

Bullying and cyberbullying

Bullying can happen to anyone. It might happen to you, your friend or someone online. People being bullied often feel powerless and alone, or worried about what the bully might do next.

The impact of bullying can last longer than the bullying itself. Experiencing bullying can increase a person's chances of developing anxiety or depression. There are steps we can all take to try to stop bullying. If someone you know is being bullied, there are many ways you can help.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying is behaviour that is meant to be hurtful, targets a person or group of people, happens more than once and embarrasses, threatens or intimidates the person being bullied.¹ It may happen in person but can also happen out of sight or online.

Bullies don't always work alone. The impact of bullying can be even greater when a group of people begin to act together.

BULLYING CAN TAKE MANY FORMS:

- **Verbal/emotional:** name calling or put downs, threats, teasing, ridiculing, intimidation or stalking.
- **Physical:** punching, tripping, kicking, or stealing and/or destroying someone else's property. Unwanted kissing or touching.
- **Social:** being left out or ignored, having rumours spread about you.
- **Cyberbullying:** hurting someone using technology, via email, chat rooms, text messages, discussion groups, social media, instant messaging or websites. For example, being teased or made fun of online, having unpleasant comments, pictures or videos about you sent or posted on social media or websites, having someone use your screen name or password and pretending to be you to hurt someone else.

Many people have experienced bullying, with 27 per cent of young people reporting they have been bullied at some time.²

Cyberbullying happens at least every few weeks to about one in 10 young people², and workplace bullying is also a common experience reported by young people.

THE IMPACT OF BULLYING

The experience of being bullied is different for everyone.

In response to bullying people may begin to feel alone, anxious, scared, miserable and powerless, while others may feel overwhelmed by sadness, ashamed or rejected.

They may feel there is no escape from the bully or that there is no hope that things will change. Anger is another common reaction, as the attack from the bully is unfair and unwarranted.

Bullying can affect every part of a person's life, including relationships with their friends and family. It can affect a person's confidence and performance at school, in a sports team or at work.

People who have experienced bullying are also more likely to develop anxiety and depression.

TAKING ACTION

When someone is being bullied there are two important things to think about – looking after yourself or the person being bullied, and taking action to try to stop the bullying.

IF YOU ARE BEING BULLIED THERE ARE THINGS THAT YOU CAN TRY:

Ask them to stop

- tell the person you don't like how they are behaving towards you and ask them to stop
- ask them to delete any online images, posts or chats that are offensive to you.

Walk away or ignore them

- hang out with people you trust and where you feel safe
- don't respond to messages or images online; this can aggravate the situation
- turn off your mobile device or go offline so the bully doesn't have your attention
- unfriend or block the bully and change your privacy settings on your social media accounts.

Talk to someone

- tell someone you trust; a friend, parent, teacher, counsellor, workmate or manager
- ask for their advice and support to deal with the bully
- Lawstuff.org.au can explain your rights and can help to support you.

Keep a diary

- write down everything that happens and what you have tried to stop the bullying

- keep mobile phone messages, emails or social media chats as a record of what has happened.

Report the abuse

- make a complaint to the social media site and get others to as well
- if the bully is threatening you, talk to a trusted adult or consider contacting the police.

Focus on looking after yourself

- focus on your own health and wellbeing. Think about your strengths and future plans
- try to focus on positive thoughts and distract yourself from the negative ones
- keep physically healthy; maintain a balanced diet and exercise regularly
- spend time with friends and family doing things that you enjoy
- install the cybersafety help button (see link on back page) on your computer or mobile device. It offers help and advice about upsetting things that you have seen on the internet.

If things don't improve get help

- there is a range of ways that people can help you online, over the phone or in person. The services listed on the last page are a good place to start.

Everyone copes with being bullied differently. Often you'll need to try a few solutions to find what works best for you, or your friend. If the things you try don't work, it's time to get help from someone else. You don't have to face this alone.

IF YOU SEE SOMEONE BEING BULLIED YOU COULD HELP IN A RANGE OF WAYS:

Tell the person acting like a bully to stop

- if you feel safe to do so, call others out on their bullying and ask them to stop: "Enough. This isn't funny."

Be respectful of others

- do not harass, tease or spread gossip about others. This includes on social media or chat rooms
- think before you post. Don't comment on or forward posts, images or videos that may hurt others
- leave negative online groups and conversations.

Help the person take steps to protect themselves from the bully

- report bullying to someone that can help – this can be a parent, teacher, manager, supervisor or team coach
- encourage the young person being bullied to email the site and seek their support in managing the situation
- unfriend or block the bully where possible
- be supportive
- try to arrange to be with your friend or online at the times that the bullying is happening
- don't bully or attack back. Support your friend by letting them know you are there to help
- if things do not improve suggest that they get help and support from a counsellor, either online, over the phone or in person. See 'Where you can get help' list on the last page for contact details.



“I went through a horrible time when I was going through primary school and then when I started secondary school. Everyone teased me because I was so overweight.

I went home from school every single day crying because I got teased in the classroom and everywhere I went, I was teased and bullied. Kids just wanted to bash me up all the time and upset me. Even at baseball, as I loved playing baseball, but I hated being teased.

Sometimes, I would try and stand up to the bullies but that only saw me labelled as a ‘bully’ as well, which I really disliked as I was only trying to defend myself. That’s why it’s really important to tell someone such as a teacher, parent, coach or friend so that others know what’s happening and they can help you stop it.

All I wanted to do was stay in my bedroom where I felt safe. I didn’t want to see anyone because I knew and believed they would tease me. So I kept eating everything I could. I didn’t care – I was overweight anyway and I thought that everyone hated me.

I got really bad and just wanted to die, so my parents got some help for me. They took me to a doctor and a dietician to help with my diet. They also took me to a counsellor, who I spoke to and that helped me feel better. So I suppose it was my parents who really helped me.

The greatest help of all was my big sister, who entered me into the Biggest Loser competition on TV, where I spent 14 weeks away with my Dad. Together we lost a heap of weight and came second in the competition.

Through that experience, I learnt how to face challenges and get through them. The biggest challenge of my life was to beat the depression and get help to overcome it.

‘Believing in myself’ was the most important thing to my recovery. I had to believe that I could do it. I had to set my mind to believing that I could lose the weight and then that would be my ‘step’ to feeling better about myself and dealing with all my other challenges and anxiety.

Self-confidence is a big thing and I didn’t realise it at the time, but I had a very low opinion of myself. So ‘feeling good about myself’ and ‘liking who I was again’ was the most important step in my recovery.

I keep healthy and active now by working out in the gym every day and exercising really hard. I also eat very well. I eat a low carb diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables and I really enjoy this new lifestyle of good food and exercise.

Talk to a friend, a parent, a girlfriend or a boyfriend, a teacher, or just someone – so that they can get the help you need. It just makes it so much easier – if you share your feelings with a friend or anyone – so that they can help you in some way.

Make sure they share their story with someone else so that they can understand and can help, like a doctor or a counsellor. Don’t keep it to yourself – it will just make you worse.”

Todd, 15 years

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

There are many people who can support you, including friends, teachers, family members, counsellors, managers or parents. They can talk with you about how you are coping and what support you need.

TALK TO SOMEONE

If your feelings of stress, anxiety or sadness get too intense, a counsellor, youth worker or doctor can help. You can talk to a counsellor in person (at the local medical clinic, headspace), online (ehespace, Kids Helpline, *beyondblue* Support Service) or by phone (Kids Helpline, *beyondblue* Support Service).

Talking to someone about how you feel can seem a bit strange at first, particularly if it's not something you do often, but it is a good habit to get into. By talking about what is going on you can begin to look at how you are feeling, why you are feeling that way and what you can do about it.

You may not be able to stop the bully doing hurtful things, but you can take control over how you respond to them and how you look after yourself. You might decide to do more things that you enjoy, focus on your positive or helpful thoughts, spend time with friends who you trust, or exercise to cope better with the stress.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

Some people worry about confidentiality when they see a counsellor or health professional, but health services must abide by laws around confidentiality.

For people over 18 years of age, what is said to health services remains confidential unless there are any risks to the person, or if they pose a risk to someone else. If the young person is under 18, the health service will work with them to identify what support they need. This might be the first thing that you talk with your counsellor or health professional about so that you can feel safe to talk openly about your situation.

If you have seen someone for a while and nothing seems to be changing, then you might like to try another counsellor or health professional. Everyone is different and young people tell us that it can take a few tries before you find a counsellor that suits you, so don't give up.

Getting help is a sign of your strength and determination, enabling you to take back the power that the bully has tried to strip from you. It's about making yourself stronger mentally to deal with the challenges that you face every day.

References

- ¹ Lawstuff.org.au. (2014). Lawstuff australia – know your rights – topics – bullying. [online] Retrieved from: http://www.lawstuff.org.au/vic_law/topics/bullying [Accessed: 5 Feb 2014].
- ² Cross, D., Shaw, T., Hearn, L., Epstein, M., Monks, H., Lester, L., & Thomas, L. (2009). Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS). Perth: Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University.

Where to find support

For help with how you're feeling

Youthbeyondblue

www.youthbeyondblue.com

Learn more about anxiety and depression and how to talk about it with your friends, or talk it through with our Support Service.

 1300 22 4636

 Email or  chat to us online at www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

Kids Help Line

www.kidshelp.com.au

1800 55 1800

headspace

www.headspace.org.au

www.eheadspace.org.au

1800 650 890

ReachOut

Reachout.com

For more info on bullying

CyberSmart

www.cybersmart.gov.au

Bullying No Way!

www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Cybersafety help button

www.communications.gov.au/online_safety_and_security/cybersafetyhelpbutton_download

Lawstuff

www.lawstuff.org.au



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