

## Helping your child who is being bullied

Michelle Roberts



Australian Research has indicated that 10% of children report being bullied most days. Your child is not the only one!

When your child is bullied, all of your protective parenting and caring skills come to the fore. You want to stop the bully and to protect your child.

Helping children protect themselves from bullying is more likely to be successful than attempts to stop the bullies.

### What is bullying?

“Bullying is a form of aggression involving the abuse of power in relationships.”<sup>1</sup> It is recognised globally as a complex and serious problem. It can be seen as the “abuse of power through unjustified and repeated acts of aggressive behaviour intended to inflict harm”<sup>2</sup>

### Bullying

Bullying has the potential to result in severe psychological, social and mental health problems in both the bullied and the bully<sup>3</sup>.

There are different types of bullying behaviours

- Covert bullying is not always obvious. It is sometimes referred to as “hidden bullying.” It might include behaviours such as deliberately leaving a child out of an activity (exclusion), or it can include the spreading of gossip, hurtful stories, rumours or enforcing social isolation and may include cyber-bullying”. Social exclusion has been demonstrated to be the worst form of

bullying.<sup>4</sup>

- Overt bullying is often easier to see and includes direct aggression with intent to distress, upset and hurt. It includes behaviours such as verbal abuse, making fun of someone or belittling, threats, physical or verbal attacks, personal insults and humiliation.

Research indicates that covert bullying may result in more severe psychological, social and mental health problems that overt bullying.<sup>5</sup>

### What you can do to help your child.

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|---------|--|
| Believe | The first step to helping your child is to believe them when they tell you that they are being bullied. We know that children are less likely to tell adults they are being bullied because they don't believe adults can make a difference <sup>6</sup> or that they will be believed or that telling someone will make the bullying worse. |
| Listen  | To what is happening and when it is happening. Listen when your child tells you about bullying, if they say it's happening, they probably are experiencing bullying. Being bullied is often a personal view of what the situation is, it is something that makes your child feel sad, frightened and left out.                               |

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**Act quickly** Let your child know that you understand how distressing this is to them. Helping your child with strategies to cope with the bullying behaviour and doing this immediately is more likely to stop the bullying and to help your child before the bullying causes emotional difficulties.

## What works?

1. Using a problem solving approach
2. Ask your child what they have tried so far. Look at these strategies and identify those that have been successful.
3. Work on adding more tools for social survival, such as practising saying "leave me alone" calmly and walking away, looking at ways to avoid situations where the bullying is likely to occur and making friends that are supportive.
4. Mediation by an adult not related to either child
5. Making the problem one of shared concern and shared responsibility for a solution, enlisting the help of friends, teachers and peers.
6. Taking a 'no blame approach'.
7. Direct teaching of social survival skills.

## The Bystander role.

The bullied/bully relationship occurs within the wider friendship or peer group. The broader peer group is powerful in allowing bullying to happen or putting a stop to it. There is evidence that older adolescents are more influenced by their peer group than their own behaviour.<sup>7</sup> Encouraging all children to speak up when they witness bullying is a powerful bully stopping strategy.

## Shared Concern

Stopping bullying involves individuals, peers, parents and teachers working together, encourage your child to let you inform their school of the problem

## What is less successful?

Punishing the bully. Children who are being bullied are more motivated to fix the problem than the children who are bullying.

## School

May fail to recognise bullying, it can be difficult to detect. If your child is being bullied at school, make sure that their teacher and the Principal are aware. Ask for a meeting to plan together what the strategies for ending the bullying will be. Remember, this is a 'shared concern'.

## Resources

National Centre Against Bullying

<http://www.ncab.org.au/>

Raising Children Network

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

## Endnotes

1. Kandersteg Declaration, Switzerland, June 10, 2007 cited in the Australian covert bullying prevalence survey
2. Smith, P.K., 2004 Bullying. Recent Developments. Child & Adolescent Mental Health
3. Rigby, K. and Slee, P.T. (1999) Suicidal ideation among adolescent school children, involvement in bully/victim problems and perceived low social support Suicide and Life-threatening Behavior, 29, 119-130
4. Sharp, S., 1995. How much does bullying hurt? The effects of bullying on personal wellbeing and educational progress of secondary school students cited in Australian covert bullying prevalence survey. Pg. 27
5. Australian covert bullying prevalence survey
6. Helen Mc Grath & Toni Noble. Bullying Solutions. Evidence Based approaches to bullying in Australian Schools. Pearson Education
7. Salmivalli, Lappalainen & Lagersperetz. 1998)

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