Clinical Toolkit
Clinical Tips: Avoidance and Bullying

Young people may experience school refusal or anxiety due to bullying. School refusal and other avoidance behaviours can increase and prolong feelings of anxiety and should be addressed by the treating clinician.

Avoidance
Asking about avoidance is very important as it can prolong or reinforce the experience of anxiety. This is part of assessing the functional impairment at home, school and with peers and other relationships. This may include assessing number of missed days, decline in school grades, and reduced activities of usual interest.

Addressing Bullying
The GP should ascertain the type of bullying, ie physical, verbal, psychological (social exclusion, rumours, putdowns), sexual (which can be physical or verbal) or cyber, and determine if mandatory reporting is necessary.

The following are strategies for supporting young people that have been victims of bullying:

- Reassure the young person that they’ve done the right thing by telling someone
- Recognise that the bullying must have been difficult to deal with
- Reiterate that no one has a right to bully them
- Encourage the young person to disclose the bullying to their parents
- For victims of cyberbullying, offer advice on online empowerment. Suggest that they do not respond to messages. If there is a need to respond, it should be done in an assertive manner, with support
- Let the young person know that keeping evidence of bullying is important and can be passed to parents, carers, the school or the police if necessary
- You can refer the young person and/or their parent or carer to helpful online resources – eg headspace, Reachout and The Alannah And Madeline Foundation