

Building parent-school partnerships

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Bully-proofing KIDS



Bullying is an issue to be discussed around the meal table, in the context of keeping kids safe. Talk to kids about their right to feel safe; how to recognise if they feel unsafe and what to do if they experience or witness bullying.

Despite the fact schools are very proactive when it comes to making them safe places for kids, bullying unfortunately, is something that's still with us. According to the 2009 Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study one in four kids from Years 4 to 9 experiences some type of bullying at school.

Frequent bullying is highest in Year 5 (32 per cent experiencing some bullying) and Year 8 (29 per cent) so it is something that parents and teachers need to understand. Bullying is an insidious behaviour that transgresses a child's right to feel safe and secure. It can adversely affect children's learning, further peer relations and their emotional well-being.

Often children will tease, argue and sometimes fight, which shouldn't be confused with bullying.

Bullying is selective and intentional. It's also repetitious rather than a one-off or occasional event. It can be physical, verbal or social exclusion. It also now happens online, which means some kids no longer

feel safe at home. Kids generally feel powerless when they experience bullying.

Bullying is an issue to be discussed around the meal table, in the context of keeping kids safe. Talk to kids about their right to feel safe; how to know when they feel unsafe and what to do if they experience or witness bullying.

Knowing when kids are being bullied?

Some research suggests that around 20 per cent of bullying goes unreported so it can be difficult spotting children who experience bullying. However, kids will usually show signs in three ways:

- 1 Acting out:** outward signs such as displays of unusual aggression at home, talking about hating school and getting into trouble more often.
- 2 Acting in:** subtle behaviour changes such as sullenness, withdrawing from usual activities, being uncommunicative, feigned illness, bed-wetting and altered sleep patterns.

3 Telltale signs: more obvious physical signs such as torn clothes, items missing, altered school routes and physical injuries.

Children who are bullied usually display a combination of signs. Children often find it hard to communicate that they are being bullied. Some don't have the language required. Many kids feel ashamed, or even believe what bullies tell them. Sometimes kids are also reluctant to tell adults about bullying, as they fear that they will take the matter out of their hands, so your approach needs to be gentle and non-judgmental.

Here are six things to do if you suspect your child is being bullied:

- 1 Listen to their story**
It really is important to stay calm and get the real story. Kids need to be believed when they are bullied, so make sure they get the chance to talk.

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... Bully-proofing kids ...

2 Get the facts

Bullying behaviour usually follows patterns. An accurate picture will help you determine your next course of action, for example, whether you need to give your child some avoidance or coping strategies or gain assistance from your child's school.

3 Recognise & validate their feelings (anger, fear & sadness are common)

Bullying always elicits strong feelings so make sure kids can share their thoughts and feelings with you.

4 Give them some common coping skills & defense mechanisms

Look for some simple ways to help them handle the bullying such as making sure they stay in pairs, practising a comeback line or even walking and talking confidently.

5 Get the school involved

If your child continues to struggle with bullying contact your child's school. Resist the temptation to confront suspected bullies, or their families. Teachers generally have very practical, tried and true ways to tackle bullying.

6 Help build your child's support networks & their self-confidence

Positive peer groups are great protective factors for kids when they are bullied so do all you can to encourage and build their friendship groups inside and outside school.

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