speaking with your GP, a Social Worker, or a Psychologist.

Bullying resources

A wide range of websites and organisations exist to specifically addressing bullying, including:

Bullying. No way!

www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Cybersmart

www.cybersmart.gov.au

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation

www.amf.org.au

Beyond Blue

www.beyondblue.org.au

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www.limbs4kids.org.au

Tel: 1300 782 231 Email: kids@limbs4life.org.au

The Limbs 4 Kids program is an initiative of Limbs 4 Life, Australia's peak organisation for amputees and persons living with limb difference. Limbs 4 Kids ensures that all Australian children and young people with limb difference, as well as all of those who care for them, receive access to information and support.

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