

## Bullying: how to spot it

By Raising Children Network

Bullying can be frightening, and physically and emotionally damaging for children. It is all too common among school children. Even preschoolers can experience it. Here are some tips on how to spot if your child is being bullied and what you can do about it.

- [What is bullying?](#)
- [How to spot signs of bullying](#)
- [Talking to your child about bullying](#)
- [Tips for talking about bullying](#)

### What is bullying?

On the surface, it's like teasing. Most of us know how that feels. But sometimes kids tease other kids over and over again. Or they might tease because they really want to hurt somebody's feelings, or make sure that somebody is left out of games or activities. This is when teasing becomes bullying.

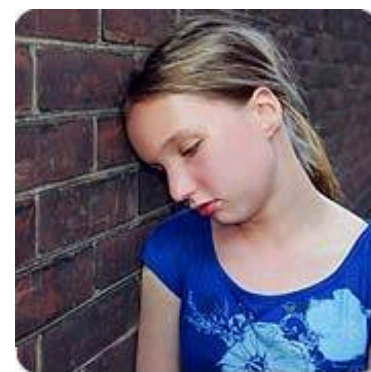
Other examples of bullying are:

- saying mean things or calling people names
- leaving people out of activities or spreading nasty stories about them
- hitting and pushing people or taking their things.

Girls tend to bully in indirect ways that can be hard to spot. Boys tend to be more physical.



When it comes to bullying behaviour, your child might be the one affected. Or your child might be the one doing the bullying. Read our article on what to do if [your child is bullying others](#).



### did you know ?

Bullying is more common than you might think:

- One in five Australian school students reports repeated bullying.
- Half of Australian children say they have been the target of bullying behaviour at least once.

Children should never be left to sort out bullying on their own. They can be seriously hurt by it. It is important for grown-ups to stop bullying before it starts happening over and over again, or damages a child's confidence.

### How to spot signs of bullying

There is no single way to tell if a child is being bullied. The way a child reacts will depend on how bad the bullying is, as well as the child's personality. Apart from obvious physical signs of bullying, the

things to look for are changes in your child's social or emotional behaviour.

Things to look out for include:

- physical signs such as bruises, cuts and scratches, torn clothes, poor sleeping, bedwetting, and frequent requests for money
- changes related to school or preschool, such as not wanting to go, staying close to teachers during breaks, having difficulty asking or answering questions in class, not taking part in activities, sitting alone, and schoolwork and homework deteriorating suddenly
- emotional clues such as anxiety, nervousness, distress, unhappiness, depression or tears, withdrawal, secretiveness, sudden changes in behaviour, being quick to anger, and unhappiness at the end of weekends and holidays
- other signs such as your child talking about being teased, taunted, ridiculed, degraded, threatened, dominated, made fun of, or laughed at. Your child might be excluded at lunch and recess, lose contact with classmates after school, or be chosen last for teams and games.

### Talking to your child about bullying

One in five children keeps bullying a secret from people around them, so it can be hard to know for sure if your child is being bullied. Try some of the following conversation starters if you suspect that your child is being bullied.



Keep the conversation relaxed and friendly, and try not to bombard your child with questions. Children are less likely to open up to you if they feel uncomfortable.

Younger children (4-6 years of age)

- What did you do at school/preschool today?
- Did you do anything you liked? Did you do anything you didn't like?
- Who did you play with?
- What sort of games did you play? Did you enjoy them?
- Would you have liked to play different games with someone else?
- Are you looking forward to going to school tomorrow?

Older children (7-8 and up)

- What did you do at lunchtime today?
- Is there anyone you would like to invite home?
- Are there any classes at school you really like, or don't like?
- Is there anyone at school you don't like? Why?
- Are you looking forward to going to school tomorrow?

Read more about [talking with your child about school](#).

### Tips for talking about bullying

If your child is being bullied, one of the best ways to help protect your child is to talk about it. Listen to your child, help your child understand what is going on, and show that you care and will help.

- Listen. Ask your child simple questions, then listen to the answers. Try saying things like,

'So what happened next?' and 'What did you do then?'

- Stay calm. This is a chance to show your child how to solve problems. If you feel angry or anxious, wait until you feel calm before you discuss it with your child or with others.
- Summarise the problem. You could say something like, 'So you were sitting on your own eating your lunch and Sam came up and took your lunch box and threw it across the playground.'
- Agree that there is a problem. For example, 'It sounds like you had a really horrible time at lunch today.'
- Let your child know it's OK. Help your child to understand that what these feelings are normal. For example, 'No wonder you're feeling so sad about this.'
- Praise your child. For example, 'I am really pleased that you have told me about this.'
- Make it clear to your child that you will help. For example, 'It sounds like things haven't been so good. Are there some things we could do to make it a bit better?'
- Talk about why people bully. It can help your child to understand some reasons for bullying: 'Sometimes people can be mean. Why do you think they said those things?'
- Steer clear of negative comments. These don't generally help to sort out the issue. So be careful not to say things like, 'Don't come to me with your complaints – stand up for yourself' or 'You poor thing. Never mind, you can stay home.'



If you are worried about bullying, you can also telephone the [Parenting Hotline](#) in your state for confidential support.

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Rated ★★★★★ (23 ratings)

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#### More to explore

- ▶ Bullying at school: helping your child
- ▶ Bullying at preschool: helping your child
- ▶ A guide for talking to preschoolers
- ▶ A guide for talking to school-age children
- ▶ Preschoolers Behaviour Toolkit
- ▶ School Age Behaviour Toolkit
- ▶ Self-esteem
- ▶ Social anxiety
- ▶ Anxiety and fears

#### Web links

- ▶ Dealing with bullying - Bully blocking
- ▶ Bullying: who needs it? (NSW Dept of Education & Training)
- ▶ Bullying no way
- ▶ National Centre Against Bullying

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