
My Child being Bullied

A LIFE EFFECTIVENESS GUIDE

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Introduction

Long gone are the days when the phrase 'sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me' was used to toughen the kids in the school playground. Bullying is now an issue that is taken very seriously by parents and schools.

Research over the past 25 years confirms that bullying is an international problem. The likelihood of a child being bullied is higher if the child is a boy, in primary school and has a shy/quiet temperament. However any child, regardless of their gender, age or abilities can be targeted by a bully. Studies indicate that 15 percent of students in schools are involved in bullying, either as the bully or as the victim (Center for Children and Families in the Justice System, 1996).

The long term effects of bullying are a controversial debate. Limited studies have been conducted to give clear outcomes. However, the short term effect can be severe for some children, ranging from low self esteem and poor academic progress to depression and in some cases suicide.

This booklet aims to assist parents to respond when their child is being bullied in a calm and planned manner. Although the focus is on the 'victim' of bullying, the booklet can provide insight to all families. This is important because all children affected by bullying – those displaying the bullying behaviour, those who are targeted and also those who are bystanders.

How to Use This Booklet

This booklet is based on the information from leading experts on bullying. Using a combination of theory, strategies, data collection, recording sheets and reflection activities, parents will develop their knowledge and skills about the following:

- Signs that your child maybe bullied
- Defining bullying behaviour
- Common myths about bullying
- How the bullying behaviour develops
- Common reactions from parents whose children are bullied
- A four step process to support your child

Strategies outlined in this booklet are a guide only. You may need to alter strategies slightly depending on your son's or daughter's ages and ability.

Signs That a Child May Be Bullied

In most cases a child will not tell an adult that they are being bullied and the school may not be aware of any subtle changes in a child's behaviour. Therefore it is crucial for parents to identify when their child is experiencing a problem. If you have noticed that your child's attitude, behaviour or emotional responses have changed recently, the issue of bullying should be considered.

Children and adolescents respond to difficulties growing up. As they develop their behaviour and personality will change. This is natural. However some behaviours are not natural signs of healthy development and should be identified and linked to specific problems.

In the event of a child/adolescent being bullied there are a number of ways that this will be expressed. The following list is some the most reported signs of bullying:

- Coming home with cuts and bruises
- Torn clothes
- Asking for stolen possessions to be replaced
- 'Losing' lunch money
- Asking for money or starting to steal (to pay the bully)
- Falling out with previously good friends
- An unwillingness or refusal to go to school
- Feeling ill in the mornings
- Being moody and bad tempered
- Being quiet and withdrawn
- Starting to stammer, lacking confidence
- Bed wetting
- Crying themselves to sleep, having nightmares
- Insomnia
- Anxiety

- Wanting to avoid leaving the house
- Aggressive with brothers and sisters
- Wagging school
- Doing poorly in their schoolwork
- Refusing to talk about what's wrong

What Is Bullying?

According to the Victorian Education Department bullying is defined as:

'when someone, or a group of people, who have more power at the time, deliberately upset or hurt another person, their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion.'

Understanding bullying becomes clearer when we identify examples from the 3 categories of bullying behaviour, as outlined by Lawson (1995). It is important to remember that the behaviour is not considered bullying if it is an isolated incident.

1. **Direct Physical Bullying**

This includes, but is not limited to hitting, tripping, pushing, taking possessions or damaging property.

2. **Direct Verbal Bullying**

Direct verbal bullying can include name calling, offensive, threatening and insulting remarks. Topics may include homophobic and racist remarks, highlighting special needs or verbal abuse.

3. **Indirect Bullying**

This form of bullying is harder to recognise and is often carried out behind the bullied student's back. It is designed to harm someone's social reputation and /or cause humiliation. Indirect bullying includes lying and spreading rumours, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking, encouraging others to socially exclude someone, damaging someone's social reputation and social acceptance, cyber-bullying, which includes the use of email and text messages or chat rooms to humiliate and distress.

What Is Not Bullying?

Not all conflict between peers can be classified as bullying. It is sometimes difficult to identify the difference between bullying and everyday conflict. The following would not be regarded as bullying:

Mutual Conflict

In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the problem. However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way.

Social Rejection or Dislike

Unless the social rejection is directed towards someone specific and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others, it is not bullying.

Single episode acts of nastiness, of meanness, random acts of aggression or intimidation.

If a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different students is not the same as bullying.

Criminal Behaviour

Bullying is antisocial, not criminal behaviour. Some very aggressive acts are beyond the bounds of school bullying and should be handled by the police or juvenile authorities. This may include threatening or using a weapon, serious theft, serious threatening to cause grievous bodily harm or to kill and sexually assault (including any unwanted sexual touching).

Common Myths about Bullying

The knowledge many people have about bullying is based on myths and misunderstandings. These can be dangerous because these attitudes may make you double guess yourself and your reactions to bullying. The following table contains six of the most misconstrued myths about bullying.

COMMON MYTHS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT BULLYING	
Myths	Reality
<i>'We don't have bullying in our school'</i>	Bullying occurs in all schools and to a greater degree than most people realize.
<i>'You have to learn to stand up for yourself – bullying is character-forming'</i>	This is a dangerous myth, because it suggests that victims of bullying are to blame for being bullied. Bullying is abusive and humiliating.
<i>'It was just a bit of fun. Can't you take a joke? Boys will be boys'</i>	A bully should not be allowed to 'charm' their way out of the situation. Bullying is not fun and boys demonstrating that they are 'tough' should not be accepted.
<i>'They were asking for it. They got what they deserved'</i>	Bullying is not about justice, rather it is about victimization.
<i>'Teachers know how to handle bullying. It's their job'</i>	Being a teacher does not mean they are an expert. Most of the time bullying occurs

	out of sight and therefore the teachers are not aware of it occurring.
<i>'Bullies are thick kids from dysfunctional families picking on academic, nerdy kids with glasses'</i>	Bullies and victims come in all shapes and sizes.

(Sullivan, 2000)

How Did This Happen?

The act of bullying usually does not just happen. A child is not bully-free one day and then a victim of full-blown bullying the next. If this was the case, victims of bullying would be more likely able to react more proactively against the bullying behaviour. It is believed that bullying involves a gradual and deliberate process. Keith Sullivan (2000) describes this process as The Downward Spiral of Bullying. Sullivan uses the following case study to identify the five steps in this spiral.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF BULLYING

Scenario:

It is the beginning of a school year, and students are in the process of re-forming old alliances and starting new ones. The groups students belong to are defined as much by determining who is 'out' and who is 'in'. Those who are 'out' can be subjected to bullying.

A new boy has arrived at the school. He is academically able but quiet and unaggressive. He becomes the victim of serious bullying and this occurs through a five-stage process. The following describes what happens and how the events affect the bully/ies, the victim and the bystanders.

Stage One: Watching and waiting

At the beginning of the year, the pupils settle into the school culture. During this early stage, the students are quietly gaining a sense of the characteristics of their classmates and the dynamics of the class room. Those who will bully are observing and gathering information, picking who will be easy to bully and who will be bully-proof. Those who are prone to be bullied may have no idea that they are being targeted. Those who may become bystanders in acts of bullying may have given signs that they are not easy

targets. Research indicates that early in the school year, single acts with bullying potential are visited on a large number of individuals, but that the frequency of these acts decreases as students who may succumb to being bullied and those who are resistant are identified.

Stage Two: Testing the waters

If, after stage one, a child is perceived as being a potential victim, the next move is for the bully (or part of a bully group) to activate the bullying in a minor way. He may walk past the potential victim's desk and knock off a pencil case. This is a small but symbolic act that tests the response of the potential victim. If the child is embarrassed and seems nonplussed, and responds weakly or not at all, he gives the message that he is a potential victim. (If he retaliates successfully, he may move out of the potential victim group and may be accepted by the main group.)

Stage Three: Something more substantial occurs

Stage two confirms the existence of a potential victim. When he arrives at school the next day, four boys walk very close to him and jostle him, one grabs his bag, and then they throw it around. He runs from boy to boy, felling panicky and they laugh. A teacher comes over and asks what is going on. "Just having some fun" the leader says. The victimized boy does not contradict him. He hopes that if he says nothing he will be seen as a good sport.

Stage Four: The bullying escalates

More often than not, the bullying goes unchecked and gets worse because there is nothing to stop it. If the boys see they can get away with their behaviour, they may beat their victim up or degrade him in various ways. They can also subject him to bullying outside school by an orchestrated campaign of intimidation. The peer group does nothings but watches passively, united in their complicity.

Stage Five: Bullying is the status quo

The boy who is being bullied is losing confidence, failing academically, truanting, and, in a worse case scenario, may eventually attempt suicide. Those who are bullying get

unrealistic sense of their own power and, as they get older, commit other antisocial acts that are not tolerated by the adult world. Crime and imprisonment can be the results. The bystanders are now immobilized by their inaction and have a negative sense of the world as an unsafe and frightening place in which they are essentially powerless.

Why did we include this scenario?

We have not included this scenario to anger or upset parents. 'The Downward Spiral of Bullying' demonstrates a number of points:

1. The bullying act can be a gradual process, were it develops outside the victim's control.
2. Victims should not be blamed or seen as weak. Instead they need to be protected and supported.
3. Victims should not be expected to tough it out or solve the problem themselves.
4. Negative outcomes can occur for everyone involved.

Your Feelings as a Parent

If you believe that your child is a victim of bullying, you are most probably experiencing two reactions. Firstly, outrage, coupled with other emotions such as confusion and guilt. Secondly, this may raise memories of your own experiences with bullying – either as being bullied, as the bully or as a bystander. It is absolutely natural if you are experiencing these memories and feelings. However, it is better to acknowledge them and use them to your benefit, rather than letting your feelings filter through onto your child and their need for support.

Journal

1. Try to remember any experiences you had as a child. Whether you may have bullied a child, been bullied or a by-stander.

2. Take some time to reflect on your feelings about your child's situation. If you find this difficult, try using dot points.

How Not To React

If your reaction is to seek justice for your child, you are not alone. However you need to think about what this will accomplish...not really much at all!

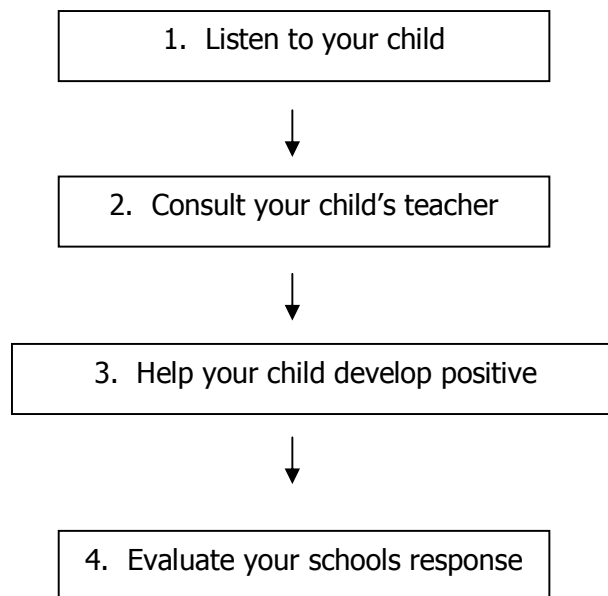
Do not:

- Storm into school demanding action
- Confront the child/children who are bullying your child
- Confront the child/children's parents who are bullying your child

These actions will not change your child's situation. Instead it will take attention away from the problem and place the attention onto you. It may also fuel the situation further. You may be seen as aggressive and you may be banned from the school premises. In the worst case scenario the school may feel the need to contact the police.

How to Address Bullying

There are four simple steps to take when addressing bullying. Each step is just as important as the other, so ensure you put the same thought and effort into each step.



Step 1 – Listen To Your Child

The first step is to raise the issue with your son or daughter. It is important that a child is not pressured into discussing a bullying problem. Most children are embarrassed about the fact they were being bullied. Step 1 may therefore take a little time and a number of discussions to complete. Unless you feel that your child is in extreme physical danger, it is vital that your child feels they have some control over how much and when they provide information to you.

Step 1 incorporates the following:

- Choosing an approach to raising the issue
- General strategies parents should consider prior to discussing bullying with their child
- Information to collect about the bullying - sheet 1 and sheet 2
- Journal entry to outline your strategy

Strategies To Raise The Issue

You can take either a direct or non-direct approach. For older children you may find that a direct approach is suitable. Older children have more understanding of what bullying involves. For younger children, asking questions about their school experience will often be the best ice-breaker. This is because the child will be less alarmed and may also not understand terminology such as bullying.

Questions you could use to start discussions about school include the following:

- What did you do at school today?
- What did you do at lunchtime?
- Who do you like at school?
- Who do you dislike at school?
- Are you looking forward to going to school tomorrow?
- What is your favourite part of school and why?

How To Prepare

1. Prepare with a positive and engaged frame of mind. You do this by choosing an appropriate time and place for the discussion. Utilise a situation where you can avoid distractions and that there is some form of privacy away from other siblings.
2. Set aside your emotions and prejudices. Your aim should be to learn about your child's experience. Giving examples of your experiences as a child is fine, as long as this assists your child to talk about themselves. Try to keep control of your emotions and opinions and deal with them after your discussion.
3. Believe your child. Take his complaints seriously.
4. Don't overreact: listen calmly and encourage him/her to express their feelings.
5. Enforce that what is happening is wrong and that they are not alone.
6. Don't agree to keep the bullying a secret.
7. Reinforce to your child that you love and value them, and that you are here to help.

How to Document Bullying

Documenting information about bullying is important for two reasons. Firstly it is the most reliable method of providing details when they are requested by the school. It also gives an accurate measurement on whether the bullying increases or decreases.

The following two sheets can give you examples of the information you will need to record.

Sheet 1 – The Bullying Behaviour

Most of the information you need for this sheet can usually be gained from conversations with your child. However you may need to ask them to be specific in examples to develop a good understanding of the bullying. It is this type of information you will need in step 2, when you meet with a teacher and discuss the bullying behaviour with them.

Sheet 2 – Diary of the Bullying Behaviour

The focus of this form is for you and your child to document each time bullying occurs. It is good to start this straight away, even before you begin any intervention. Without this information you will not be able to accurately measure whether the bullying increases or decreases over time.

Sheet 1 - The Bullying Behaviour

Who is involved in the bullying?

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What happens?

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What does your child do when the bullying occurs?

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Has anyone seen or been told about the bullying (friends or teachers)?

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When does the bullying happen?

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Where does the bullying happen?

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How long has the bullying been happening?

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Other information about the bullying.

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Sheet 2 - Diary of the Bullying Behaviour

Date/Time	Bullying behaviour (what happened, by whom etc)

Journal

Before speaking to your child, consider the following points and jot down these and any other points:

- Whether a direct or indirect approach would work the best*
- When and where would be the best place for the discussion*
- How you think you might start the conversation*

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Step 2 – Consult Your Child’s Teacher

To successfully combat bullying behaviour teachers need to be involved. If your child is in primary school you should meet with his/her teacher, however if your child is in high school it is better to meet with the Home Room Teacher.

When you meet with the teacher it is important to keep a calm, problem-solving approach. Blaming others or demanding that the bullying needs to stop is not the first impression you want to make.

Before you meet, take some time to write down the main point you need to tell the teacher. This can be gathered from Sheet 1 – The Bullying Behaviour. Do not be surprised if the information you provide the teacher is the first they have heard of the issue. Remember if you did not know that your child was being bullied, then it is a likelihood that the teacher doesn’t either.

After giving an overview of the bullying behaviour you should be asking the following questions:

- What can the school do to assist my child?
- Have similar situations been occurring to other children?
- What advice should I recommend to my child to report bullying in the future?
- Does the school have a ‘Bullying Policy’?

The school will need time to investigate and talk to teachers and, perhaps, other students. However you should make a plan with the teacher that either you will contact them or they will contact you. Be sure to agree on a time frame for further consultation.

It is important to document what was discussed in the meeting. You may need this further down the track, if the outcomes of this meeting are not what you expected. The following sheet – Initial Meeting, should be completed after the meeting. Include as much information, regardless how trivial as you may need to recall this at a later date.

Also ensure that you write down the date by which you or the teacher will be making further contact.

Initial meeting

Date:

Teachers Name:

Details of discussion:

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Who will make the follow up contact?

By which date?

Step 3 - Help Your Child Develop Positive Strategies

Below are three types of strategies to consider. Depending on the age of your son/daughter you can adjust these to suit. In all behaviour modifying situations, there are proactive and reactive strategies to consider.

Proactive strategies are used to reduce the opportunity of bullying occurring. Taking a 'proactive' approach can be empowering for children and adolescents as it is something that they can do to control their own behaviour and current situation.

Reactive strategies are preplanned reactions when bullying behavior occurs. Reactive strategies aim to defuse the situation simply and quickly to keep your child safe. It is unwise to encourage your child to fight back, as your child could be seriously hurt. When children or adolescents have a plan that they can practice and utilise at these times, they are more confident in reacting in a controlled manner.

First, however it is important to reflect on your own child's behaviour.

Reflect on current behaviour

Reflecting on your son or daughters behaviour is not blaming your child for being bullied, as some children do have habits or behave in a manner which is the central theme of the bullying.

Consider the following questions:

- Is your child doing something that might encourage a bully to pick on him/her? Examples could include picking their nose, unable to pronounce words or body odor.
- If so, how can you help your child to reduce this behaviour or develop alternative behaviours?

Jot down any thoughts you have on assisting your child in this area.

Proactive strategies

The following strategies should be planned with your child. Your son or daughter will usually have the answers; they might just need to be asked the right questions.

Proactive Strategy 1 – Avoid the Bully

From the information you have gathered in Sheet 1 – The Bullying Behaviour, you should have a good idea when and where the bullying behaviour occurs. Use this to create an alternative plan with your child.

For example: Bullying that occurs at morning tea and lunch usually occurs when there is little teacher supervision. Discuss the option of your child eating in an area where the supervising teacher is usually positioned. Another example is bullying which occurs on the way home from school. Try to identify alternative routes which the child can take, ensuring they are 'high-use' routes by other children or the public.

The following example is a way to draw up a plan for your child. Give a copy to your child so they can refer to it. It is best if the copy is kept in a safe place such as their bedroom where other people cannot access it. You may need to revisit this plan until your child feels comfortable. This plan can change at anytime when situations in the future change.

Current Situation	New Plan
<p>Example 1 I enter school via the lower gate near the bike racks. This is where 'name of bully' also enters.</p>	<p>I will be dropped off at the front gate each morning.</p>
<p>Example 2 'Names of bullies' usually push me around on the veranda before class. This happens before the teacher arrives.</p>	<p>I will wait for the teacher to arrive before entering the veranda in the mornings.</p>

Proactive Strategy 2 - Build self-esteem

Find positive outlets to nurture your child's self-confidence. Identify strengths / interests and use these to increase his/her self esteem and develop new social circles. This could be as simple as joining a sporting club or taking lessons.

Jot down how you and your child will use proactive strategies.

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Reactive Strategies

Michele Borba (2001) recommends the following strategies to respond to bullying behaviour:

- **Assert yourself.** Teach your child to face the bully by standing tall and using a strong voice. Your child should name the bullying behavior and tell the aggressor to stop:

"That's teasing. Stop it." or "Stop making fun of me. It's mean."
- **Use "I want."** Communication experts suggest teaching your child to address the bully beginning with "I want" and say firmly what he wants changed:

"I want you to leave me alone." or "I want you to stop teasing me."
- **Agree with the teaser.** Consider helping your child create a statement agreeing with her teaser.

Teaser: "You're dumb." Child: "Yeah, but I'm good at it." or Teaser: "Hey, four eyes." Child: "You're right, my eyesight is poor."

- **Ignore it.** Bullies love it when their teasing upsets their victims, so help your child find a way to not let his tormentor get to him. A group of fifth graders told me ways they ignore their teasers:
"Pretend they're invisible," "Walk away without looking at them," "Quickly look at something else and laugh," and "Look completely uninterested."
- **Make Fun of the Teasing.** Fred Frankel, author of "Good Friends Are Hard to Find" suggests victims answer every tease with a reply, but not tease back. The teasing often stops, Frankel says, because the child lets the tormentor know he's not going to let the teasing get to him (even if it does). Suppose the teaser says, "You're stupid." The child says a rehearsed comeback such as: "Really?" Other comebacks could be:
"So?" "You don't say," "And your point is?" or "Thanks for telling me."

Once you choose one or more of these techniques, rehearse it together so your child is comfortable using it. The trick is for your child to deliver it assuredly to the bully--and that takes practice. Explain though he has the right to feel angry, it's not OK to let it get out of control. Besides, anger just fuels the bully. Try teaching your child the **CALM** approach to defueling the tormentor.

- **C - Cool down.** When you confront the bully, stay calm and always in control. Don't let him think he's getting to you. If you need to calm down, count to twenty slowly inside your head or say to yourself, "Chill out!" And most importantly: tell your child to always get help whenever there is a chance he/she might be injured.
- **A - Assert yourself.** Try the strategy with the bully just like you practiced.
- **L - Look at the teaser straight in the eye.** Appear confident, hold your head high and stand tall.

Step 4 – Evaluate School’s Response

Use this form to document the Follow-up Meeting.

Follow-up Meeting

Date:

Teachers Name:

Details of discussion:

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Understanding your School's Responses

Only you, as the parent can determine whether the school responses are satisfactory.

The following questions can help to evaluate whether the school is being proactive against bullying towards your child.

1. Did the school take your issues seriously?
2. Was some investigation carried out?
3. Are there any strategies being put into action to help reduce the incidents of bullying for your child?
4. Is there a school bullying policy which outlines boundaries etc?
5. Does the school wish to talk to you in the near future or at least maintain an open line of communication?

Lee (2004) has developed an overview for parents to determine at what stage schools have developed in relation to anti-bullying policies. School responses about bullying and any policies they have in place may be able to be classified into one or a combination of the following 4 stages:

The four stages of school development in dealing with bullying	
1. Denial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a policy somewhere, written by someone, sometime ago• Bullying is not a problem in this school, but is viewed as a natural part of the growing process• Little can or should be done about it• If it were to be a concern for us it is important that we keep the issue 'in house'• Being open about our anti-bullying approach would

	<p>imply it is a problem and could be bad publicity for the school</p>
2. Token	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a policy, written by a nominated person following a professional development day • It is occasionally waved in front of parents and inspectors • Few people know what it says, but many rest secure that bullying has been discussed • One 'expert' is identified as dealing with the issue and they were the creative force behind the written policy
3. Moving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue is taken seriously and there is a regular review of the policy which incorporates advice and support for pupils, parents and staff • Staff share effective practice and materials that they have found useful • Preventative practices are in place • Ways of dealing with it that are known by adults and pupils in the school
4. Motoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has clear policy and practices that all know, helped to create and feel ownership of • It self-monitors by gathering data about the experience of key players, including parents. All acknowledge that there is bullying beyond the school, nonetheless, staff and pupils combat it in school by constantly adapting, revisiting and experimenting • There is recognition of the importance of involving a wider community and of the value of sharing effective practice with parents and other significant parties • Preventing bullying forms part of a programme that focuses on involving and empowering pupils in playing a positive role in school and making wise choices

	<p>throughout their lives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils are supported in developing strategies that not only provide personal protection, but also develop positive peer relationships• Preventing bullying is synonymous with promoting an ethos in which all pupils who attend the school value and respect each other
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Where to Now?

Depending on the outcomes so far, you should use the following guidelines:

UNHAPPY

Reflect back on your 1st and 2nd discussions with the teacher. Use this information to write a letter to the principal outlining the situation. Make sure you are calm and not insulting to the school or the teacher. Ask for an appointment to discuss the situation further.



Discuss all options for your child and the responsibilities of the school with the principal.



Continue working with the principal and teacher until the school develops strategies to assist your child.

HAPPY



Keep in contact with the teacher to closely monitor the situation. Keep supporting your child to use proactive and reactive strategies where needed.



In the case where the situation does not improve or becomes worse, seek further help from the school and/or other professionals.
In the case where the situation improves, continue monitoring child's behaviour and reports of bullying.

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