



## Is It Bullying?

### A parent's guide to understanding bullying and other social behaviours in a school environment.

As parents, any level of hurt we see our own children experience can be difficult. There is nothing harder than hearing your child say "... *doesn't want to be my friend anymore*" or "... *hit me today*". Hearing these things from your child can be quite emotive and we often want justice for the hurt our child is feeling. Parents can also feel quite helpless when you feel your child is being bullied. You are relying on the school to listen to you and your child, and trusting that they will act in the best interests of your child.

Unfortunately, these days the term 'bullying' has become a generic term for any type of negative behaviour. Negative behaviours are a concern and need attention, but come in many forms and it is important to separate them from true bullying. It is not easy for kids to understand the difference between a deliberate act and an accidental one, which is why it is vital that parents understand what is and what **is not** bullying.

Below are some examples of behaviours that, while upsetting and hurtful, are **not** bullying:

- Two friends have an argument. One of the children says "I don't want to be your friend anymore" or "I'm not playing with you". While upsetting, this is an example of children trying to negotiate big feelings and social dynamics.
- One child throws a handful of leaves/sand/bark at another child. While unpleasant, this could have been a misunderstood joke, attention seeking or an expression of frustration.
- Directed name calling i.e. "You're fat/ugly/lazy..." This is mean and hurtful, but unless repeated is not bullying. This can be an expression of how that child is feeling, an attempt to communicate some other emotion or attention seeking.

When trying to determine if what your child is telling you is bullying or not, it can be helpful to think in these terms:

#### Is it Rude/Unkind?

If something is rude, it is usually spontaneous, unplanned, inconsiderate, thoughtless or poor manners – but not meant to actually hurt someone. Rude or unkind behaviours are isolated or once off occurrences.

#### Is it Mean?

The difference between rudeness and meanness is intent. Mean behaviour aims to hurt or depreciate someone but is an isolated incident or a once off. This can be a result of a misunderstanding or miscommunication and is usually able to be resolved restoratively.

#### Is it Bullying?

Experts agree that bullying entails three key elements: an intent to harm, a power imbalance, and repeated acts or threats of aggressive behaviour. There is often no sense of regret or remorse from the bully and is one sided behaviour towards a target. There are various types of bullying including physical, verbal and cyber.

The national definition of bullying for Australian schools says: "Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons. Bullying can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying."

<https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/WhatsBullying/DefinitionOfBullying>

In primary school we are working with young people who are learning, developing awareness of social and behavioural norms and don't yet have all the tools to deal with every situation. We have a responsibility to teach them skills and strategies to negotiate a range of social situations and develop appropriate skills to deal with these situations,

including resilience and protective behaviours. This is done in class through a range of programs and is supported in the yard by teachers and students using the grievance procedure to resolve issues. However, it is never ok for children to feel unsafe or victimised at school, and in these circumstances leadership will be notified so appropriate intervention can occur.

Unfortunately, not every incident is clear cut. That is why as a school we do our utmost to investigate incidents thoroughly, get both sides of the story and respond accordingly. Responses may vary but can include anything from a restorative conversation with all parties, to loss of play/privileges, to suspension. When consequences are enacted we need to make sure

we have acted on accurate information. No parent wants their child to be bullied, harassed or made to feel unsafe. Likewise, no parent wants their child to be given consequences that are based merely on suspicion or accusations.

There can at times be a perception that issues and incidents are not dealt with by the school. Firstly, we must determine whether it is true bullying or another type of negative behaviour. Secondly, we must fully investigate each incident on its merits. Finally, we must decide on the appropriate outcome and intervention for each individual incident. We also must maintain a professional level of privacy, and confidentiality must be considered and therefore makes details of specific incidents inappropriate to share with others.

## UNDERSTANDING LEVELS OF BEHAVIOUR

The table below provides a quick reference to help explain varying degrees of negative behaviour. An understanding of these terms may be useful in talking to your child about an incident that has occurred and whether or not it is bullying.

	<b>RUDE</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>BULLYING</b>
How often	Occasional / Once Off	Once or twice	Repeated / Ongoing
Intent	Spontaneous, unintentional	Intentional	Planned, unprovoked and purposefully done
Reason	Based in thoughtlessness, can be inconsiderate or poor manners	Based in anger, can be impulsive or cruel, can be a result of misunderstandings or miscommunication	The bully is trying to gain control over the target. The bully is intentionally trying to upset, hurt or create a power imbalance.
Impact	Can cause hurt feelings	Can hurt others deeply	One sided towards a target
Resolution	Person who was rude accepts responsibility. An effort is made to apologise and rebuild or repair the damaged relationship.	Person who was mean often regrets the behaviour. An effort is made to apologise, recognise the impact on the other person, rebuild the relationship and not repeat the behaviour.	The bully often does not regret the behaviour or tries to justify and rationalise the behaviour. The behaviour doesn't stop despite the bully being aware of the impact of their behaviour.

### A word on Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is an increasingly complex issue for parents and educators alike.

Ultimately, Cyberbullying that occurs outside of school hours, on social media and gaming platforms, and on personal devices is the responsibility of the parent or caregiver. Parents need to educate themselves on the risks and capabilities of different devices/platforms and set rules and guidelines for their own child. Parents can support their child to have strong security settings, block people or inappropriate content, and report serious offences to the police.

If an incident of cyberbullying occurs at school on school devices, it will be investigated and dealt with accordingly. Also, if an incident of cyberbullying occurs outside **and** is impacting on your child while at school (ongoing teasing, harassment, not feeling safe to come to school), this will also be dealt with according to school policy, and after investigation could result in school based consequences being implemented.