

Preventing bullying: A guide for families

Why it matters

One in six Australian students report being bullied at school. Bullying can seriously affect a child's confidence, mental health and learning. But research shows that strong, connected families can help prevent bullying. Children are less likely to experience bullying – or to demonstrate bullying behaviour – when they feel safe, supported and know what respectful behaviour looks like.

What is bullying?

Bullying is when someone deliberately and repeatedly hurts or intimidates another person, often using their power to cause harm. It may be face-to-face or online and includes:

- verbal (e.g. name-calling, teasing, threats)
- physical (e.g. hitting, pushing, damaging property)
- social (e.g. excluding others, spreading rumours)
- online (e.g. hurtful messages, posting private images).

It's important to know that bullying is not just a one-off disagreement or occasional teasing. Those situations can still cause harm, but bullying is targeted, repeated, and creates a power imbalance.

Ways to strengthen family connections

- Spend time one-on-one – even 10 minutes of child-led time a day strengthens trust.
- Family time – scheduled regular shared family time is linked to better behaviour and communication.
- Listen without judging – ask open questions, and let your child express themselves fully.
- Be a role model – show kindness and respect in your own relationships, online and offline.
- Be consistent – clear routines and boundaries help children feel secure and respected.

Conversation starters

Keeping the conversation open can help your child feel safe to talk. Try:

- “Who did you spend time with today?”
- “What was something that made you smile?”
- “Was there anything that made you feel uncomfortable or upset?”

If your child is being bullied

- Stay calm and thank them – “it's really brave of you to tell me.”
- Describe what's happening – “that sounds like bullying because it's happening often.”
- Make a plan – keep a record, talk to the adults that can provide support, and set follow-up steps.
- Rehearse responses – help your child practice confident ways to ask for help or walk away safely.
- Keep checking in – ask how they're feeling and monitor any changes in mood or behaviour.



If your child is demonstrating bullying behaviour

- Stay curious, not angry – “can you help me understand what’s been going on?”
- Talk about empathy – “what do you think the other person felt?”
- Set clear expectations – “in this family, we treat others with fairness and respect.”
- Guide them to repair harm – talk about apologies, making amends, or writing a note.
- Work with the school/community group – ask about positive behaviour support or mentoring programs.

Getting help

- If it happens at school or in the community – talk to your child’s teacher, principal, coach or other trusted adult.
- If it’s online – save messages, block the person, report the content and visit esafety.gov.au.
- If someone is in danger – Call 000 straight away.

Support for families

Service	What they offer	Contact
Kids Helpline	Free 24/7 counselling for children and young people aged 5–25	1800 55 1800 kidshelpline.com.au
Headspace	Mental health support for 12–25-year-olds	headspace.org.au
Parentline	Confidential support for parents and carers	Parentline in your state or territory
Raising Children Network	Trusted parenting advice, videos and tools	raisingchildren.net.au
Bullying No Way	National resource on bullying prevention	bullyingnoway.gov.au
eSafety Commissioner	Cyberbullying info and reporting platform	esafety.gov.au

Final tips

- Act early. If something feels wrong, talk to your child and involve the school or community organisation.
- Keep notes. Writing down incidents helps everyone respond clearly and quickly.
- Work as a team. A partnership approach makes a big difference.
- Take care of yourself. Supporting a child through bullying can be emotional. It’s okay to ask for help too.

Be bold. Be kind. Speak up.

Every small action at home helps create a safer and more respectful community for all young people.

