

Work with your teen's school

1. **Talk to someone who will support you**, such as a family member, GP or trusted friend. You can speak to a mental health professional for free on the Dolly's Dream's support line – 0488 881 033. For a full list of support services [click here](#)



2. **If your teen wants to report the bullying personally** (and you judge this is safe), help them decide which staff member to tell, rehearse what they want to say, and pick a quiet place and time to talk. Or, if you decide to tell the school yourself, the following steps may help.
3. **Make a time to meet with school staff** and explain politely why you want to talk. Ask to speak somewhere away from students where you won't be interrupted.

Usually, it's best to contact the class teacher, especially if the bullying started recently, is not very severe, happened mostly in this teacher's class and hasn't been reported before.

However, you might decide to contact school leadership, such as a year level coordinator, deputy principal or principal, if the bullying is severe and persistent, if it happened in lots of different places, or has been reported before without success.

4. **Bring to the meeting:**
 - a pen and paper
 - a clear account of what happened, when, where, and who was involved
 - screenshots of any cyber bullying
 - a clear sense of what your teen wants and what positive result you're looking for
 - a list of questions you want to ask

- any points your teen has asked you to make
- any steps you've already taken, eg. reporting cyber bullying to the website
- a copy of the school's anti-bullying policy from their website, if you'd like to refer to it.

You might also bring a support person, like a friend or neighbour, who can sit with you, take notes, or ask for a pause if you're upset. They should not typically get involved in the discussion itself. Ask a calm person who is not personally affected by the bullying.

5. Stay calm and respectful, and work together wherever you can.

- Tell the school what happened. Be clear and honest.
- Check what the teachers know. They might have information you don't.
- Explain the positive outcome you want for your teen.
- Ask what you can do to help.
- Brainstorm solutions together and agree on the next steps.
- Check whether the teacher needs to tell anyone else and how they'll protect your teen's confidentiality.
- Check who students should talk to if they're upset at school, eg. nurse, chaplain.
- Sum up what you've all agreed to do, to check you're on the same page.
- Make a time to speak again.
- Afterwards, write a note for yourself about what was covered in the meeting.

6. Avoid common mistakes.

- Never get aggressive, threatening or personal with school staff.
- Don't get distracted by other issues.
- Don't get stuck arguing about 'was it really bullying?' If you and the teacher disagree on this, try to focus instead on the behaviour itself, how it affected your teen, and how to fix it. If a child is hurt, adults must step in, whether they think it was bullying or not.

7. What if the bullying goes on? We must be realistic: change takes time and teachers can't be everywhere at once. But if you've made a genuine effort to work with the class teacher without success, you might decide to speak (respectfully) with school leadership. You might also check your school's policy on handling complaints.

8. What if I want to go beyond the school? Most bullying gets dealt with at the school. However, there are occasional cases where parents try in good faith to work with the school, but severe and relentless bullying keeps happening. These parents might decide to approach their regional or district office of the education department in their state or territory, the Catholic Education Office in their diocese, or their school board.

Note: in most cases, education offices expect parents to have made a genuine attempt to work with the school first.

In Victoria, the Independent Office of School Dispute Resolution handles some cases when state schools, parents and the department have been unable to find a solution together.

Very occasionally, a case will be investigated by the state Ombudsman (for state schools) or a registration / accreditation body (for non-government schools) if there are big-picture concerns about the overall running of a school under the law. They do not focus on the behaviour of individual students.

9. Who else can help?

- Report cyber bullying to the website where it happened or the eSafety Commissioner.
- If a serious criminal offence was committed, you might seek legal advice (probonocentre.org.au/legal-help/), make a police report, or apply for an intervention order through the Children's Court or Magistrates Court.
- If you think the school treated your family unfairly because of a 'protected characteristic' such as disability or religion, the Human Rights / Equal Opportunity Commission in your state or territory may be able to provide advice or help you work with the school.