

bullying**free**nz



# Tackling Bullying

## A guide for parents and whānau



**Information to support parents,  
whānau and schools to work together**

[www.bullyingfree.nz](http://www.bullyingfree.nz)

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Who we are</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>What is bullying?</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>What is <u>not</u> bullying?</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Why does bullying happen?</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>What kinds of bullying are there?</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Where does bullying happen?</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>How serious a problem is bullying?</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Myths about bullying</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>What to look out for</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Starting early</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Why don't children and young people ask for help?</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>How should I talk to my child about bullying?</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>My child is being bullied. What should I do?</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>How do I deal with online (cyber) bullying?</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>How can I help my child who is bullying others?</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>My child has seen bullying. What should I do?</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Talking and working with your school</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Working with your school – steps to take</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Where can I get more information and help?</b> .....	<b>19</b>

# Introduction

Bullying is a very serious and distressing experience. Many children and young people carry the effects of bullying into their adult lives and relationships.

In any situation involving bullying, it is important that as adults, we listen to children and young people and help them to find the support that they need.

The aim of this guide is to provide information to parents, carers and whānau to help you respond effectively to any concerns your children and young people may have about bullying or if they are involved in an incidence of bullying.

Bullying can happen anywhere and to anyone, in lots of different ways. It could be in a physical place, such as the playground, the classroom, the sports field or the park. Or, it might take place online or on a mobile phone, through social media, online games or by text message. No matter where or how it happens, we all have a responsibility to make it stop.

All children and young people have the right to feel safe, secure, accepted and valued. To achieve this, boards of trustees, school leadership and staff, students and their parents and whānau all need to work together.

## Who we are

The cross-sector Bullying Prevention Advisory Group (BPAG) is a collaboration of 18 organisations, with representatives from the education, health, justice and social sectors, as well as internet safety and human rights advocacy groups.

BPAG members strongly believe that bullying behaviour of any kind is unacceptable and they are committed to making sure combined action is taken to reduce bullying in New Zealand schools.

### The Bullying Prevention Advisory Group includes representatives from:

New Zealand Police  
Netsafe  
Office of the Commissioner for Children  
Human Rights Commission  
ACC  
Sport New Zealand  
Education Review Office  
NZ Council for Educational Research  
NZ Assn of Intermediate & Middle Schooling  
NZ Educational Institute Te Riu Roa  
NZ Post Primary Teachers' Association  
NZ Principals' Federation  
NZ School Trustees Association  
Secondary Principals' Association of NZ  
Ministry of Education  
Ministry of Health  
Ministry of Justice  
Ministry of Social Development

## What is bullying?

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Kids who bully use their power – such as physical strength, knowing something embarrassing, or popularity – to control or harm others. Bullying is when one student (or a group of students) keeps picking on another student again and again to make them feel bad. They say or do mean things to upset them, make fun of them a lot, try to stop them joining in, or keep hitting or punching them.

Bullying can happen anywhere, at any time, and can be verbal, physical or emotional. It can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious or hidden.



Bullying is deliberate – harming another person intentionally.

Bullying involves a misuse of power in a relationship.

Bullying is usually not a one-off – the behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

Bullying involves behaviours that can cause harm – it is not a normal part of growing up.

## What is not bullying?

Bullying is a word often used to describe a lot of things that are not actually bullying. These other behaviours may be just as serious as bullying, but may need to be sorted out in a different way.

Sometimes there might be a fight or argument between students. If it happens once, it is not bullying even though it can be upsetting. It is also not bullying if someone sometimes fights with a friend and they can sort it out.



Conflict between two or more people who have a disagreement, a difference of opinion or different views (where there is no power imbalance) does not always mean it's bullying.

Not liking someone or a single act of social rejection is not bullying.

One-off acts of meanness or spite are not bullying.

Isolated incidents of aggression, intimidation or violence are not bullying.



# Why does bullying happen?

## **Bullying is a relationship problem.**

Students are bullied for lots of reasons. Sometimes they are bullied because they are different, or because they're clever or popular. At other times they are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. It can be caused by differences in race, sexuality, religion, disabilities and abilities, weight, height, or anything that creates a difference between one child and another. Bullying often comes from a belief that it's okay to act that way.

Students who bully sometimes have problems and are unhappy. They may be trying to make up for a lack of attention, power or love in their own lives. By bullying, they try to get these in their lives. These students need to feel powerful and seem to enjoy harming others. They often don't understand the feelings of the person they bully. Sometimes they don't even know that what they are doing is bullying behaviour, or they don't understand how much hurt and anxiety they cause.

## **Here are some common reasons why children and young people bully others:**

- To gain a sense of power among their classmates.
- To get attention or become popular.
- They are scared, so they try to scare others to hide their feelings.
- They are unhappy and take it out on others.
- They are being bullied themselves.
- To get things they want.
- To copy another person they admire.
- To make themselves feel better when they are feeling bad about themselves or jealous of someone else.
- Because they feel that another person is becoming more popular than they are in their group.
- They hope to use it as a way to make people be their friend.



# What kinds of bullying are there?

There are three types of bullying behaviour – physical, verbal and social.

PHYSICAL	VERBAL	SOCIAL (Relational)
<p>Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hitting / kicking / pinching / spitting / biting.</li> <li>- Tripping / shoving or intimidating another person.</li> <li>- Taking or damaging someone's belongings.</li> <li>- Making mean or rude hand gestures.</li> <li>- Touching another person when they don't want you to.</li> <li>- Being made afraid of getting hurt.</li> </ul>	<p>Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calling someone names.</li> <li>- Teasing someone in a hurtful way.</li> <li>- Making fun of someone.</li> <li>- Being sarcastic in a hurtful way.</li> <li>- Making racially offensive comments about someone and their family.</li> <li>- Rude comments or jokes about someone's religion.</li> <li>- Hurtful comments about the way someone looks or behaves.</li> <li>- Mean comments about someone's body.</li> <li>- Inappropriate sexual comments.</li> <li>- Taunting.</li> <li>- Threatening to cause harm.</li> </ul>	<p>Social bullying involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ignoring or leaving someone out on purpose.</li> <li>- Telling other students not to be friends with someone.</li> <li>- Spreading rumours about someone.</li> <li>- Destroying relationships.</li> <li>- Embarrassing someone in public.</li> <li>- Sharing information or images that will have a harmful effect on the other person.</li> <li>- Telling lies or nasty stories about someone to make others not like them.</li> </ul>

If any of these behaviours occur only once, or are part of a conflict between equals (no matter how inappropriate) they are not bullying.

Bullying is when these things happen (or have the potential to happen) again and again to someone.



## Where does bullying happen?

Bullying can happen **in person** or **online**.

Online bullying is also called cyber-bullying. Bullying someone online can potentially have a very large audience.

Children who are bullied online are often also bullied in person. This means that when dealing with online bullying, it's important to look at other situations as well.

Bullying can be **easy to see**, or **hidden** from those not directly involved.

**Easy to see bullying** involves physical actions such as punching or kicking, or verbal actions such as name-calling and insulting.

**Hidden bullying** can be very hard for others to see. It can include repeatedly using hand gestures and weird or threatening looks, whispering, excluding or turning one's back on a person, restricting where a person can sit and who they can talk with. Sometimes hidden bullying can be denied by the initiator who will say they are joking or 'just having fun'.

Remember, bullying can sometimes happen between friends. Friendship loyalty and the confusion of an on-again-off-again friendship can make some children and young people reluctant to seek help.

## How serious a problem is bullying?

Most of the time other students are there when bullying happens at school. Usually there are three parties – initiators (those doing the bullying), targets (those being bullied), and bystanders (those who witness the bullying). It's common for children to have different roles at different times. Some children are both bullied and bully others, and at other times they may witness bullying (helping the initiator or defending the target). Every situation is different.

### Bullying isn't good for anyone

Some people think bullying is just part of growing up and a way for students to learn to stick up for themselves. But bullying can make students feel lonely, unhappy and frightened. It's not just the students being bullied who are affected. Most students say they don't like seeing bullying in their school – it makes them feel worried and uncomfortable. Students who bully others are also more likely to have problems and be unhappy.

### For the child being bullied

Being bullied can affect everything about a child: how they see themselves, their friends, school, and their future. Students who are bullied often experience depression, low self-esteem that may last a lifetime, shyness, loneliness, physical illnesses, and threatened or attempted self-harm. Some students miss school, see their marks drop or even leave school altogether because they have been bullied.

### For the child bullying

Some students engage in bullying for a short time only and then stop, either because they realise it's wrong or they learn more appropriate behaviour. A small group of students continue to bully others over many years. Parents/carers, whānau and schools need to support those who bully others to learn more appropriate ways to get on with people and deal with conflict and social challenges.

### For others

Even if a child isn't being bullied, they can be affected by it. No one can do well when they feel unsafe.

# Myths about bullying

Sometimes people say some of these things about bullying. They mean well, but they're wrong.

## **“You need to learn to stand up to the bullies.”**

Children who tell you about bullying usually are very upset because they can no longer deal with the situation. If they could have dealt with the bullying, they would have. Asking for support is not a weakness, it's a good decision.

## **“You should stand up for yourself and hit back when you are bullied.”**

Hitting back usually makes the bullying worse and increases the risk of serious harm. The person doing the bullying is often bigger, so the target could get seriously hurt by hitting back. Fighting with the other child can escalate the situation, and your child may be reprimanded for their part in a fight.

## **“Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can never hurt you.”**

The scars left by name-calling can last forever.

## **“Bullying is just a stage that kids go through at school. We all went through it and we're fine.”**

Bullying is not normal or acceptable behaviour. It can have long-lasting negative effects on everyone involved.

## **“People are born bullies.”**

Bullying is a learned behaviour and these behaviours can be changed.

## **“The best way to deal with a student who bullies others is using punishment.”**

Students who bully others usually have problems themselves and are generally unhappy in their own lives. These students always need to face the consequences for their actions, but also need support to change their behaviours and to find better ways of getting what they want to feel good about themselves.





# What to look out for

A child's behaviours and moods can change for lots of reasons. **You need to be alert to the possibility that the change in behaviours and moods is related to bullying.**

Talk with your child about school if you are concerned and ask general questions about how things are going.

## Children or young people being bullied may:

- Be frightened of walking to and from school, want to change their usual route, or beg to be driven to school.
- Be unwilling to even go to school, feel ill in the mornings (headaches, stomach aches).
- Begin doing poorly in schoolwork.
- Come home regularly with clothes or belongings damaged or missing.
- Have unexplained bruising, cuts and/or scratches.
- Come home really hungry (someone has taken their lunch or lunch money).
- Become withdrawn (not talking), distressed, anxious or unhappy.
- Have feelings of helplessness or low self-esteem.
- Spend more time alone, have a sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations.
- Have changes in behaviour, becoming aggressive and/or unreasonable at home, or bullying siblings or other friends.
- Stop eating.
- Have trouble sleeping or frequent nightmares, especially on Sundays or at the end of the school holidays.
- Ask for money or start stealing, or have pocket money go missing (to pay the bully).
- Refuse to say what's wrong (too frightened of the bully).

They may give unusual excuses for any of the above.

## The signs of possible bullying online can be the same, but include other behaviours with phones and computers, for example:

- Anxious about using their computer or mobile phone.
- Seem nervous when a text message or email appears.
- Are visibly upset after using the computer or mobile phone, or suddenly avoiding it.
- Close the screen, or hide the mobile phone when others enter the room.
- Spend unusually long hours online in an extra tense, brooding mood.
- Receive suspicious phone calls, emails or packages.

But there could be other reasons for these signs, so try not to jump to conclusions. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there anything else bothering my child?
- Are there other issues at home or outside school that may be influencing my child's behaviour? For example, major changes like a separation, bereavement, or new baby; or issues with friends outside school?

If there have not been any other changes and you suspect

bullying may be the cause of the distress and anxiety, it is important to try and act as early as you can.

Please read ***How should I talk to my child about bullying?*** for guidance on doing this.

# Starting early

Bullying behaviour doesn't suddenly and without warning appear in children. It is a learned behaviour and it can be unlearned. Children under the age of five are learning how to get along with each other, share and understand their feelings.

These skills are learnt gradually in caring and supportive environments. Parents, carers, whānau and early childhood educators are children's first teachers. They support children's development every day and model how to behave with other people.

Children who do not see positive examples of joining in, sharing, solving problems and dealing with conflict may have difficulty getting on with other children.

## Provide real life practise

Ordinary everyday situations are great for real-life learning. You don't have to formally 'teach' social and emotional skills or use special toys or resources.

Be on the lookout for opportunities to talk to your child about feelings and encourage appropriate behaviour.

Learning social and emotional skills and how to behave needs lots of practise. It's a long process of guidance and support.

## Be a positive role model

Be a good example when you deal with other people, express your feelings, and resolve conflicts.

Children are good observers and learn by watching you. Act in the way that you want your child to behave.

Young children will try out different ways of behaving to see what happens. It's important to recognise that some of these behaviours may lay a foundation for future bullying. For example, they may make mean faces, grab toys, push others away, refuse to play with someone, tell lies about others, or even make threats. Although hurtful, it's not done to deliberately and repeatedly hurt a less powerful child, so is not considered bullying. However, if this type of behaviour is allowed to continue, it could turn into a pattern of bullying.

The good news is that it's easier to stop in the early stages if they are redirected. Depending on the reaction of other children or adults, young children usually change their behaviour and try out new ones.

## Responding appropriately if you see aggressive behaviour

Aggressive behaviour is a normal part of a child's development. Your role is to respond in ways that help your child learn more appropriate ways to behave.

When you see aggressive behaviour:

- Reassure the child who has been hurt.
- Find out why it happened.
- Show other more appropriate ways to act.
- Teach children other ways to solve problems.
- Comfort other children if necessary.

The goal is to teach your child that non-aggressive ways of sorting out problems are better for everyone.



## Tips for teaching your child social and emotional skills:

- Be a positive role model of what you would like your child to do.
- Talk about things other people do and how they might feel.
- Praise your child when you notice them making an effort to get on with other children.
- Build up positive behaviour by talking about taking turns, sharing, helping, and looking after others.
- Practise listening, sharing, cooperating and taking turns. Playing games that involve taking turns or passing a toy (such as a ball) help kids develop these important social skills – while having fun!
- Point out stories of positive behaviour, as well as bad behaviour, from personal experience, current events, movies, books and technology.
- Talk about how everyone is different and how that's great, since our differences make us special. Interactions with other children are best when they understand, appreciate and respect one another.

# Why don't children and young people ask for help?

Your child may not know the word 'bullying', but they know when someone is being mean, hurting them, or making them feel sad or scared. They may not tell you because they may be worried they'll make things worse if they 'tattle', 'tattle', or 'nark'.

Your teenager probably won't tell you there's a problem either. They may use another term, like 'harassment', rather than 'bullying' to describe the behaviour. Teenagers often prefer to handle things on their own. They might think you'll get upset, that you will take away their technology, such as their mobile phone, or they might just find it embarrassing to have a parent involved.

## Children and young people don't tell adults for many reasons:

- Bullying can make a person feel helpless. They may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again. They may fear being seen as weak or a nark.
- They may fear a hostile response from those bullying them.
- Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Kids may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether it's true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak. Many children don't want to upset their families.
- Children or young people who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or could understand.
- Kids may fear being rejected by their friends. Friends can help protect children from bullying, and they can fear losing this support.

# How should I talk to my child about bullying?

**First you need to make sure you have a clear understanding of what bullying is.**

Point out that bullying is not just when someone is mean to you once, but it happens over and over and makes you feel like you can't stop it.

## Some of these questions might help you discuss bullying with your child:

- Have you seen bullying happening? What did you do? How did you feel?
- Who are the adults you would talk to when it comes to things like bullying?
- Have you ever felt scared to go to school because you were afraid of someone bullying you?
- Have you ever tried to help someone who was being bullied? What happened? What would you do if it happened again?

The most important thing is to let your child know how to get help if bullying happens.

Encourage them to speak to an adult if it happens, and to keep on asking for help if the bullying doesn't stop.

## Narking vs Telling

### NARKING

Narking is telling on someone to get that person in trouble.

### TELLING

Telling is getting help when you or someone you know is being hurt, or when your right or that person's right to be safe is being taken away.

# My child is being bullied. What should I do?

Bullying has been compared to brainwashing, with the targets ending up believing that somehow they deserve to be bullied. They feel vulnerable and helpless. Their self-esteem may have been seriously damaged, especially if the bullying has been going on for some time.

Recognising the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying. Not all children who are bullied or are bullying others ask for help.

It's important to talk with your child if they are showing signs of being bullied. Take whatever your child says seriously and find out exactly what has been going on.

## Understand

Children who are being bullied are often frightened to talk about what is happening, either because they have been threatened or because they fear adult interference will make things worse. Be prepared for your child to deny that there is anything wrong.

## Encourage

Encourage your child by saying that you are concerned and that you want to help and support them, whatever the problem, and that you can work together to solve this problem.

## Reassure

Reassure your child that the bullying is not their fault. Many children blame themselves and this may make them feel even worse.

## Ask

Ask your child what they want to do about it and how you can help. An important part of your response is to avoid jumping in to solve the problem. While it is natural to want to protect your child, helping them to find their own solution is a better option. It helps them feel they have some power in the situation. Make time to sit down and talk – about your child's ideas, feelings, solutions.

**If you think your child is being bullied, the most important thing to do is to talk to them about it. Try to:**

- Encourage your child to talk about what has been happening.
- Stay calm and positive.
- Take their problem seriously – let them know you're happy they've told you.
- Listen to them and tell them you believe them.
- Explain that it's not their fault and it's never okay to be bullied.
- Ask them what they want you to do.
- Work with your child to come up with some solutions.



## Tips For Reporting Bullying:

1. Listen to your child and assure them that they have a right to be safe.
2. Be clear on the facts. Make notes about what happened and when it happened.
3. Help your child see that there is a difference between 'narking', 'tattling' or 'telling' and reporting. It takes courage to report. Reporting is done not to cause trouble for another student, but to protect all students.
4. Telling is getting help when you or someone you know is being hurt, or when your right or that person's right to be safe is being taken away.
5. It may be difficult, but try to remain calm so that you can support your child and plan a course of action with them.
6. Stay on track. Keep an eye on your child's behaviour. If your meetings with school staff haven't made the bullying stop, go back and talk to the principal. Follow-up on the steps that were agreed to at the meeting.
7. Speak to your child's trainer or coach if the bullying is taking place during after-school activities or sports events.
8. Contact the Police if the bullying involves criminal behaviour, such as sexual assault or use of a weapon, or if the threat to your child's safety is in the community rather than the school.

# How do I deal with online (cyber) bullying?

Online bullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology to transfer, send, post, publish or distribute content with the intention to harm a person or a group. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as mobile phones, computers and tablets, as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat and websites.

**Remember: Single incidents or random inappropriate actions are not bullying.**

If your child has been cyber-bullied, you should keep all evidence. Save bullying messages and images – these are useful if you report the bullying to the school or the police. If the cyber-bullying involves physical threats and you are worried about your child's safety, contact the police immediately.

Each case of online bullying is different and each child will respond differently. There's no definite way to tell if your child is being bullied online, but if you think they might be try asking them about it in a non-confrontational way.

## Examples of online bullying include:

- Sending abusive or threatening text or email messages.
- Spreading rumours via email or posted on social networking sites.
- Posting unkind messages or inappropriate images.
- Sharing someone's personal or embarrassing information online.
- Imitating others online:
  - someone stealing your child's passwords or getting into their accounts and changing the information there;
  - someone setting up fake profiles pretending to be your child, or posting messages or status updates from their accounts.
- Excluding others online:
  - someone trying to stop your child from communicating with others.

## Online bullying is different to bullying in person in the following ways:

- A lot of people can view or take part in it. Messages and images can be distributed quickly to a very wide audience – for example, rumours and images can be posted on public forums or sent to many people at once.
- It's often done in secret with the bully hiding who they are by creating false profiles or names, or sending anonymous messages
- It can be persistent and difficult to escape – it can happen any time of the day or night.
- It's difficult to remove as it's shared online so it can be recorded and saved in different places.
- It's hard for the person being bullied to escape if they use technology often.

Research suggests that many students who are bullied online are also bullied in person. If your child reports online bullying, it's important to check further to get the full picture.



### Tips if your child is being bullied online:

1. **Don't take away their technology.** Taking away your child's laptop or mobile phone can separate them from their peers and their support network.
2. **Stay calm.** Your child needs to be able to talk to you and know that you'll be calm and helpful.
3. **Evaluate the situation.** It's important to know exactly what's going on before you can work out what to do next. Is it just a few thoughtless remarks, or is it something more serious?
4. **Understand how your child is being affected.** Every child is different, and behaviour that deeply affects one child may be water off a duck's back to another. If your child is upset about a situation, let them know that you understand and it's okay to be upset.
5. **Teach your child how to use the features available on most social networking sites.** For example, blocking and 'unfriending' people, and updating privacy settings.
6. **Work through a plan together.**

If your child is experiencing online bullying, you can contact Netsafe [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz) for help and advice no matter what your situation is.

Netsafe's service is free and confidential.

To report an online incident or to get advice, contact Netsafe by:

- calling toll-free on **0508 NETSAFE** (0508 638 723)
- completing an online contact form
- emailing [queries@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:queries@netsafe.org.nz)

Netsafe's contact centre is available to help from 8am-8pm, Monday to Friday and 9am-5pm on weekends.

**REMEMBER: Any incidents involving serious assault or child abuse must be referred to the New Zealand Police and/or the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki.**



# How can I help my child who is bullying others?

All children are capable of bullying at some time and it's important for parents to respond in a calm and helpful manner. Sometimes children are unaware of the effects bullying behaviour can have on others.

Bullying is a relationship problem. Children who bully others need help and support to learn better ways of relating to others. Your relationship with your child can be part of the solution.

Discuss with your children positive ways to make friends and socialise with other children.

Talk about bullying with children and about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. For example, "Should we tease people because they look different?" Encourage your child to respect others and to accept people's differences.

Many students engage in bullying for a short time only and then stop either because they realise it's wrong or they are supported to learn more appropriate behaviour. A small group of students continue to bully others over many years.

Stay calm and learn more about your child's behaviour so you can respond appropriately. Be aware that your child may deny they have taken part in bullying or they may make light of the part they played in it.

## Ask

Try to understand why your child may be behaving in this way.

Ask them about what they think is going on, and why they are bullying someone else – remember not to criticise, blame or judge.

Ask them what they think might help them to stop bullying. Sometimes a student who bullies other children in one situation may themselves be bullied in another.

Think about any issues or problems your child might be experiencing at school that may be impacting on their behaviour.

## Understand

Children who bully need help to understand how their behaviour affects others. They need support while learning to repair the harm they have caused. They need to develop their social and emotional skills.

## Explain

Explain what bullying is and why it's not acceptable. Talk about the other person's feelings and help your child to understand what it is like for the person being bullied.

## Reassure

Tell your child that you do not support bullying, but that you do support them. Reassure them that you are ready to help and support them in putting a stop to bullying behaviour.



# My child has seen bullying. What should I do?

Your child may know someone who is being bullied or has seen it happening at school. Witnessing bullying can be distressing.

Roles children play when they witness bullying can include:

- **Followers (kids who assist):** These children may not start or lead the bullying, but may encourage or join in.
- **Supporters (kids who reinforce):** These children are not directly involved, but they provide an audience. They may laugh or support the children who are bullying. This may encourage the bullying to continue.
- **Outsiders:** These children remain separate from the bullying situation. They neither reinforce the bullying behaviour nor defend the child being bullied. Some may watch, but do not show they are on anyone's side. These children often want to help, but don't know how.
- **Defenders:** These children actively comfort the child being bullied and may come to the child's defence when bullying occurs.

**A child who witnesses or knows bullying is occurring needs support. Let your child know that you take the bullying seriously.**

## Encourage

Encourage your child to talk about what happened. Children who see bullying sometimes want to talk about:

- Not knowing what to do or not wanting to make the situation worse.
- Feeling worried about their own safety if they intervene.
- Being anxious that they will be bullied as a result of stepping in.
- Not knowing if their actions will make a difference.
- Feeling worried about the impact on their friendship if they take action.

## Reassure

Let them know you understand their feelings and fears about what to do. Respect your child's judgement about whether it is safe to say something. They are the ones who really know the situation. Respect their feelings and their assessment of the situation.

## Ask

Ask your child what they want you to do. Don't jump in to solve the problem.

## Explain

Tell your child that reporting the bullying is okay because kids often need help from adults to stop it. Point out that if they don't do anything the bullying will probably continue.

If there is an immediate risk of danger to anyone involved, contact your school.

**Many bystanders to bullying feel anxious and distressed about seeing something they think is wrong. Students can also feel upset about not knowing what to do. Talk about how to be a supportive bystander:**

**If they feel safe to do so, your child could:**

- Walk away and tell a teacher right away.
- Tell the person who is bullying they will get a teacher if they don't stop.
- Encourage their friends to walk away or tell the person to stop.
- Tell the person bullying they don't think what they are doing is right or funny.
- Help the person who is being bullied to get away and go somewhere safe.

**If they don't think it's safe to say anything, there are other things they could do:**

- Tell the person being bullied that it's not okay and they didn't do anything wrong.
- Ask the person being bullied if they want help to get it stopped.
- Tell a school staff member about it.
- Try to make sure their friend is not alone when they might get bullied.
- Ask the person who is being bullied to join their group or game.
- Walk away – people who bully like others to watch.

It can be helpful to practise these approaches at home to help your child feel more confident.



# Talking and working with your school

All schools are required to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for their students (National Administration Guideline 5 – NAG 5). Your school's anti-bullying policy helps make sure the obligation to provide a safe learning environment is being met.

Schools can be enormously helpful once they are aware that there is a bullying concern.

Most mild bullying can be managed by students themselves, with support from their classroom teachers. Responding to more severe bullying behaviour may need help from senior school staff.

**REMEMBER: When talking to school staff about bullying, try not to be aggressive or lose your temper. A good working relationship between you and the school is important.**

## How should I talk to our school?

When talking to school staff about bullying, be calm and constructive.

### During meetings with staff:

- Refer to your written notes to be as clear as possible about what happened and write notes of the discussions with your child's teacher or other staff.
- Ask what steps will be taken and if a plan is to be developed with home and school strategies.
- Recognise that investigating the situations at school will take time.
- Write down when you contacted the school, who you have spoken with, and any agreements that were made.
- Stay in touch with the teacher and let them know if problems continue or something new happens.

### What kind of questions could I ask our school?

- Does the school have a bullying prevention policy?
- What procedures are there for dealing with bullying behaviour?
- What support is available for students who are involved in bullying?
- Who should my child report bullying to?

## What can you expect from your school?

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has made recommendations about how schools should respond to reports of bullying. Parents and students should expect:

- To be heard and responded to sensitively and not to be dismissed.
- To be told that the report of bullying will be investigated and that there will be a response in a timely manner.
- To get feedback on the situation and to have the incident responded to in an appropriate way.
- To be protected from negative consequences of their reporting.
- That the school will intervene and support initiators, targets and bystanders that are involved in bullying behaviour.

The school and parent should keep each other informed of any changes and developments.

# Working with your school – steps to take

## If your child is being bullied...

Listen calmly and get the full story.  
Ask questions to get more details if you need to (who, what, where, when).  
A good understanding about what has happened can help you communicate with your school about the situation.  
Keep a record of events and agree together on actions you will take.



## Report the bullying to the school

Encourage your child to talk to the teacher or other staff (e.g. school guidance counsellor).  
Let them know that you will also report it to the school if the bullying doesn't stop.  
Your child may be reluctant for you to do this, so discuss the idea and reassure them that the school would want to know and is able to help.  
Make an appointment to meet with your child's teacher or senior staff member/principal.  
Speak to your school and agree appropriate action.  
Contact the school immediately if you have a concern about your child's safety.



NO

### Check in regularly with your child. Is the issue resolved?

YES

Keep the conversation going. It can take time to resolve issues, so check in regularly with your child about their experiences and their feelings.  
Your ongoing support is important.

Make an appointment to see the appropriate senior school staff member or principal.  
Agree appropriate action and request a reasonable timeframe for resolution.



NO

### Has the issue been resolved?

YES

If you are not happy about the way the school has responded to your bullying complaint, you can make a written complaint to the Board of Trustees. You can ask to attend the meeting at which the complaint will be addressed, and you can speak at that meeting if you get permission from the chairperson.



NO

### Has the issue been resolved?

YES

If you are unhappy with the way the Board of Trustees has dealt with you or the situation, you can take your complaint to:

- Your local Ministry of Education office, or
- The Office of the Children's Commissioner.



# Where can I get more information and help?

If you need to talk to someone other than emergency services or get further information about bullying, try these services and resources:

- **Commonground** – An online hub providing parents, family, whānau and friends with access to information, tools and support to help a young person who is struggling.  
[www.commonground.org.nz](http://www.commonground.org.nz)
- **Parent Help** – Here to help parents with all parenting challenges from those everyday situations to the most serious issues.  
Phone (0800) 568-856  
[www.parenthelp.org.nz](http://www.parenthelp.org.nz)
- **Family Services 211 Helpline** – For information on (and direct transfer to) health and social support services in your area.  
Phone (0800) 211-211
- **Skylight** – A national not-for-profit trust that enables children, young people, their family / whānau and friends to navigate through times of trauma, loss and grief.  
Phone (0800) 299-100  
[www.skylight.org.nz](http://www.skylight.org.nz)
- **Netsafe** – If your child is experiencing online bullying, contact Netsafe for help and advice no matter what your situation is. Netsafe's service is free and confidential.  
Phone (0508 638 723)  
[www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz)
- **Digi-Parenting** – An online hub of resources designed to help parents navigate the complex world of young people online.  
[www.digi-parenting.co.nz](http://www.digi-parenting.co.nz)

Helplines for children and young people:

- **Youthline** – Visit [youthline.co.nz](http://youthline.co.nz) for online chat or email [talk@youthline.co.nz](mailto:talk@youthline.co.nz)  
Phone (0800) 376-633  
or Free Text 234
- **The Lowdown** – Visit [thelowdown.co.nz](http://thelowdown.co.nz) or email [team@thelowdown.co.nz](mailto:team@thelowdown.co.nz)  
or Free Text 5626
- **What's Up** – (for 5-18 year olds). Phone counselling is available Monday to Friday, 1pm-10pm and Weekends, 3pm-10pm.  
Online chat is available 7pm-10pm daily at [whatsup.co.nz](http://whatsup.co.nz)  
Phone (0800) 942-8787
- **Kidsline** – for young people up to 18 years of age.  
Open 24/7.  
Phone (0800) 54 37 54 (0800 kidsline)



bullying**free**nz

