

# Bullying

What is bullying? It's a word that gets used a lot to describe a whole lot of things. Find out what bullying is, and get the facts on what different types of bullying look like. It can affect you in a lot of different ways, and it's hard to figure out why people are doing it to you. Find out what to do about it.

## What is bullying

Bullying is when people repeatedly and intentionally use words or actions against someone or a group of people to cause distress and risk to their wellbeing. People who do it usually have more influence or power over someone else, or want to make someone else feel less powerful or helpless.

Bullying is not the same as conflict between people (like having a fight) or disliking someone, even though people might bully each other because of conflict or dislike.

**The sort of repeated behaviour that can be considered bullying include:**

- > Keeping someone out of a group (online or offline)
- > Giving nasty looks, making rude gestures, calling names, being rude and impolite, and constantly negative teasing.
- > Spreading rumours or lies, or misrepresenting someone (i.e. using their Facebook account to post messages as if it were them)
- > Harassing someone based on their race, sex, religion, gender or a disability
- > Intentionally and repeatedly hurting someone
- > Intentionally stalking someone
- > Taking advantage of any power over someone else

Bullying can happen anywhere. It can be in schools, at home, at work, in online social spaces, via text messaging or via email. It can be physical, verbal, emotional, and it also includes messages, public statements and behaviour online intended to cause distress or harm (also known as cyberbullying).

## Types of bullying

**Face-to-face bullying** (sometimes referred to as direct bullying) involves physical actions such as punching or kicking or direct verbal actions such as name-calling and insulting.

### This can look like...

- > Being harassed or abused
- > Being excluded
- > Having rumours spread about you
- > Being dominated by someone

### Take action...

- > Learn more about your legal rights
- > Talk to someone who can help like a parent, teacher or counsellor
- > Work on building self-confidence

**Covert bullying** (sometimes referred to as indirect bullying) is less direct, but just as painful. It means bullying which isn't easily seen by others and happens out of sight, such as excluding people from groups or spreading lies or rumours. Because it is less obvious, it is often not noticed by other people.

**Cyberbullying** occurs through the use of technology like Instant Messaging or chat, text messages, email and social networks or forums. It's similar to offline bullying, but it can also be anonymous, it can reach a wide audience, and sent or uploaded material can be difficult to remove. Most people who cyberbully also bully offline.

## How can bullying affect you and others?

Bullying affects everyone in different ways. But there are common feelings that come up when you are being bullied.

How bullying can affect individuals includes feeling:

- > *guilty like it is your fault*
- > *hopeless and stuck like you can't get out of the situation*
- > *alone, like there is no one to help you*
- > *like you don't fit in with the cool group*
- > *depressed and rejected by your friends and other groups of people*
- > *unsafe and afraid*
- > *confused and stressed out wondering what to do and why this is happening to you*
- > *ashamed that this is happening to you*

Bullying can have a negative impact on everyone – it is not just a problem for victims and bullies. If you see or know of others been bullied you may feel angry, fearful, guilty, and sad. You may also feel worried that the bullying could happen to you.

When bullying isn't stopped or challenged by anyone it can create an environment where bullying is accepted and where everyone feels powerless to stop it.

## Why do people bully others?

People bully for different reasons. Those who bully persistently are likely to do so in order to dominate others and improve their social status. They may have high self-esteem, show little regret for their bullying behaviour and not see bullying as wrong.

Other people may bully out of anger or frustration, they may struggle socially and could have also been victims of bullying.

## What you can do to stop bullies

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If you know or see someone who is being bullied, find out how to stop bullying on ReachOut.com. If you are being bullied, you should talk to someone you know well and trust; they will give you much needed support and will often have suggestions you hadn't considered for helping with the situation.

If you feel safe and confident, you should approach the person who is bullying you and tell them that their behaviour is unwanted and you won't put up with it. If you are being bullied while at school, it is a good idea to seek help from a friend, or to talk to a teacher or counsellor to see if they can help. If you are being bullied at work, check out the info on workplace bullying on ReachOut.com.

**Know your rights.** You have a right to feel safe and to be treated fairly and respectfully. Bullying is a serious problem with serious mental and physical impacts. Find out about your rights when you're facing harassment.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (1300 656 419) has a complaint handling service that may investigate complaints of discrimination, harassment and bullying.

*This fact sheet was developed in partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011. Facts included from the National Safe Schools Framework*