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## Is my child being bullied?

Bullying is behaviour that repeatedly harms another less powerful person; the victim. Bullying can happen in many contexts and situations, including on websites and by cell-phone. The hurtful behaviour can be:

- physical, such as hitting and punching
- verbal, such as teasing, taunting, threatening and name-calling
- non-verbal, such as ignoring or excluding.

A bullied child can be hurt physically and socially. It's often an isolating experience because the bullied child's feelings of acceptance, friendships or group inclusion are damaged. Groups are a natural part of school life and to be excluded from the peer group can be traumatic for children and effect their learning, development and health.

## It can be hard to know if your child is being bullied

Bullying often happens when teachers or parents aren't around and a child being bullied often won't tell an adult

## Signs your child may be being bullied

Some signs a child or teen is being bullied are they:

- seem anxious or negative about school
- been off school or classes because they've been sick a lot
- reluctant to join in certain activities
- child has bruises and won't give you a straight answer how they got them
- child is submissive or withdrawn with other children, seems unhappy or insecure, low self-esteem or self confidence
- talks about "nobody likes me" or "haven't got any friends"
- talks about wanting to hurt someone or get back at someone
- finds it hard to be assertive or stand up for themselves.

## If you suspect your child is being bullied at school

If your child or teen is being bullied, here are four steps you can take to help them deal with the situation and make sure the bullying stops:

- talk with your child or teen
- have a plan
- talk to the school
- support your child or teen's activities and friendships.

### *Talk with your child or teen*

Talk with your teen or child to find out the facts: if they are being bullied, who by, when and how. Ask your child what happens at school, what happens when there is free time, how they are feeling. Talk with your child about different aspects of school and how they feel about it. Note details from these conversations to use in your plan.



Be aware that your child may not give you direct answers. They may deny anything is wrong. Teach your child or teen that:

- telling on those who bully should not be considered telling on others because we need to start to talk about this to stop the bullying
- everyone is a victim when the bully is allowed to treat others badly
- if your child tells you and/or school staff about bullying you can help them to stop the bullying
- people are bullies for various reasons, such as having social or emotional difficulties they find difficult to handle or talk about. Some may feel pressure to participate in bullying behaviour to fit in with peers or to avoid being bullied themselves.

Don't confront the suspected bully or bullies yourself. Your first instinct may be to protect your child and address the suspected bully directly. This may only escalate the situation and ultimately make things worse.

### **Have a plan**

A plan will help your child feel comfortable, give confidence and assure them you are taking it seriously. However, they may not want you to make a fuss and put them in the spotlight.

Together, plan what your child will do if they get bullied again. Some ideas are:

- list some immediate things your child can do when the bullying happens. For example:
  - first, ignore the bully
  - if that doesn't work, tell the bully to stop
  - if the bully continues, walk away
  - tell an adult or another child or teenager
- who they will tell when they're being bullied so they can get help.
- encourage your child to tell friends about the bullying. A unified peer group can help avoid bullying behaviour.
- encourage them to stick with their friends when they are at school or out. Bullies are less likely to confront them if other people are around.

### **Talk to the school**

Even if the bullying seems to have stopped:

- talk to the school about the situation
- remember the school must give your child a safe learning environment
- ask what the school will do to support your child
- keep in touch with the school and let them know of any developments.

### **Support your child or teen's activities and friendships**

Allow your child or teen to spend more time doing things they enjoy in a safe environment. Encourage them to spend time with friends. If they have few friends, support them to try new activities where they might make new friends, and encourage them to bring friends home. Check there's always appropriate adult supervision at your child's activities.

For younger children, you could read a book about bullying together. Most libraries have a good selection. Here are some: *Te Taniwha i te Kura* by Tim Tipene, *Taming the Taniwha* by Tim Tipene, *Back Off Bully* by Mark Dobson, *Marvin and the Mean Words* by Suzy Kline, *Words are Not for Hurting* by Elizabeth Verdick.

### **More information**

- Download Step up, be safe from [mineduwww.minedu.govt.nz](http://mineduwww.minedu.govt.nz)
- Visit [www.police.govt.nz/service/yes/nobully](http://www.police.govt.nz/service/yes/nobully) or speak to your local community police officer
- Visit NetSafe, [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz), phone 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) or email [queries@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:queries@netsafe.org.nz)
- Visit Family Services, [www.familyservices.govt.nz](http://www.familyservices.govt.nz) for support for your family
- Encourage your teen to visit Youthline, [www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz).

