



the facts:
navigating life



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

understanding bullying

Bullying is not just playing around or harmless fun. Bullying happens when someone has (or thinks they have) more power than someone else.

This could be:

- power in numbers
- being older or stronger
- being popular
- being in the majority.

Bullying can increase the risk of developing mental health problems for everyone involved, particularly those experiencing the bullying. It can take place anywhere like at home, work, school, TAFE/uni, online or over the phone.



Bullying is not OK, it's not simply 'a normal part of growing up', it's never the person being bullied's fault, and help is always available.

Different forms of bullying

- **Verbal** (e.g., putting someone down or threatening to cause harm).
- **Physical** (e.g., contact that hurts someone or breaks their things).
- **Social** (e.g., spreading rumours, excluding someone, embarrassing someone in public).
- **Cyberbullying** (e.g., sending harmful messages, pictures or making comments on social networking sites. This type of bullying can be anonymous and posted online where it can be seen by lots of people. And it can go on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so people don't get a rest from it).

Bullying can also be done secretly, like doing or saying something behind someone's back. This type of bullying can be harder to see, but it's no less damaging.

Why might bullying happen?

There are many reasons why someone might use bullying behaviour. People who bully may have experienced bullying, trauma or violence themselves. It's still important to remember though, this doesn't make it OK.

People might use bullying because they feel peer pressure, and are trying to feel more secure, more powerful, 'look cool' in front of others, or feel better about themselves. This may be their way of coping if they haven't learnt healthier ways to cope or aren't getting the support they need. Bullying behaviour can also happen because of jealousy, lack of knowledge, fear or misunderstanding.

Bullying is very complex. A person might use bullying behaviour, be a bystander, and/or experience bullying. It can depend on who is around and what the situation is. Each of these roles can have a negative impact on mental health and can make experiencing mental health problems more likely.

What are the effects of bullying?

Anyone who has experienced bullying knows how upsetting it is. People who experience bullying might feel:

- alone
- unsafe
- afraid
- stressed
- humiliated
- angry
- ashamed
- rejected.

Sometimes a person might feel that there is no escape and may do things to 'fit in', like changing their appearance or acting differently. They may believe some of the awful things said about them, which can impact their sense of self. Sometimes they might want to hurt others, or themselves, because of it.

Being bullied can affect a person's performance at school, uni, TAFE or

work, and can continue to affect them through their life adulthood.

Experiencing bullying can also increase the risk that someone will develop depression and anxiety in the future, and it can increase the risk of self-harm, suicidal thinking and suicide.

Bullying can be traumatic, especially when carried out or ignored by others, as having supportive relationships are really important in everyone's life.

Young people report one of the worst parts of bullying is feeling like they're going through it alone, which is why it's so important to support anyone going through a tough time/help them access support or reach out if you're having a hard time yourself.



What can you do about bullying?

Face to face

- Stay calm. Try focusing on your breathing as a way to stay calm. Staying calm and not showing that you are overwhelmed can help you to feel better.
- Don't fight back, as this can make the situation worse, get yourself hurt or blamed for starting the trouble.
- Try to ignore the bullying by calmly turning and walking away. If the person doing the bullying tries to stop or block you, try to be firm and clear. Having friends to stand with you or walk you away is a great idea in these moments.
- Try to avoid the person who is bullying you or ask a friend to stay with you when they're around.
- Tell a trusted adult what has happened straight away. They can support you and help you find ways to get the bullying to stop.
- Get some more information. Schools, universities, TAFEs and workplaces have anti-bullying policies that can help you to find out what you can do.

Cyberbullying

- Report any bullying to the site where it is occurring. All social media platforms have a reporting system. It's anonymous, straightforward and depending on what you've reported, there's a chance it could get taken down quickly.
- Keep everything that is sent to you with screenshots, whether they're nasty comments, pictures or messages – try to get a permanent copy of it. This is so you can show these to someone you trust later on.
- Contact the eSafety Commissioner, if after 48 hours the image or content has not been removed by the site, or if you're feeling afraid or threatened.
- Talk to people you trust. Let them know how you're feeling and that you need their support.
- Ask your friends to stand up for you by challenging the bullying in low-risk ways.
- Talk to your parents, carer, teacher or another trusted adult about what's happening. When families and schools work together, this is the best way to address it.
- Block the person or people from being able to contact you and change your privacy settings to protect what you post on social media.
- Delete your current online account and start a new one if the bullying is persistent and ongoing. Only give your new details to trusted friends.

Remember, it's unlikely that everyone agrees with the person bullying, even if they don't say something to support you. They might be afraid of getting involved or could be ignoring the person bullying as a way of not joining in. It's important that everyone feels comfortable standing up for one another in ways that won't put them at risk.

What is a bystander?

Someone who sees or knows about the bullying is called a bystander. It can feel difficult to step in, but a bystander can have a big effect on whether the bullying continues or not. It can also help someone who has been targeted see they have people who support them.

What can I do if I'm a bystander?

Try not to support the bullying by looking on and doing nothing, laughing at the person being bullied or by 'liking' or sharing hurtful photos or posts online.

If you feel safe, step in and speak up in an assertive but not an aggressive way. Show the person that you're there for them by spending time chatting with them and helping them to walk away from the situation. Remind the person being bullied there is always help available.

It's important to think carefully about your safety before you try to stop the bullying. If you can't safely take action yourself, report it to a trusted adult and let them know you want to remain anonymous.

Getting support

If you're being bullied, it's a good idea to build your supports and know you're not alone. Building a support network of family, friends, Elders, staff from school or work and/or mental health professionals is important to getting support and putting a stop to bullying as quickly as possible.

See our website for more information about bullying and how to support your mental wellbeing – headspace.org.au



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit headspace.org.au

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation is funded by the Australian Government.

 **headspace**
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

The headspace Clinical Reference Group have approved this clinical resource. Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information. 03 October 2022