

Emerging Minds Families

FACT SHEET

Finding out your child is experiencing or engaging in bullying

Definition

Emerging Minds acknowledges that families come in many forms. For the purposes of easy reading, the term 'parent' encompasses the biological, adoptive, foster and kinship carers of a child, as well as individuals who have chosen to take up primary or shared responsibility in raising that child.

As a parent it's natural to want to protect your children. So when you first find out your child is experiencing or engaged in bullying (or you think they could be) it's completely normal to feel some strong emotions – like anger, guilt or worry – and be unsure what to say or do next.

How you initially react is more important than what you say. If your child sees you stressed, upset or outraged about the situation, they're likely to respond in the same way. If they're worried about how you'll respond, they might shut down and not tell you exactly what's been happening.

It's important to take a couple of minutes to ensure you're calm so you can focus on your child's needs and work out how to respond together.



First steps

1. Check your reactions and feelings.
2. Plan the conversation with your child.
3. Take care of yourself.

Check your reactions and feelings

It's completely normal to feel upset for your child, angry about what they've experienced or done, or even guilty for not knowing earlier.

If you were bullied when you were a child, finding out about your child's bullying experience or behaviour might bring up some unpleasant memories and strong feelings for you.

Before you can focus on your child's needs and feelings you need to take a moment to acknowledge your own.

Here's what some parents we spoke to said helped them.

“

I was bullied during school, so I knew how it made me feel and what wasn't done at the time. It wasn't spoken about, it was just 'Oh, toughen up, kids will be kids'. So I was determined, after I got over the guilt, [to do things differently]. I was like, 'Well, what can I do to sort the situation out?'

VANYA, MUM OF TWO

“

I often use the phrase, ‘I need to think about that and I’ll get back to you’. That way, I’ve got time to actually go and think about what I want to say or how I want to react, particularly if something’s quite emotive for myself. It means that I can take some space. It means I’ve still acknowledged, I’ve heard what my child said, but that I am not going to react in the moment and just say something that’s going to set her off or me off or whatever.

JESS, MUM OF ONE

It’s OK to say ‘I just need to think about this for a minute and I’ll be back’. Try going into another room and take 10 slow deep breaths or make yourself a cup of tea.

Once you feel calmer you’ll be able to tune into your child’s feelings and support them.

Plan the conversation

As a parent, it’s part of your role to help your child ‘make meaning’ of their experiences, especially challenging ones, and understand the impact of their behaviour. Otherwise children may come up with their own explanations of why something has happened to them or why they behaved the way they did.

Take a moment to work out what you want to say and get prepared so you can answer any questions your child has about their bullying involvement and help them make sense of it.



Some of the issues you might want to cover in your first conversation about bullying

- What is bullying (and what’s not bullying).
- Bullying is usually about gaining power or showing power over someone else, so it’s worth talking about what that might look like. You may need to help your child see the power imbalance, for example, the child doing the bullying might not be bigger or older but perhaps they have ‘power’ because lots of other children support their behaviour.
- If your child has experienced bullying let them know that it’s not their fault, they don’t have to put up with it and together you’ll make a plan to stop it from continuing.
- If your child has engaged in bullying behaviour let them know that you want to understand why and support them to stop the behaviour.
- If you haven’t already done so, take a look at [Bullying and child mental health](#). This ‘in focus’ article includes videos with advice from children, parents and practitioners.

Take care of yourself

Parenting can be hard work at the best of times. When your child has been harmed (emotionally and/or physically) responding requires more of your time, understanding and emotional energy. You need to look after your own health and wellbeing so that you can support your child.

How you manage and express your emotions and stress affects how your child copes too. It’s important to take care of yourself and reach out to your own support network so you’re able to care for and support your child while you are both dealing with this challenge.

Different self-care strategies are helpful for different people. Think about what works for you: what are the things that help you feel calmer during stressful times?

Some strategies that are commonly recommended

- Get enough sleep.
- Eat well and stay hydrated.
- Stay physically active – even just a 10-minute walk outdoors.
- Spend some time away from your children doing things you enjoy.

- Find ways to relax – like a warm bath, meditation or some deep breaths.
- Strengthen your own support network by reconnecting with friends and family, or going to an event at your child's school.

It's also important at times like this to be able to ask for, and accept, help from others. Think about who supports you or what you're already doing to support yourself that you can build on.

How you manage and express your emotions and stress affects how your child copes too.

You could:

- Meet a friend or make time with a work colleague to talk about what's happening.
- Ask someone to look after your other children for an hour or two so you can have one-on-one time to talk with your child who's involved in bullying.
- [Call a parent helpline](#) to talk through how you're feeling and get advice.



If you're feeling strong emotions like anger or guilt about your child's involvement in bullying, or if you're having difficulties making sense of it yourself, it's a good idea to talk to another adult before you talk with your child. Talking to other parents can be helpful, especially if they've dealt with a childhood bullying issue. Sometimes talking to another adult first, especially when you're feeling upset or angry about a situation, can help you calm down enough to talk to your child.



“

If you feel [overwhelmed] talk to your own support people. So if you've got a friend or a partner, or maybe using a counsellor to talk about some of that stuff, especially if you've got your own experiences of bullying as well ... talking to somebody can help you straighten your head about what you're thinking.

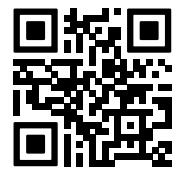
VANYA, MUM OF TWO

Supporting your child through a difficult time helps them make sense of it and can strengthen your bond.

Taking care of yourself will ensure you're better prepared to notice how your child is feeling and coping, so you're best able to support them. Also remember that children notice and learn from modelled behaviour – so watching you take care of yourself and use positive coping strategies will benefit them (and the rest of your family) too.

Immediate support and advice

If you are worried your child might harm themselves, contact a mental health crisis service.



What to do next

If your child has been bullied it's important you seek to understand their experience and what they need from the adults in their life, so check out *Understanding your child's experience of bullying*.

AVAILABLE HERE

Understanding your child's experience of bullying



If your child has engaged in bullying check out *Understanding and addressing your child's bullying behaviour*.

AVAILABLE HERE

Understanding and addressing your child's bullying behaviour

