

Friendships and confidence: overcoming teen bullying



Bullying is a scary reality of life, and it can be especially challenging during the teen years. It takes various forms, such as verbal insults, spreading of rumours, exclusion from social groups, online bullying through online platforms, and even physical intimidation.

As a parent, it's crucial you address bullying promptly and provide the necessary support for your teen. Here are some tips to have that important conversation and navigate the steps ahead.

First, it's important to know the signs that might indicate that your child is being bullied online. Watch out for the following behaviours, which might be a sign they're struggling:

- Emotional changes: Irritability, sadness, anxiety, mood swings, low self-esteem.
- Physical complaints: Unexplained injuries, headaches, stomach aches.
- Changes in social behaviour: Avoiding social situations, loss of friendships, isolation.
- Academic decline: Decreased grades, loss of interest, difficulty concentrating.
- Unexplained items or money loss: Missing belongings, requests for money.
- Changes in sleep and eating patterns: Insomnia, excessive sleepiness, loss of appetite or comfort eating.
- Avoidance of specific places or activities.
- Digital behaviour changes: Secretive online activities, excessive time online, withdrawal from social media.

How to start a conversation

When approaching the topic of bullying with your teen, create a safe and open environment for discussion. Choose a time when both of you are relaxed and find a comfortable space where they feel at ease.

Start the conversation by expressing your concern and asking gentle, open-ended questions.

Avoid putting pressure on them to share if they're not ready but let them know you're there to listen and support them.

Encourage them to share their experiences and emotions and assure them that their feelings are valid.

Stay calm, empathetic, and non-judgmental throughout the conversation.

How to listen to your teen's concerns

If your teen tells you they are being bullied online, stay calm and actively listen, giving them the opportunity to share their story at their own pace. Show empathy by acknowledging the difficulty they've faced and reassure them that they don't deserve to be treated that way.

Avoid being judgmental or dismissive and instead focus on understanding their desired outcome. Promise to work together to find a solution, reminding them that many people have overcome bullying and found happiness in their lives.

Taking steps against online bullying

To effectively address online bullying, it's crucial to help your teen in documenting and reporting incidents. Encourage them to keep a record of bullying instances, including saving screenshots or capturing other forms of evidence.

Teach them how to report the bullying to the respective social media platform or website where it's taking place. If the issue persists or escalates, advise them to reach out to the appropriate authorities, such as the eSafety Commissioner or local police, for further assistance.

By keeping a record and reporting incidents, your teen can take proactive steps towards addressing online bullying and ensuring their online safety.

Steps to take

If your teen confides in you about being bullied online, it's vital to respond calmly and acknowledge their need for support.

Reacting with anger, seeking retaliation, or restricting their access to the online world may not be helpful. Instead, consider the following actions:

- Express gratitude and empathy for your teen's openness, recognising the courage it takes to speak up.
- Create a conducive environment for open conversation and active listening. Find a suitable setting that aligns with your child's preferences, whether it's engaging in a walk or playtime or having uninterrupted discussions.
- Involve your child in the decision making process and openly discuss the next steps with them. Where appropriate, let them share their thoughts on how to proceed and respect their choices.
- Collect evidence of the bullying incidents. While the temptation to remove them immediately may be strong, preserving evidence ensures that the platform can respond appropriately.

- Utilise blocking features to prevent your teen from encountering hurtful content. Blocking the person or group responsible offers immediate relief and protection.
- Report the bullying incidents to the relevant platform. In Australia, laws govern online bullying material, and familiarising yourself with the reporting process outlined by the eSafety Commissioner will enable you to take appropriate action on different apps.

Addressing your teen's bullying behaviour: prevention and consequences

No one wants to think of their own child as a bully, but the reality is that it does happen.

Preventing bullying is always preferable, and this starts with cultivating empathy in your child. Encourage them to consider how they would feel if someone consistently treated them unkindly, fostering an understanding of the emotional impact.

Emphasise that there are real consequences for engaging in bullying behaviour, ranging from being banned from platforms to legal ramifications.

If, despite this, you do find out that your child has been bullying others, the following things can help turn the situation around:

- Emphasise that it's the behaviour you don't like – not them as people. We can all learn from mistakes and make different behavioural choices.
- Set an expectation that they will own their behaviour – and work to make it better. Apologising to the people impacted is essential, and there are different ways that this can be done. Follow up to make sure this has happened, holding your child accountable might be labelled by them as 'nagging', but it is essential to not just let it slide, as this is setting up an expectation.
- If you aren't sure how to encourage this apology, talk to your child's school – they will have wellbeing support in place and can offer some suggestions. They will also be able to work to support friendship and peer groups in the school context.

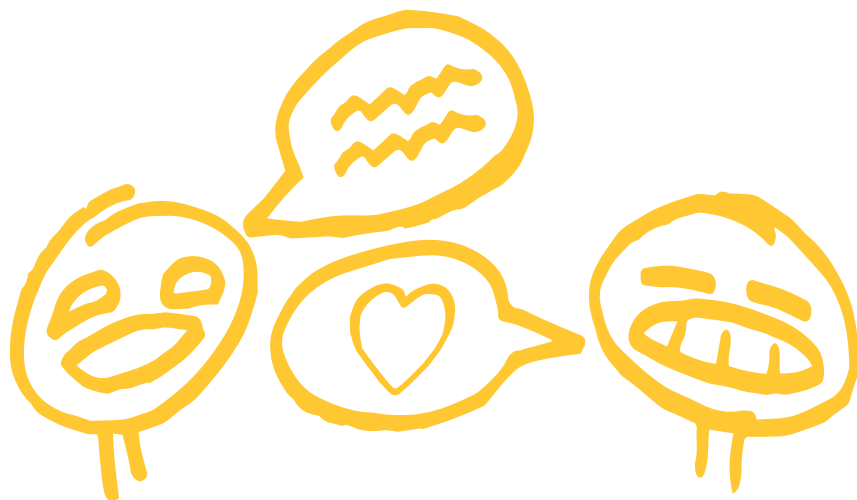
- If you haven't already, work with your child to create a plan of consequences if expected behaviours are not being met. Consequences should be logical, and manageable – and you must follow through. Another part of this plan can be suggestions on what to do instead, if they find themselves in a situation where they are thinking about repeating the bullying actions.

Keep up the life balance:

- Support your teen's well-being by promoting healthy habits like regular sleep, exercise, and balanced eating. Help them discover activities that bring them joy and relaxation. Explore mindfulness and meditation programs or apps suitable for their age.
- Recognise the role of technology in their lives and have open discussions about managing its use. Establish family rules, encourage positive online spaces, and teach them how to handle negative experiences online.
- If serious online bullying persists, guide your teen on reporting it to the relevant website or platform. If necessary, inform them about reaching out to appropriate authorities for further support.
- By following these steps, you can provide the necessary support and guidance to help your teen navigate and overcome bullying, fostering their wellbeing and resilience.

Key takeaways:

1. Look out for signs of online bullying: Emotional changes, physical complaints, changes in social behaviour, academic decline, unexplained items or money loss, changes in sleep and eating patterns, avoidance of specific places or activities, and digital behaviour changes.
2. Create a safe environment for conversation: Find a comfortable space, express concern, ask open-ended questions, and be supportive without pressuring them to share.
3. Listen actively and show empathy: Stay calm, listen without judgment, acknowledge their difficulties, and reassure them that they don't deserve to be treated that way.
4. Take organized steps against online bullying: Help your teen document incidents, save evidence, and teach them how to report bullying to social media platforms or websites. If necessary, involve appropriate authorities.
5. Support life balance: Promote healthy habits, encourage activities that bring joy and relaxation, manage technology use, and guide your teen on handling negative online experiences.



Telstra tech talk

Secure storage and locking shop.

Many mobiles offer built-in secure storage for sensitive files. Combine this with trusted, powerful, and free security controls and your teens will have better control over content they would rather keep private.

1. *Secure storage.* Many phones offer built-in secure storage that can keep files in isolated areas that require additional checks like passwords to access. Knowing the location of your sensitive information is a crucial step to maintaining privacy and security. Sensitive content should not be stored on social media, lest those accounts be compromised.
2. *Password managers help.* These set, store, and recall passwords so you don't have to. Free managers are built into most phones including iPhone, Samsung, and Pixel, along with web browsers, and are widely trusted by security experts. Paid options allow for family password management.
3. *Every account needs a new password.* Reusing passwords is very dangerous, so ensure your teens use their managers to set new combinations whenever they register new accounts. A passphrase, a combination of three or four words in a unique sentence, is a good way to set passwords you need to manually recall. There's no need for random letters and numbers – just type a regular sentence with spaces and capitals in the usual spots.
4. *Multi-factor authentication is a deadbolt for accounts.* It's a complex name for a simple process that will send almost all hackers packing. It validates by way of a code or phone notification that your child is the person trying to log in, and not a hacker with their stolen password. Set it up for social media and all other important accounts.
5. *OPSEC is not just for spies.* Operational security is a big word for a simple concept; outsmart your adversary by cleaning up clues. Asking your teen to not post photos and videos of themselves or to use their real names may fall flat, but there is still lots to be done to help. While few scammers will spend time getting to know their victims in order to hack them, personal animosity is too often the fuel someone needs to spend the time attempting to break into a victim's account. Be sure that your teens' passwords and password recovery questions are unique and would not be guessable by anyone. Together, with multifactor authentication also in play, accounts will be that much harder to hack even for those willing to play a long game.

