Bullying and harassment at school

Advice for parents and care-givers

All parents want their children to be safe and happy and to do well at school. This pamphlet provides advice about what to do if your child is being bullied or harassed.

What is bullying and harassment?

Bullying and harassment are deliberate and repeated actions towards others which involve the misuse of power.

These differences can be related to culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, body size and physical appearance, age, or economic status.

Bullying and harassment:

- may be physical (hitting, kicking, pinching), verbal (name-calling, teasing, threats), written(notes, graffiti) psychological (stand-over tactics, gestures), social (social exclusion, rumours, putdowns) or sexual (physical, verbal or nonverbal sexual conduct)
- may be done directly (eg face to face) or indirectly (eg via mobiles or the internet)
- may be motivated by jealousy, distrust, fear, misunderstanding or lack of knowledge
- have an element of threat
- can continue over time
- is often hidden from adults
- will be sustained if adults or peers do not take action.

How can I tell if my child is being bullied or harassed?

Children affected by bullying and harassment may not talk about it with their teachers or school counsellor. They may be afraid that it will only make things worse, or that it is wrong to tell tales or ‘dob-in’ other students.

That is why, as parent or care-giver, you have an important part to play in helping the school, and your child, deal with bullying and harassment.

When people are bullied or harassed they may feel angry, embarrassed, frightened, humiliated or uncomfortable, scared or unsafe.

Some signs a child or young person is being bullied or harassed may be:

- Reduced ability to concentrate and learn
- Refusal to attend school, excuses not to go
- Unexplained cuts, bruises, or scratches
- Stolen or damaged possessions/clothing
- Headaches or stomach aches
- Asking for extra pocket money or food
- Acting out, tearfulness, depression

Note: Under recent amendments to the South Australian Equal Opportunity Act 1984 it is unlawful for a student 16 years of age and over to sexually harass another student or staff member.

Students and staff should have their complaints addressed through the school grievance procedure, but can make a complaint to the Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia.
What should I do if my child is being bullied?

If your child is being bullied or harassed you may feel anxious or sad. However, it is important that you try to stay calm and take the following steps:

- Listen calmly to your child
- Let your child know that telling about the bullying or harassment was the right thing to do
- Find out:
  - What happened
  - Who was involved
  - Where it happened
- If anyone else saw, read, or heard it.
- Talk with your child about what should be done
- Make a note of what your child tells you to help you when you talk to the school.

Talk to the school

Your child may not want you to talk about the bullying or harassment. However, it is important you let the school know so the problem can be worked out together.

Make a time to speak to your child’s teacher, the counsellor, deputy principal or principal.

Be as clear as possible about what happened.

Ask the school what else you can do to help your child and the school to stop the bullying or harassment from happening.

Keep in touch with the school, and let the staff know if problems continue.

What will the school do?

All DECS schools work within the guidelines of the School Discipline policy:

DECS, school communities, services and agencies work together to create learning communities which are:

- safe
- inclusive
- conducive to learning
- free from harassment and bullying

Each school has an anti-bullying and harassment policy and grievance procedure, either as an individual statement or as part of the school’s behaviour code. You may ask for a copy of the school’s policy or code.

A range of consequences may be used for students who bully and harass, including time spent out of the classroom or playground.

Principals can suspend and/or exclude students from school, even if the behaviour occurred outside of school hours or off site, including cyber-bullying. Police may also need to be contacted.

Staff may also:

- talk with students involved and help them to solve the problem
- teach students about dealing with conflict and anger
- teach students about care and respect for themselves and others.
What if the bullying continues?

If you have tried these suggestions but your child is still being bullied or harassed, then you may contact your local regional office and talk to the Manager, Regional Support Services or the Regional Director.

The telephone number for your regional office is available from the general switchboard for the Department of Education and Children’s Services on 82261000.

They will work with you and the school and try to solve the problem.

Need more information?

The following telephone numbers and websites can provide support and information about bullying and harassment:

- DECS information for parents:
  [www.decs.sa.gov.au](http://www.decs.sa.gov.au) > Parents and Community > Health and Wellbeing > Bullying and harassment. See also Cyber-safety
- DECS information for students:
- DECS Parent Helpline: 1800 222 696
  Parent Helpline: 1300 364 100
  Youth Healthline: 1300 131 719
- Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
- Youth beyond blue [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)