



## Parent Tip Sheet 8. Bullying

To ensure all Victorian government secondary schools are healthy and safe places to learn, each school takes bullying and cyber bullying very seriously and has policies and guidelines to prevent and manage it.

### What is bullying and unacceptable behaviour?

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

Bullying includes:

- Direct physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, damaging property
- Direct verbal bullying, such as name calling, intimidation, racist/homophobic remarks
- Indirect bullying, such as spreading rumours
- Cyberbullying, which includes the use of digital technologies to bully or harass someone, such as setting up a defamatory website.

Unacceptable behaviour refers to a wide range of behaviours that are not appropriate or acceptable, including harassment, discrimination and threats or acts of violence.

Many antisocial behaviours are not examples of bullying, even though they are unpleasant and often require teacher intervention and management. Some examples of behaviours which are not bullying include:

- A situation where there is mutual conflict, that is, a balance of power where students are both upset and usually want a resolution to the problem
- Social rejection or dislike (unless it is a repeated act and directed towards a specific person)
- Single episodes of nastiness, meanness or one-off acts of aggression or intimidation. Although not bullying, these are unacceptable behaviours.

Schools are required to have a Student Engagement Policy that includes strategies to promote positive student behaviour, build a safe and inclusive environment, prevent bullying and antisocial behaviour, and encourage respect, compassion and cooperation.

Student safety and wellbeing is the responsibility of the whole school community. Teachers and staff have a responsibility to ensure students are safe. All students – whether they are being bullied or targeted, a bystander, or are bullying or harassing others – are able to play a role in preventing or responding to the situation.



This Parent Tip Sheet was developed by the Hume Whittlesea LLEN and is a summary of *Welcome to Secondary School – A Parent's Guide to Victorian Government Secondary Schools* developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. A copy of the Parent handbook can be obtained from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/newsinfo/secondaryschool.htm> in English, Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese and Chinese.



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## How do I know if my child is being bullied or a target of unacceptable behaviour?

Some of the signs that a child is being bullied or is a target of unacceptable behaviour include:

- Being unwilling or refusing to go to school
- Feeling ill in the mornings
- Being frightened to walk to and from school
- Wagging school
- Doing poorly in their school work
- Becoming withdrawn, starting to stammer, lacking confidence
- Crying themselves to sleep, having nightmares
- Asking for money or starting to steal (to pay the bully)
- Refusing to talk about what's wrong
- Having unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches
- Beginning to bully other children or siblings
- Becoming aggressive and unreasonable
- Reluctance to discuss cyber bullying in case their computer or phone is taken away.

## What can I do if my child is being bullied or targeted by unacceptable behavior?

**Step 1:** Listen carefully to your child and show concern and support.

**Step 2:** Congratulate your child for confiding in you.

**Step 3:** Give sensible advice – don't encourage your child to fight back; this will most likely increase the bullying or unacceptable behaviour.

**Step 4:** Assist your child to develop positive strategies including:

- Saying 'leave me alone' and calmly walking away
- Avoiding situations that might expose them to further bullying or unacceptable behavior
- Making new friends
- Using technologies safely and responsibly.

**Step 5:** Ask your child the following questions to understand if there is a repeated pattern:

- What, where and when did the incident happen?
- Who was involved on each occasion?
- Did anybody else see it and, if so, who?
- What solutions have been tried so far?
- What are the names of any teachers who may be aware of the problem?

**Step 6:** Work with your child's school to solve the problem. Schools take their responsibilities in relation to bullying and unacceptable behaviour very seriously and they have more success when parents work with the school to solve the bullying problem.





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If you were not aware that your child was being bullied or the target of unacceptable behaviour, then perhaps your child's teachers did not know about it either. You should:

- Make an appointment with your child's teacher and make notes of the points you want to discuss before the meeting.
- At the meeting try to stay calm and present information in a way that makes it clear that you and the school are working as partners in trying to fix this problem.
- Recognise that the school will need time to investigate and to talk to teachers and, perhaps, other students.

**Step 7:** Work with the school to establish a plan for dealing with the current situation and future incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour. Before you leave, ask for clarification about the next steps in the plan.

**Step 8:** If needed, ask for appropriate specialist staff to become involved.

**Step 9:** Encourage your child to report any further incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour to a teacher they trust at the school.

### What can I do to reduce bullying and unacceptable behaviour at school?

- Report all incidents of bullying and unacceptable behaviour to the school, not just incidents that happen to your own child.
- Let your child know how much you disapprove of bullying and unacceptable behaviour and why.
- Respect for others should be modelled and encouraged at home.
- Talk to your child about the qualities associated with caring friendships and discourage them from staying in friendships where they are mistreated or not respected.

For more information, visit [www.education.vic.gov.au/respect](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respect) and [www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au) or [www.bullyingnoway.com.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au)

