

Emerging Minds Families

FACT SHEET

Signs of bullying parents should look out for

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.

Children who are experiencing bullying don't always tell an adult.

In most cases it's because they feel afraid or ashamed, or because they don't want to worry their parent. Sometimes it's because they're worried about what the adult might do in response, like confronting the child doing the bullying or contacting their parents.



So it's important to be aware of what's happening in your child's social world and look out for the signs they could be experiencing bullying, engaging in bullying or both.

Common signs of bullying

Some of the common signs a child could be involved in bullying (experiencing and/or engaging in it) include:

- suddenly disliking or refusing to go to school (or to their sport training or another activity they used to enjoy)
- getting upset or anxious before and/or after school
- not wanting to talk about what's going on at school
- changes to their routine that seem strange or aren't explained – e.g. they used to always take the bus but now want you to drive them to school
- staying in their room for too long or not interacting with family
- scratches, bruises or marks on their skin, or other unexplained injuries
- personal belongings are missing or damaged
- friendship changes or breakups
- not wanting to go to social activities, like a birthday party or a school disco
- being online less or seeming 'jumpy' when they get a message or notification on their phone
- being aggressive towards or picking on their sibling
- often saying they have a headache, stomach-ache or 'feel sick'
- changes to eating habits, such as not eating lunch at school, having no appetite or overeating
- sleeping problems, including bad dreams or trouble getting to sleep
- a drop in their school results
- feeling stressed, anxious or low, or thinking (and talking) negatively about themselves
- self-harming and/or thoughts about suicide.

The signs can be hard to spot, as they might be small changes in behaviour or mood. Some are also indicators of other health issues or something else that's worrying your child. It can be helpful to book an appointment with your family doctor/GP who can help to rule out any physical health problems and explore what your child is experiencing.

How to talk about bullying

If you notice any of these signs of bullying, it's important to talk to your child.

It can be hard to know how to start a conversation about bullying. Some tips include:

- Find a time when you're both calm and not rushed, in a place you know your child will feel relaxed. With younger children, you might talk while doing something else together, like colouring or having a snack. Older children and teenagers often open up when you're in the car together and there's no eye contact.
- Asking direct questions often doesn't work – so avoid questions like 'Are you being bullied?' or 'What did you do to that kid?' Instead, be curious and ready to listen.
- Try asking casually about how things are going at school. If you've noticed friendships changing, you could say something like: 'Hey, I haven't heard you mention (friend's name) recently – have they been away from school?'
- Children, especially teenagers, are more likely to be open with you if they don't feel pressured. A casual comment about someone or something that happened could be their way of reaching out. If you show you're interested – but not prying – your child is more likely to keep talking.
- Keep trying. You might have to gently bring up the topic a few times before your child opens up to you.

Have you noticed any changes in your child's behaviour, friendship circles or routines?

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I noticed that it would start the night before: he'd have trouble falling asleep, and then the school refusal, and he wouldn't tell me why. It was just, 'Oh, I hate school. It's boring, I hate it. I'm not going'. And then one day I was at the school and I heard a girl say to him 'You're such a weirdo'. And that was the first time I thought 'Oh, OK'. And then that night I asked him about it and that's when it all came out.

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If you think your child is involved in bullying but they can't or won't talk to you about it, don't push too hard. Remind them they can talk to you about anything and you'll take it seriously, but that if they can't tell you they should talk to somebody – ideally an adult they trust who can help them work out what to do such as a favourite teacher, educator or sports coach, or maybe an aunt or uncle.



What to do next

Emerging Minds Families has developed a series of fact sheets with advice from children, parents, psychologists and school counsellors about what to do next.

If you think your child might be experiencing or engaging in bullying first take a moment to read *Finding out your child is experiencing or engaging in bullying* so you can address your feelings, prepare your response, and focus on your child's needs.

If your child has **experienced bullying**, take a look at the following resources, preferably in order:

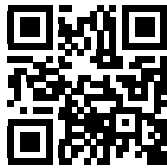
- *Understanding your child's experience of bullying*
- *Making a plan with your child to address bullying*
- *Taking action to stop your child being bullied*
- *Protecting your child from bullying harm*

If your child has **engaged in bullying behaviour**, take a look at:

- *Understanding and addressing your child's bullying behaviour*
- *Helping your child to stop their bullying behaviour.*

AVAILABLE HERE

View all bullying resources on Emerging Minds Families



Immediate support and advice

If you are worried your child might harm themselves, [contact a mental health crisis service.](#)

