

Eight skills to support children's mental health around bullying involvement

The following skills are designed to support you in developing the confidence and skills to respond to the mental health of children aged 4 to 12 years who have experienced bullying behaviour or who have been engaging in bullying behaviour. Use of these skills is further explored in the course [Practice strategies for childhood bullying](#).



Elevating the child's connections

Feeling connected is an important protective factor against bullying. Practitioners are well placed to explore the child's existing connections within their family, school and community, and consider each with the child in detail. Where connections may be limited, it is important that the practitioner supports the child and family to create networks.



Responding to children's protests

Children may initially deny, minimise or justify their bullying behaviour when asked about it. These protests can be a result of many factors, such as feelings of shame. It is vital that practitioners can look past these protests by beginning their work through validating the child's feelings, while simultaneously not minimising the behaviour.



Exploring the child's experience of bullying

Practitioners can work with children who have experienced bullying to understand their specific experience of the behaviour and how it has most impacted them. Bullying will have different effects on everyone. Therefore, a child's individual experience must be explored.



Defining values and preferences

Allowing space for the child to explore what is important to them can provide them with an opportunity they may have not had before. Generally, children will be able to identify how they want to be seen by others and engage with the world. These values and preferences often don't align with bullying behaviour.



Making meaning of bullying behaviour

Through exploring the meaning behind bullying behaviour, children can move away from feelings of self-blame. In making meaning, children can begin to understand that the messages they are receiving are not about them personally and are more likely a reflection of how the child engaging in bullying is feeling.



Uncovering contrasts

Through exploring a child's values or preferences for interacting with others, practitioners can then begin to gently support a child to uncover contrasts between their bullying behaviour and their values or preferences. This can support children to recognise that their behaviour and values are misaligned in a non-shaming way.



Building a team with the child

Children can be supported to build a team around them that is made up of the most supportive people in their lives. Building a team helps everyone around the child get onto the same page about the child's experience of bullying and how they can provide the best support possible.



Supporting children to show their true colours

Children who engage in bullying behaviour need support to continue to demonstrate their values. Practitioners should recruit support where possible from the child's family, school and community. Once children who engage in bullying behaviour are aware of their values, they can be supported in a number of ways to feel better equipped to respond when bullying behaviour gets in the way.