



Bullied students

Behaviour support and student management are key aspects of teaching. Teachers and other school professionals are constantly required to respond to challenging, difficult or emotionally 'needy' students on a day-to-day basis. The following strategies can be used as part of general teacher practice or more formally through the establishment of individual learning plans, behaviour support plans, student management plans or whole school management plans.

For guidelines, templates and more information on writing behavioural support plans, created by the Victorian State Government, Department of Education and Training, [click here](#).

<p>School strategy</p> <p>1. Implement and enforce a no-tolerance bullying policy.</p>
<p>Purpose. To prevent bullying by enforcing a no-tolerance policy to social rejection, teasing, bullying, harassment or discrimination.</p>
<p>Action. Ensure the policy includes processes to identify instances of bullying (including listening to students and parents), and a rule that requires bystanders to report bullying and other unacceptable behaviour. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implement a no-bullying message box to encourage students and parents to report bullying if they if they do not wish to approach a staff member. Locate the box near the administration area or library, to enable anonymous reporting of incidents. Students can deposit short, written messages about bullying or other things that worry them. ○ Encourage bystanders to support a bullied student in appropriate ways. It may be unrealistic and potentially dangerous to encourage children to intervene directly. Emphasise safety and give students ideas about how to support a child or adolescent who is being bullied, without endangering themselves. For example, a bystander could say, 'Stop it! You're breaking a school rule. Leave Jack alone! Jack, come and play with us,' or they could ask a teacher to intervene. ○ Provide safe zones. Yard duty teachers can monitor students who feel unsafe in the yard by having clearly designated areas of refuge. Teachers should identify students who present in refuge areas and review their need for support. The welfare team or designated senior staff member should regularly review support for students who are frequent presenters to the school nurse, library, sickbay, quiet areas, other staff or the staffroom. ○ Teach parents and teachers not to be bystanders. Often a parent may know first about a bullying incident though a family conversation at home. Inform parents of the need to contact the school immediately so the school can take responsibility for assisting students who are bullying to change their behaviours. Explain that parents should not approach the child's family. Teachers must also not be bystanders for example, it is not acceptable to tell a bullied student not to worry 'because the bully is leaving in two weeks time'.



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<p>Teacher strategy</p> <p>2. Teach assertiveness.</p>
<p>Purpose. To provide students with the skills to enable them to stand up for themselves and others. Students generally need to be explicitly taught assertive techniques.</p>
<p>Action. Provide role-play scenarios where students act out appropriate responses if they are bullied, harassed or witness bullying. Use role plays and follow-up discussions as opportunities to teach assertive statements and techniques such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Act in an unaffected manner, step or walk away saying ‘Maybe, I’m busy, whatever’ ○ ‘Stop! I don’t like it when you call me that name. Stop doing it!’ ○ The five-finger strategy. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Say ‘Stop.’ 2. Walk away. 3. Say ‘No.’ 4. Loudly say ‘No!’ 5. Tell the teacher. ○ ‘What are you doing? No, you’re not (dispute their statement), you are trying to hurt me. I don’t like it. Please stop.’ ○ ‘Stop it! You’re breaking a school rule. Leave Jack alone! Jack, come and play with us.’ (bystander statement). <p>For further ideas see the Psych4Schools ebooklet, <i>Working with children who are bullied</i>, page 9. http://www.psych4schools.com.au/free-resources/www</p>

<p>Teacher strategy</p> <p>3. Assist students to develop confident thinking.</p>
<p>Purpose. To teach students that self-confidence and strong thinking can help them to cope with unfair situations. Students can learn to change their thinking to reduce the impact of a situation on their emotions.</p> <p>Developing self-confidence can help a bullied student to respond appropriately to teasing or rumours. This can help to reduce the escalation of bullying incidents.</p>
<p>Action. Help the student to reframe their thinking. For example, a student who tends to use catastrophic thinking, such as, ‘Oh no! He called me a loser. Everyone’s going to think I’m stupid and no one will ever play with me again’ is likely to feel sad and lonely.</p> <p>Reframing the thoughts will help the student to cope if called hurtful names. A more appropriate way for the student to think is, ‘So what? He calls everybody a loser’ and ‘I’m not a loser. There are lots of good things about me.’</p>



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4. Talk with a bullied student to help build self-awareness, peer acceptance and resilience.

Purpose. To encourage self-awareness and promote positive coping skills.

Note. This strategy must be handled selectively and sensitively. There is no excuse for bullying, and the school must not tolerate it. The targeted student must not feel they are to blame if bullied. If appropriate the targeted student's parent could be involved for issues such as poor personal hygiene or to assist in reinforcing positive coping strategies and building resilience.

Action. Work with another teacher or school professional, to explain to a bullied student that there may be things they can do to build peer acceptance. Discuss things that detract from greater peer acceptance such as poor hygiene, reacting to name-calling by lashing out, crying, yelling or throwing things, frequent complaining, constant calling out in class, dominating games or discussions, being a poor loser in games by screaming out frustrations or angrily walking off mid way through a game and deliberately kicking the ball over a fence to spoil the game for others.

Talk with the student about empowerment. While schools are making rules and encouraging bystanders to use assertive 'power' to help stop bullying, at times the targets of bullying may be able to change the way they react or respond to bullying, which can help it to stop. Discussion points may include:

- **Being called names** – use self-confident, strong thinking (see 3 above), speak assertively rather than aggressively or passively, play in safe zones if feeling uncomfortable or unsafe, develop a network of supportive friends, learn to cope with a 'personal dig', or a one off nickname or an infrequent tease. These verbal encounters, while unwelcome, can be part of the ebb and flow of daily life. However, if they are repeated then this bullying must be addressed and stopped.
- **Being a complainer** – take responsibility and stop blaming others, learn to 'go-with-the-flow', in games discuss briefly a dispute over a rule or decision but then accept that majority rules, explore faulty thinking and/or challenge negative thinking, join in and help or take responsibility for assisting with the smooth operation of an interest group e.g. chess club, choir or dance, rather than complaining and isolating yourself from others.
- **Impulsive and annoying behavior** – 'Catch yourself' before making or doing an inappropriate sound or action, count backwards from five rather than acting on impulse. For younger students a positive behaviour chart to graph and promote pro social behaviors is a useful starting point. For older students suggest they identify peers who manage their behaviours well, and have them observe and copy these positive peer models. Learn 'stop-think' behavior to reduce speaking or calling out see <http://www.stopthinkdo.com>.
- **Dominating games or discussions** - play by the rules, be a good loser and learn to enjoy participation over 'winning at all costs', take turns, reduce impulsive behavior and practice emotional regulation (e.g. being annoyed or upset rather than angry), broaden talents and skills, co-operate with others, use 'give and take' and social graces to build social acceptance and friends, learn 'stop-think' behavior and peer mediation and conflict resolution. See [NSW Public Schools Peer mediation webpage](#) or [Kidsmatter](#).



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5. Check in regularly with students who may be vulnerable to bullying.

Purpose. To open dialogue that may alert you that a student is being bullied or exposed to acts of hostility or aggression.

Action. In quiet times, before school or break times speak privately with the student about what's happening in their lives at home and at school and how they are going. Keep the conversation casual and encourage them to speak about things they like and dislike about break times, class times and specialist sessions.

For further strategies to assist students who are bullied see the Psych4Schools ebooklet, [Working with children who are bullied.](#)

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