

Dealing with Bullying Behaviours

Bullying is not a new issue, but sadly it is one that never seems to go away. The 15 March is the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence and is a timely occasion to talk about how, as parents, you can best support and protect your children against bullying.

Unfortunately, parents and teachers are often not the first to know when bullying is happening to their child at school. Children who are bullied may feel afraid or ashamed or fear reprisals if they speak up. No-one knows your child like you do and there are signs parents can be alert to and positive steps you can take. A child who is being bullied may:

- be tense and teary, especially on returning from school, or the place they are being bullied
- start making excuses for not wanting to go to school. eg feeling sick
- want to change mode of transport or route to or from school
- talk about hating school and refuse to tell you what has happened
- demonstrate a change in behaviour or demeanour, or become withdrawn
- experience a drop in academic performance, problems sleeping, bedwetting or general regression

Whilst it might not necessarily mean they are being bullied, any of the above can be signs that something is not right with your child.

As parents you can:

- spend time talking to them and encouraging them to tell you about their fears and feelings
- listen to their story, taking seriously what they say and believe what they tell you (just being **heard** and **believed** can give your child a boost)
- be sure they understand that it is not their fault
- know that taking things into your own hands can disempower your child and make them feel even less in control
- talk to them about their own ideas around what can be done and assist them in developing their own non-violent strategies. This can help them feel better about themselves, more confident and less fearful
- avoid using names like “sook” and “weakling.” They are unhelpful and don’t allow anyone else to
- help your child to think of ways to avoid the situation where bullying is occurring
- help your child in building confidence in the things they do well, and help him/her feel good about other things in their life.

The next step is to talk to your child’s teacher or the person in authority where the bullying is occurring. Be clear about what is happening, be prepared to name the children who bully your child, and keep contact until the problem is sorted. If talking to those in authority about this is difficult for you, take a friend with you for support. Reassure your child that being bullied is not their fault and that something can and will be done about it.

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