

Working together

A toolkit for parents to address bullying

An initiative of the Queensland
Schools Alliance Against Violence



Queensland Government

On 23 February 2010 the Premier announced the formation of the *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence* (the Alliance) to provide advice on best practice measures to address bullying and violence in Queensland schools to the Minister for Education and Training, the Honourable Geoff Wilson MP.

The Alliance is independently chaired by Professor Ian O'Connor (Griffith University) and includes representatives from:

- Education Queensland
- Queensland Catholic Education Commission
- Independent Schools Queensland
- Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens Association
- Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools
- Queensland Independent Schools Parents Council
- Queensland Teachers Union
- Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union
- Queensland Independent Education Union
- Catholic sector principals
- State sector principals
- Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (Queensland)
- Indigenous education representative
- Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

In August 2010, the Alliance endorsed the release of *Working Together: a toolkit for parents to address bullying*.

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Introduction

The Queensland Government has been working hard to address the increasingly complex issues of bullying, cyber bullying and violence in schools. Working together with parents* is critical for success.

Working Together: A toolkit for parents to address bullying provides parents with practical tips on how to support their children should they experience or engage in bullying behaviour. The toolkit also provides parents with information and strategies to assist them in communicating with school staff should any concerns regarding bullying arise.

Parents make decisions in the best interest of their own child. The *Working Together* toolkit aims to support parents in this process.

The toolkit is part of a package of materials developed by the *Queensland Schools Alliance Against Violence (the Alliance)*. The role of the Alliance is to provide the Queensland Government with independent advice on strategies to address issues of bullying and violence in all state and non-state schools throughout Queensland. One specific task of the Alliance is to identify evidence-based best practice across Queensland education sectors, nationally and internationally, which may be implemented in Queensland schools.

A key achievement of the Alliance has been the development of an effective framework which is based on national and international best practice to assist schools to take action against bullying. *Working Together: A toolkit for effective school based action against bullying* is available at <http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/behaviour/qsaaav/index.html>

* Throughout the toolkit the term *parents* is used. In these instances *parents* refers to *parents/carers*.

What is bullying?

There is no universally accepted definition of bullying. It is important to have a clear understanding of exactly what bullying is, to deal with it effectively. Some behaviours which may be distressing to your child, such as mutual arguments, would not be considered as bullying. Bullying has certain features which make it different from other types of violence or abuse. According to Dr Ken Rigby, an expert in studying bullying:

“Bullying is a systematic and repeated abuse of power. In general bullying may be defined as:

- *dominating or hurting someone*
- *unfair action by the perpetrator(s) and an imbalance of power*
- *a lack of adequate defence by the target and feelings of oppression and humiliation.”*

Bullying can take many forms. The *National Centre Against Bullying* identifies five types of bullying:

1. **Physical bullying:** This is when a person (or group of people) uses physical actions to bully, such as hitting, poking, tripping or pushing. Repeatedly and intentionally damaging someone's belongings is also physical bullying.
2. **Verbal bullying:** Repeated or systematic name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks and verbal abuse. This is the most common form of bullying.
3. **Social (covert) bullying:** Indirect actions, such as lying about someone, spreading rumours, playing a nasty joke that make the person feel humiliated or powerless, mimicking or deliberately excluding someone.
4. **Psychological bullying:** For example, threatening, manipulating or stalking someone.
5. **Cyber bullying:** This is a method of bullying using technology, such as email, mobile phones, chat rooms and social networking sites to bully verbally, socially or psychologically.

The *Safe to Learn* (DCSF, 2007) resource developed in the United Kingdom identified that students can be bullied for a variety of reasons. Specific types of bullying may relate to:

- race, religion or culture
- appearance or health conditions
- sexual orientation, gender or sexuality
- home and family circumstances
- learning needs, disabilities or being gifted.

Just as bullying can take many different forms, it can also occur in different relationships: student to student, staff to students, and amongst staff, students and parents/carers. Although each of these instances of bullying is serious and needs to be addressed, the focus of this toolkit is on actions parents can take to respond to bullying behaviour amongst students.

Bullying can happen anywhere, in any school, travelling to and from school, in community playgrounds and shopping centres, and in cyber space (which may mean at home as well).

Many parents are particularly concerned about cyber bullying which is a method of bullying using technology such as the internet and mobile phones. According to Bernard and Milne (2008) the main forms of cyber bullying are:

- **Flaming:** online fights using electronic communication with angry or vulgar messages
- **Harassment:** repeatedly sending nasty, mean or insulting messages
- **Denigration:** posting or sending gossip or rumours about a person to damage his/her reputation or friendships
- **Outing:** sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online
- **Exclusion:** Intentionally and cruelly excluding someone from an online group
- **Cyber stalking:** repeated, intense harassment and denigration that includes threats or creates significant fear.

What is not bullying?

While it is important to understand and define what bullying is, it is also important to be clear which behaviours are NOT bullying. For some people, 'bullying' is a highly emotive term and its use may lead to a strong reaction (Rigby, 2010).

The *National Centre Against Bullying* acknowledges that while the following behaviours are often upsetting to those involved, they do NOT constitute bullying:

- social bantering with minor insults and jokes
- mutual arguments and disagreements (where there is no power imbalance)
- not liking someone or a single act of social rejection
- one-off acts of meanness or spite
- isolated incidents of aggression, intimidation or violence.

While these behaviours would not be considered bullying because they do not involve deliberate and repeated harm and a power imbalance, they need to be addressed in the same way as other inappropriate student behaviours. If parents are concerned about these behaviours, they should contact their child's teacher or principal.

What do we know about children who get bullied?

Parents often ask why their child is being bullied. Some reasons are apparent – the child may stand out as different (e.g. in their physical appearance or behaviour), and in the students' world where fitting in is very important, this can make them a target. Some reasons are not so apparent, and relate to social skills and the way some children relate to others (Field, 2007). Children who get bullied:

- react to the bullies; bullies need to know they have upset or frightened the other child
- show the bully they are sensitive about some things; let the bully know their vulnerabilities
- may have body language or posture that sends a message they think they will be picked on; they appear as a victim
- may not know how to stand up for themselves in a friendly assertive way
- may not have a clear idea of how to be friends or what they want from a friendship, and put up with the negative attention of bullying rather than being left out altogether
- may not have a group of supportive friends to help protect them.

Understanding why some children get bullied is important because this can suggest to parents what they can do to help their child. Some ideas and strategies for parents are provided starting on page 17.

What do we know about children and young people who bully?

Bullies come in two main kinds:

- the rare but truly malicious bully who enjoys hurting and upsetting others
- the much more common power-playing bully who does not realise that his or her behaviour is as hurtful or damaging as it is.

These different kinds of bullies need different responses (Field, 2007).

Although the stereotype is the tough bully, the research on the different types of bullying shows that children who bully are not necessarily the physically dominant child with self esteem issues. McNamara & McNamara (1997) suggested that many students who bully others verbally and socially are:

- popular in their own groups
- having leadership skills
- not malicious in their intent
- thoughtless in their actions.

Other characteristics of bullies can include:

- high energy
- good verbal skills and an ability to talk themselves out of trouble
- a high estimation of their own ability
- an ability to manipulate individuals or groups
- an enjoyment of conflict and aggression
- a delight in getting their own way
- the appearance of being popular but are actually often disliked.

Of course, bullies can have difficulties with health, schoolwork and self-esteem. They may themselves be emotionally neglected, bullied, abused or experience violence. They may have personal, social and interpersonal difficulties; difficulty expressing empathy, dealing with their emotions and with conflict (Field, 2007).

What roles can children and young people play in bullying?

Not all children play a clear role as either the child who is bullying or the child who is being bullied. Children may take on different roles in different circumstances. A child who is being bullied in one context may do the bullying in another, or a child who acts as a bystander may intervene and act as a protector if the ring leader is not around. The *Safe to Learn* document identifies these different roles as:

- **Ring Leader:** children who through their social power can direct bullying activity
- **Associates:** children who actively join in the bullying (sometimes because they are afraid of the ring-leader)
- **Reinforcers:** children who give positive feedback to the child doing the bullying, for example through comments, by smiling or laughing
- **Outsiders/Bystanders:** children who remain silent or watch and therefore appear to condone the bullying behaviour or who want to keep themselves safe by not drawing attention to themselves out of fear of the bully
- **Defenders:** children who try to intervene to stop the bullying or comfort children who experience bullying

How do I know if my child is being bullied?

Research suggests that very few children tell anyone about being bullied. They may not tell anyone because they feel weak or ashamed, are frightened they may only make things worse, or think there is nothing that can be done. The first that some parents hear about their child being bullied is when the school contacts them about the issue. Sometimes children put up with bullying for a long time and only tell their parents when it has become overwhelming.

Some signs your child is being bullied may be:

- not wanting to go to school
- finding excuses for not going to school, e.g. feeling sick or being sick
- wanting to go to school a different way, e.g. changing the route, or being driven instead of catching a bus
- being very tense, tearful and unhappy before or after school
- talking about hating school or other children
- having bruises or scratches
- damage to or loss of personal belongings
- showing problems with sleeping, e.g. not sleeping, nightmares, bedwetting
- not having any friends
- refusing to talk about what happens at school
- being upset or secretive when receiving text messages, checking emails or social networking sites.

If you suspect your child is being bullied, find an uninterrupted time to ask your child about school and directly ask about bullying or about other children being mean to them. Realise it may be difficult for your child to tell you the details. If your child remains reluctant to talk to you, it may be a good idea to discuss your concerns with the class teacher or principal.

Of course, sometimes children do tell their parents they are being bullied. Parents' careful questions, listening and supportive responses are a very important part of successfully dealing with bullying. Try to keep communication calm and open or you might deter your child from talking to you.

What can I do if my child is being bullied?

Parents and siblings can feel very upset when a child is affected by school bullying. Parents may feel anger, fear, shame, confusion, frustration, embarrassment and powerlessness, and may need to draw on their own networks to deal with their own emotions and for support during the process.

Parents will consider what they know about their child and the details of the situation to make decisions in their own child's best interest. The way children relate to each other is complex and the bullying situation can change regularly or unexpectedly. The following are some general strategies to try.

Talk to your child in a calm and supportive manner focused on finding a solution to the problem. Discuss with your child some immediate strategies to deal with the bullying. If your child is experiencing verbal or physical bullying, and has not already tried these, encourage your child:

- to walk away
- to try to act unimpressed or unaffected
- to use other strategies to diffuse the situation (e.g. agreeing in an offhand way with the bully when they say offensive or negative things – known as fogging)
- to say 'No!' firmly
- to talk to the teacher or other staff, e.g. school guidance officer or chaplain.

Do not advise your child to fight with the other child (as distinct from defending themselves from a physical attack.) This can escalate the situation, and your child may be observed and reprimanded for their part in a fight.

If your child is being bullied through electronic media, you can manage the access to the technology itself as well as encouraging your child to use the strategies listed on page 20.

Let your child know you will be contacting the school. Sometimes children don't want their parents to become involved or fear the consequences when the bully finds out. Field (2007) suggests that if a child is very resistant to bringing the issue up at school, parents might consider giving them a short period of a week or so to see if they can improve the situation with the strategies above. However, parents should insist they will be contacting the school if the bullying continues.

No single response will solve bullying. A variety of responses and working at several levels is necessary to stop it. You can help your child by:

- working effectively with the school staff (see page 13)
- helping your child to develop personal strategies to deal with bullying (see page 17).

How can I work with the school?

1. Gather information about the bullying

Before contacting the school, gather as much information as you can about the bullying by talking with your child. The list of questions below adapted from Evelyn Field's book (see the Resources page) may help you to organise your information. Change the wording of the questions to suit the age of your child.

- Who does the bullying, and who else is involved (including their Year levels)?
- What does the bully do: tease, physically hurt, exclude your child, send mean text messages, etc?
- Why does your child think the bully does this?
- What might lead up to the bullying: what does your child do?
- How often does the bullying happen?
- Where does the bullying happen (if necessary use a map of the school and surrounds)?
- What does your child say and do when bullied?
- Which other students witness the bullying: who are they and what do they do?
- Has your child reported it to teachers or other staff at the school previously, and what happened?
- Who else is bullied by these children?
- What is happening at school that might be contributing to the bullying happening?

When you have the information you need, think about what you would like the school to do before you contact them.

Also decide if you would like to bring a support person with you to meetings with the school staff. If you want to bring a friend, make it clear to the person that their role is to support you, and it is important that everyone stays calm and focused on achieving a good outcome for your child.

2. Meet with the school staff

Make a meeting with your child's teacher to discuss your concerns. Parents can have an advocate with them for support. At the meeting talk about when, where and how the bullying is happening. The school may have additional or different information than that provided by your child.

It is understandable that parents may feel concerned, anxious or upset about their child being bullied at school. However, it is important to try to stay calm in meetings with school staff. Remember:

- don't talk angrily, shout or yell – it will not help you or your child
- don't talk to other parents about the other child/children involved – this may inflame the situation
- if you are not satisfied with the way the situation is being handled by school staff, arrange another meeting to discuss the problem with the principal or their supervisor.

At the meeting, you may be able to agree on a plan of the actions you and the school staff will take to ensure the immediate safety of your child, and to deal with the bullying in the long term. Part of the plan should be a date for a follow-up meeting to check the agreed actions and to discuss changes to your child's situation. If you can't agree on an approach, organise a follow up meeting and seek advice or support such as mediation to help you achieve a positive outcome.

Ask the school staff to put the plan in writing. The information that could be covered in a plan of action includes:

- names and contact details of all the people involved
- any general background information you wish to note
- aims of the plan
- what each of the people involved will do: actions by parents, school staff and the student
- any remaining issues yet to be discussed or resolved
- how the school and parents will communicate, and how often
- a date for review of the plan and who is responsible for setting up this review meeting.

If the other child involved in the bullying attends another school, working through your school's principal and staff is the best way to contact the staff from the other school. Negotiating an agreed plan may take more time in this situation and involve more meetings, so your school's principal has an important role to play in this situation.

3. What sort of things will I be expected to do?

As a parent, your role in working with the school includes:

- focusing on your child
- encouraging your child to try the agreed strategies at school and reinforcing them at home
- keeping communication with the school open and regular

- seeking further help from outside school if needed for your child, such as counselling
- employing cyber safety measures at home, such as web filters, agreed usage times, parental lock outs. See suggested websites on page 27 for free and effective web filtering programs.

4. What sorts of things can I expect the school to do?

Schools can use a range of strategies to deal with bullying. The nature of the bullying incidents will help to determine which method is most appropriate. These include:

- **Physical/supervisory responses:** altering the physical environment where possible to reduce places where bullying can happen, to enhance teachers' ability to supervise students throughout the day or arranging increased supervision of students at certain times or in certain locations.
- **Restricting access to technology at school:** schools work with students and parents to establish acceptable use of technology, focusing on the use of mobile phone, social networking sites and websites.
- **Teaching and learning programs:** these promote personal development and address all forms of bullying through the teaching of communication skills, social skills, assertiveness, coping strategies, group behaviour, understanding the motives for bullying and being effective bystanders. These may be additional programs or an ongoing part of the curriculum.
- **Disciplinary measures:** action and consequences for the behaviour to impress on bullies that what they have done is unacceptable; deter them from repeating that behaviour, and signal to other students that the behaviour is unacceptable.
- **Mediation:** students in conflict are invited to work with a trained teacher or peer-mediator to find a mutually acceptable way of resolving their problem.
- **Counselling:** guidance officer or counsellor support for the student to help them to deal with the bullying; this could include various methods of working in groups with a skilled facilitator.
- **Restructure of classes:** removing the students from regular contact with each other; using temporary or long-term flexible learning arrangements.

One thing obvious in the research is that simply 'coming down hard' on a student who bullies does not resolve the situation in many cases (Bernard & Milne, 2008). It can make it even harder for adults to help these students to change their behaviour.

5. Why can't the school tell me more about the consequences for the bully?

Parents are expected to focus on helping their own child. School staff will deal with the student who is bullying, which will include meeting and discussing the issue with that student's parents, and implementing consequences for the bullying. School staff are able to tell you generally the range of

behaviour management strategies and discipline measures that may be applied. They will also tell you how your child appears to be responding at school and when your child reports concerns to them.

The school cannot provide personal information about other students due to privacy laws. Schools are also unable to provide specific information about disciplinary measures as each incident must be assessed on an ongoing and case-by-case basis to take the individual students into consideration.

6. What if I am not happy with the school's response and still have concern about my child's safety?

If you still have concerns about your child's safety, arrange to meet with the school staff again and identify what it is that you want the school to do that has not happened.

The school will respect that you will make whatever personal decisions necessary to be satisfied that your child is safe.

If you have done all you can to work with the school and you are still concerned about your child's safety, you may wish to write to the relevant supervisory body for your child's school. See the Resources section of the toolkit for a sample letter of complaint on page 26.

How can I help my child?

Research has shown that involving parents is crucial in dealing with bullying. The biggest impact comes when families help their children learn new ways to deal with bullying at the same time that the school makes changes and enforces consequences for bullying behaviours.

Knowing how to deal with bullies is a basic life survival skill. Experiencing bullying at school can be frightening and negative, but is also an opportunity for your child to learn how to deal with bullying, not just at school, but throughout life in social situation and at work. The following ideas are taken from the resources listed on page 27 and 28.

1. Your child's attitude

It is essential for you to remain positive and focused on trying to find a solution. This positive approach needs to be passed on to the child. A confident, positive and resilient appearance can stop a bully from continuing. Some children may be feeling disempowered and helpless about the situation, so you might need to talk about how to 'fake it, until you make it' – how to pretend to be confident until your child actually does feel confident and positive.

Assure your child that it is NOT their fault. Some children might benefit from discussing why the other child bullies them. You could ask your child to think about:

- why some children bully others (why the particular child bullies); explore ideas that the bullying child might only know that way of dealing with others, or that bullies may feel bad about something they cannot do.
- why the other child chose your child to bully; explore ideas that the bullying child might be jealous of them (e.g. for being attractive, intelligent, sporty) or may not understand how they are different from them (e.g. for a disability, being gifted, a cultural difference).

The aim of this type of conversation is not to excuse the bullying behaviour, which must be stopped, but to reduce the likelihood of your child blaming themselves for the bullying. You can acknowledge that it feels bad to be bullied, but point out it doesn't mean your child is powerless.

2. Your child's skills

Before learning new skills, your child needs to think about what they currently do when the bullying happens, and what they could do differently. Ask your child to think about what the other student gets out of bullying other people, and then ask how your child reacts when being bullied. When your child starts to see that some children bully just to get a reaction, they can begin to understand how changing the way they react could be part of the solution. This might mean pretending not to be bothered or frightened by the teasing or threats.

Talk to your child about the idea of taking back their personal 'power' through learning new ways of relating to the other child. Most children understand the idea of martial arts as blocking physical

attacks. You can extend this idea to explore ‘talking martial arts’ – stopping the bullying by using your words or actions to ‘block’ verbal or social attacks (Field, 2007). This might involve:

- pretending not to be bothered or frightened by teasing or threats
- making a quick retort to surprise or disarm the other child
- giving any response rather than looking ‘frozen in fear’
- using a humorous response
- using an image in their mind of blocking the negative comments from hurting them.

Although it might feel a bit strange, practising in role play is very useful to give your child the confidence to confront what may be a scary situation, and to change their usual way of behaving. Try role plays where your child practises how:

- to stand and walk in a way that appears more confident
- to give a quick retort to disarm the other child
- to use a routine response (e.g. *okay, whatever*) that implies that the child is not bothered.

3. Your child’s supports and networks

Options to explore to build your child’s supports and friendship networks are:

- identifying strengths and things your child is good at; find ways to develop these, possibly with other children outside of school
- supporting your child to make friends with other groups of children.

It may be necessary to try several different approaches before you and your child find an effective solution. Remind your child a solution may take some time and require determination.

- **Practice:** make sure your child knows it will take practice and time to change how they behave to change the situation.
- **Courage:** encourage your child to face up to the challenge, saying things like: *If you don’t try then you don’t know what is possible.*
- **Be flexible:** remind your child that it might be necessary to try a few different options to work out how to disarm this particular child’s bullying behaviour.
- **Celebrate:** change might come gradually, so keep written records of progress and celebrate any small change you achieve.

How can I protect my child from the harms of cyber bullying?

New communication technologies mean bullying is appearing in new formats and places. While in the past, school bullying might have been confined to the school grounds and surrounds, mobile phones and social networking sites mean children can be harassed and bullied at home.

The strategies previously mentioned for dealing with other methods of bullying also apply to dealing with cyber bullying. In addition, parents can teach their child how to be safe online, as well as supervising and restricting access to technology.

When talking to your child about electronic media and safety, first assure your child they will not lose reasonable access to technology as a result of telling you about any problems, including bullying. It is important to keep the communication between you and your child occurring, and some children may prefer to put up with the bullying than lose access to their phone or computer.

In making decisions about the level of support, freedom and access to technology for your child you could consider:

- your child's track record of keeping him or herself safe
- the friends your child hangs out with and their track record of safety, good behaviour and good decision making
- your child's tendency to give into temptation.

Some options for you to supervise and manage your child's access to technology are:

- explaining that your main concern is that your child is safe, and while electronic media has benefits, it has some unpredictable risks as well
- discussing how to balance social networking with protecting privacy online, e.g. using a non-identifiable, non-gender specific username, not providing personal details of name, telephone, email or banking details; checking your child's profile and explain concerns you might have
- placing computers in a central location at home; avoiding computers in bedrooms
- monitoring technology use by talking with your child, regularly checking the history tab to see which sites are being accessed and saving copies of your child's online conversations (technical advice is available at the websites in the Resource section)
- setting guidelines and monitoring the amount of online time and avoid allowing children unsupervised access to webcams

- choosing a mobile phone for your child that does not feature internet access, or block this service; service providers can assist with blocking any services including limiting calls
- limiting access to mobile phones after a certain time, e.g. no phones after bed time, or restricting phone use to certain purposes, e.g. calling known friends and family only
- discussing the appropriate use of the camera on your child's phone or computer, including when taking photos, video or audio recordings of others and if others are taking photos or recordings of your child
- stressing the importance of not responding to any messages from unknown people
- trying to keep up to date about technology (many sites provide information for parents; see the Resources section).

If your child is being bullied via electronic communication, encourage your child:

- not to respond to the message or image
- to save the evidence
- to block and delete the sender
- to report the situation to the Internet Service Provider or phone service provider; they can help you block messages or calls
- to tell trusted people – teachers and police if necessary.

Despite the concern and distress you may feel, avoid getting personally involved and taking matters into your own hands. You may also wish to contact the school if the person doing the bullying is another student.

What if it is my child who is bullying?

Bullying is a complex interaction based on misusing personal power, so it is also important to help a child who is bullying to learn better ways of relating to others. Sometimes a student who bullies other children in one situation may themselves be bullied in another. It can be distressing to hear that your child has been bullying others, but it is important to take the concern seriously and to work closely with the school.

If you find out your child is bullying others, you can:

- try to understand why your child might be behaving this way; think about issues and problems your child might experience
- discuss the behaviour with your child's teacher (and other staff as appropriate)
- consider whether there needs to be consequences at home as well
- discuss with your child the long term impact of the bullying behaviour, e.g. other people may not want to be around them; potential negative impacts on learning and school, and then work
- consider whether your home environment provides good examples of how to deal with issues and resolve differences with others; try to show positive models of friendly assertive communication with other people
- seek help to develop your child's attitudes about themselves and understanding about how their behaviour affects other people
- seek help to develop your child's skills to relate in more positive ways with other people
- think about how to build up supports for your child to change their behaviour.

Children who bully must:

- be held to account for their behaviour and the harm they have caused through appropriate disciplinary measures and learning programs
- be taught to behave in ways that do not cause harm in the future
- develop their social and emotional skills and knowledge about the effects of their behaviour on others, and their skills in solving problems in a socially acceptable way
- be supported to learning how they can take steps to repair the harm they have caused.

A consistent approach by both the home and school is important. Ensure that your child does not hear criticism from you about the school's management of the issue. Take any such concerns directly to the school staff.

How can I find out what the school is doing to deal with bullying?

If bullying is a concern, there are some questions which can guide parents to find out what their child's school is doing to address bullying including:

- How does the school foster a caring, respectful, inclusive and supportive school culture?
- Does the school have a whole school definition of bullying?
- Is there an anti-bullying policy which has been developed in collaboration with staff, students and parents, which addresses all forms of bullying (including cyber bullying)?
- How does the school respond to bullying incidents (both for the target and the bully) and are there clearly defined roles and responsibilities of staff, students and parents/carers?
- What teaching and learning programs are in place for students to promote personal development and address all forms of bullying?
- What professional development has been provided to assist school staff to understand the anti-bullying policy, implement teaching and learning programs, and to provide support for students?
- Are students consulted regularly about the types of bullying behaviour and the school and social contexts where bullying occurs?
- Have the physical environments in the school and staff supervision practices been considered as ways to limit the incidences of bullying (including cyber bullying)?
- How does the school support and engage families through regular communication and parent awareness raising and skill building?
- Are processes to address bullying regularly reviewed and is the effectiveness of school policies, programs and procedures promoted and celebrated within the school community?

In developing their policy and procedures to address bullying, schools often consult with parents through the official parent organisation at the school (Parents and Citizens (P&C) Association or Parents and Friends (P&F) Association). Parents can get involved with their school's parent group to have input into school policies.

Working Together

Resources and references for parents

Further information about specific types of bullying

The following information on the types of bullying is from the *Safe to Learn* resource (DCFS, 2007).

Bullying related to race, religion or culture

Some surveys and focus groups have found that a high proportion of bullied students have experienced racist or faith-based bullying. Recent political and social issues also appear to have been a factor in bullying and harassment.

Bullying related to appearance or health conditions

Those with health or visible medical conditions, such as eczema, may be more likely than their peers to become targets for bullying behaviour. Perceived physical limitations, such as size and weight, and other body image issues, can result in bullying.

Bullying related to sexual orientation

Evidence of homophobic bullying suggests that students and young people who are gay or lesbian (or perceived to be) face a higher risk of marginalisation than their peers. Homophobic bullying is perhaps the form of bullying least likely to be self-reported, since disclosure carries risks not associated with other forms of bullying. The student may not want to report bullying if it means 'coming out' to teachers and parents/carers before they are ready to.

Bullying related to different home or family circumstances

Students may be made vulnerable to bullying by the fact that they provide care to someone in their family with an illness, disability, mental health or substance abuse problem. Young carers may be taking on practical and emotional caring responsibilities that would normally be expected of an adult. Research has highlighted the difficulties young carers face, including risks of ill-health, stress and tiredness, especially when they care through the night. Many feel bullied or isolated.

Some students are heavily influenced by their communities or homes where bullying and abuse may be common. Some bullying at school may arise from trauma or instability at home relating to issues of domestic violence or bereavement, or from the experience of being part of a refugee family. Siblings of vulnerable students may themselves be the subject of bullying by association.

Bullying related to students with disabilities

Research shows that students with disabilities are more at risk of being bullied than their peers.

Students with disabilities, whether in mainstream or special schools, do not always have the levels of social confidence and competence, and the robust friendship bonds, which can protect against bullying. All schools should ensure that a whole-school approach is taken to deal with bullying related to students with disabilities, and that it is specifically covered in anti-bullying policies.

Where students with disabilities are themselves found to be bullying, schools should apply the same standards of behaviour as the rest of the school community, having made the reasonable adjustments necessary.

Bullying related to students with mental health conditions

Children and young people with mental health concerns may not always have the confidence, coping strategies and peer networks to protect themselves against bullying. Children and young people with mental health concerns such as depression may be particularly susceptible to the effects of bullying due to their tendency to internalise the negative effects and blame themselves for the bullying behaviour.

Sexist or sexual bullying

Sexist and sexual bullying affects both genders. Boys may be targets as well as girls, and both sexes may be targets of their own sex. Sexual bullying may be characterised by name-calling, comments and overt 'looks' about appearance, attractiveness and emerging puberty. In addition, uninvited touching, innuendo and propositions, pornographic imagery or graffiti may be used.

Students identifying as transgender or experiencing gender dysphoria (feeling that they belong to another gender or who do not conform with the gender role prescribed to them) can also be targeted by bullies.

Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying is a 'method' of bullying, rather than a 'type' of bullying. It includes bullying via text message, instant-messenger services and social networking sites, email and images or videos posted on the internet or spread via mobile phone. It can take the form of any of the previously discussed types of bullying, i.e. technology can be used to bully for reasons of race, religion, sexuality, disability, etc.

Sample letter of complaint for parents

If you have done all you can to work with the school and you are still concerned about your child's safety, you may wish to write to the relevant supervisor/supervisory body for your child's school.

Date

I am writing to complain about the way <school name> has dealt with my concerns regarding bullying of my child <child name>

The situation is < description of bullying event/s>

The impact on my child has been <outcomes for your child>

I first raised the issue on <relevant dates> and met with the school staff on <relevant dates>. The meetings were attended by <all participant names, and positions at the school if known> At the meeting it was agreed that:

- <agreed action one>
- <agreed action two>
- <agreed action three>

These things have not been done. I have expressed my concern about this to the school principal, but nothing has improved.

OR

I am not satisfied that the school has acted on my concerns or is serious about improving the situation. The school has not shown evidence that it has a school wide plan for dealing with bullying.

OR

<Other description of school's actions with which you have complaint>

I would like you to intervene in/review the way the school has handled this matter. Please contact me on <contact details>

Yours sincerely

Resources

Websites with information about bullying

Act Smart Be Safe: a gateway for parents/carers, students, teachers and the community to access information to help improve youth safety. <http://education.qld.gov.au/actsmartbesafe/>

Alannah and Madeline Foundation: a national charity protecting children from violence and its devastating effects. <http://www.amf.org.au/AboutUs/>

Bullying. No way!: an online resource providing information for parents/carers, students and educators. <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/who/default.shtml>

KidsMatter: a school based framework that aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children. <http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/>

ReachOut: an online resource that assists young people by providing information to improve understanding of the issues that relate to mental health and wellbeing. *Reach Out* also has information on how young people can get the best help from services, as well as opportunities to connect with other young people. <http://au.reachout.com>

National Centre Against Bullying: a peak body working to advise and inform the Australian community on the issue of childhood bullying and the creation of safe schools and communities, including the issue of cyber safety. <http://www.ncab.org.au/>

Websites with information about computer safety

K9 Web Protection: free Internet filtering and control solution for the home. <http://www1.k9webprotection.com/index.php>

Cybersmart program: the *Cybersmart program* is a national cyber safety education program managed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), as part of the Australian Government's commitment to promoting online safety for children and young people. *Cybersmart* provides activities, resources and practical advice to help young children, children, teens, parents, carers, teachers and library staff safely enjoy the online world, so their experiences are safe and positive. <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/>

ACMA Cybersmart program: Keeping your computer secure: information about the threats to personal computer security and actions to take. <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/en/Parents/Keeping%20your%20computer%20secure.aspx>

Net Alert: Australian Government website providing information about protecting children online, internet content filters and an avenue for complaints. <http://www.netalert.gov.au/>

Who's talking with your kids? brochure developed by Queensland Police Service which includes an internet agreement for parents to discuss with their child. <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/personalSafety/childProtection>

Internet Industry Association: Family Friendly Filters: <http://iaa.net.au/index.php/resources/764-family-friendly-filters.html>

Help Keep Your Kids Safe Online: booklet produced by Telstra which contains information for parents to assist them to make sure their children are safe online. This resource is available on a commercial website. DET does not endorse any commercial messages on this site, but believes parents may find the available cyber bullying information informative.
<http://www.bigpond.com/internet/offers/tlife/info/CyberSafety-Booklet.pdf>

Cybersafety and Security Advice: website provided by NetSafe, an independent non-profit organisation in New Zealand promoting confident, safe and responsible use of cyber space. It also includes information on phone safety. The website has sections specifically for young people, adults, parents, business and community, computer security. <http://www.netsafe.org.nz/>

Books for parents/carers

Carr-Gregg, M. (2007). *Real Wired Child: What parents need to know about kids online*. Camberwell: Penguin Group.

Field, E. M. (2007). *Bully Blocking: six secrets to help children deal with teasing and bullying*. Sydney: Finch. (This book includes language in real-life examples of bullying that may offend some people)

Rigby, K. (2003). *Bullying among young children: A guide for parents/carers*. Canberra: Australian Government Attorney General's Department.

Rigby, K. (2008). *Children and bullying: how parents/carers and educators can reduce bullying at school*. Boston: Wiley-Blackwell.

Other references

Bernard, M., & Milne, M. (2008). *Schools Procedures and Practice for Responding to Students Who Bully*. Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Department for Children, Schools and Families Guidance (DCSF) (2007). *Safe to Learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools*. United Kingdom.

McNamara, B.E., & McNamara, F. (1997). *Keys to dealing with bullies*. Hauppauge, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series.

Rigby, K. (2010). *Addressing Bullying in Queensland Schools*: Consultancy for the Department of Education and Training, Brisbane.