

# Student Services

Leading adolescent and child psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg has put together six webisodes to give parents practical tips to deal with bullying. Below is a transcript of his practical advice about 'What are the signs your child may be bullied?'. The webisode is available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFKK2awComI>

## What are the signs your child may be bullied?

One of the most common questions parents ask me is, "How do I know if my child is being bullied?"

Children may be afraid that it will only make things worse, that it is wrong to do or whinge, and that they may feel as if it's their fault.

Sadly, research suggests that a significant percentage of young people who are bullied, tell no one.

A common reaction to being bullied is **not** to seek help from others, but rather to withdraw and suffer in silence.

The victims of bullying are more likely to tell their friends about their experience, then followed by mum, then dad, teachers last of all.

And 40 per cent of boys and 25 per cent of girls who are bullied weekly, do not even tell their friends. Even larger proportions do not tell their parents.

Some students are good at hiding their feelings, but there are subtle signs, which all parents should be on the look out for.

Some signs that a child is being bullied may be:

- unexplained cuts, bruises or scratches
- damaged or ripped clothes
- vague headaches or stomach aches
- refusing to go to school
- asking for lost (stolen?) possessions to be replaced
- 'losing' lunch money
- falling out with previously good friends
- being moody and bad tempered
- wanting to avoid leaving the house
- aggression with brothers and sisters
- doing less well at schoolwork
- insomnia
- anxiety and
- being quiet and withdrawn.

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These signs can all be highlighted through a change in behaviour - say an outgoing child becomes withdrawn, an enthusiastic student stops wanting to go to school or a good student's marks start to drop.

These can all be signs that something is wrong.

How do you support your child?

The good news for parents of children who are being bullied is that you aren't powerless.

There are some things that you can do to help your child.

If bullying isn't challenged by people in a position of authority, then guess what? The bully keeps bullying.

Teachers, parents need to take a stand!

If your child is being bullied or harassed, you may feel angry, anxious or sad, however, it's really important that you stay calm and listen carefully to your child.

Praise them for talking to you about what's happened. Find out what happened, who was involved, and where it happened and if anyone else saw it.

Write down what your child says so that you can talk to the school.

If you suspect your child is being bullied, the National Centre Against Bullying offers some really helpful guidelines.

1. Begin by having a conversation about being bullied. But don't make it too intense or confrontational, or you might in fact deter them from talking to you. Remember, you want your child to feel comfortable opening up with you to talk about these things.
2. Try and get the whole story from them, without interrupting. Then, ask what they want to have happen **before** you make any suggestions. Stay calm, show support, and **don't** react straight away. Listen to your child. Try and understand the situation from their point of view.
3. Explain to them that it's normal to feel hurt. It's never okay to be bullied... and it's NOT their fault.
4. Find out what is happening. Ask **what**, **when** and **where** the behaviours occurred, **who** was involved, **how often**, and if anybody else saw it. Find out if any teachers know, and if the school's done something to address the situation.
5. Contact the school. Check the school's bullying policy and make an appointment to speak to your child's teacher or coordinator. Be calm. Make a follow-up appointment in a week or two, to make sure that the situation is being addressed. And take your child with you.
6. **Don't** advise your child to fight back. **Don't** tell them it'll go away - because it probably won't. **Don't** let your child stay away from school - because that won't solve the problem either.
7. And lastly, help your child work out some things to do, like:
  - fogging, which is using neutral statements like 'maybe' in response to bullying statements
  - saying in a loud, firm voice: "I don't like it when you say things like that"
  - or ignoring the bully and just walking away.

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The most important thing to do if you suspect your child is being bullied is to stay calm. Over-reacting and causing a scene at the school won't help anyone.

It's also important to remember to focus on what **outcomes** you want - namely, the bullying to stop.

You are not alone, and the bullying can be stopped.

Talk to your child's teacher or principal in a calm and constructive way, with a focus on finding a solution.

Nobody likes to see bullying occur, and by working together with your school we can find the best possible outcome for your child