

# Talking to teens who've bullied someone

Many teens are involved in bullying at some point. But with the right guidance from parents, they can stop this harmful behaviour.

## 1. Accept what happened

- Your teen has bullied someone. Don't ignore it, downplay it or make excuses.

## 2. Stay calm

- If you're feeling overwhelmed, take a break to collect your thoughts.
- Don't get aggressive, humiliate your teen or refuse to talk to them. These behaviours mimic the bullying and can reinforce it.

## 3. Get the full story

- Encourage your teen to tell you everything that happened. What led up to them choosing to bully someone?
- Ask simple questions like "what happened next?" and "what did you do then?".
- Rather than saying "why did you do that?", which can be hard for teens to answer, try asking "how did you come to do that?" or "what was going on for you there?".

## 4. Stop the bullying:

- Make clear that the bullying must stop at once and you'll be checking to see it does.
- Take down any cyber bullying material at once from every account or platform your teen has used. (They may have used several.)
- Think about whether your teen needs better supervision in person or online.

## 5. Build empathy

- Express your deep concern for the person who was bullied.
- Urge your teen to put into words how that person might be feeling now.
- Ask your teen how they would feel if someone bullied them or somebody they love.
- Remind them of any time in the past when they were teased or left out of things.

## 6. Work with the school

- Many schools use restorative approaches rather than punishment, so students who have bullied others must focus on repairing the damage they've done.
- Ask the school what you can do to support your teen to change their behaviour.

## 7. Focus on changing the behaviour

- Don't say "you're a bully!" – this might make your teen defensive, or it might make them think that being a bully is their role in life.
- Make clear to your teen that you love them, but their actions have hurt people and that they must take responsibility for that.
- Encourage them to think about what they could do to make life better for the person who was bullied.
- Talk to the school about what the bullied student would like your teen to do next.
- Make a plan with your teen for the next steps they will take, eg. "next time I see Owen, I will apologise / say something friendly / keep my distance so he doesn't feel scared / urge my friends to leave him alone" etc.

## 8. Understand what led up to your teen's bullying

- Is bullying common in your teen's friendship group?
- Has your teen been bullied too?
- Were they trying to impress people?
- Have they been struggling in class or feeling unwelcome at school?
- Have they not had enough supervision?
- Did they really not understand how upsetting their behaviour was?

## 9. Get help for your teen if they need it

- For parenting support, contact Parentline in your state or territory, or ReachOut parent support service.
- If your teen is struggling in class, speak with the teacher or school wellbeing team about organising extra support.

- If your teen has witnessed violent, threatening or degrading behaviour in the home, contact 1800 RESPECT: 1800 737 732 [1800respect.org.au/](http://1800respect.org.au/)
- If your teen is struggling with social skills, ask your GP or school wellbeing staff to refer you to a professional who can support your teen to build skills in dealing with conflict, saying no to peer pressure, coping with strong feelings and making friends.
- If you think your teen's friendship group is part of the problem, look for other places they could make friends, eg. a sports team, mentoring program or a part-time job.
- Talk to someone who will support you, such as a parent, GP or mentor. You can speak to a mental health professional for free on the Dolly's Dream support line – 0488 881 033. For a full list of support services [click here](#)



## 10. Get smart about tech

- Learn more about the apps, games and sites your teen uses. How do they work? How do people behave there? What age groups are they aimed at? See the eSafety Guide: [esafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide](http://esafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide)

## 11. Model positive behaviour

- Remind your teen of the values your family stands for. These might include taking responsibility for our own actions, treating people with respect even if we don't like them, and thinking about how our actions affect others.
- When your teen does things that have a positive impact on other people, point it out. Help them see how they have the power to make life better for others.
- Set an example of respectful and caring behaviour yourself, including in your own social media posts and gaming.