



Bullying

Books are covered, lunch boxes are ready and nerves are jittering. It's back to school time! While most children, and parents, feel a healthy mix of excitement and nerves at the prospect of returning to the school environment, some may not. Increasingly more children are becoming reluctant and hesitant to return to school because of their experiences of bullying.

Many parents assume that bullying is a normal rite of passage for children and that it is for the child to handle themselves. However, an increasing trend I have noticed with the children I deal with, is that bullying appears more pervasive and damaging and now more than ever, more difficult to manage without support.

It is important for parents to be aware of what their children are experiencing – it not only gives the parent a clearer understanding of the different factors facing children today, but also allows the parents to be able to support and guide their child who may be dealing with bullying.

Bullying involves one or more people singling out and deliberately, repeatedly hurting or harming someone physically or mentally. Traditionally people are familiar with physical or verbal bullying, but now, children are dealing with social and cyber bullying. With the increased use of technology, text, email, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc are the new 'playgrounds' for bullying to occur. Some examples range from being excluded from group chats, negative comments on photos, sharing private messages or photos with others, sending inappropriate images or hacking into others' accounts. This bullying can occur anytime, anywhere and anonymously – no longer can your child seek refuge at home once the school day has finished.

Most schools have anti-bullying policies and often run class based activities around this topic – but it is vital parents are involved too.

5 signs to look out if you are concerned that your child may be experiencing bullying:

- Changes in their moods: seems sad, angry, anxious or depressed; more sick or tired than usual
- Changes in their social life: avoiding certain friends or social activities that they used to enjoy
- Unexplained injuries and/or damaged or lost clothes/books/personal belongings
- Losing interest in school work and a drop in their performance
- An increase in the amount of time they are spending alone



In order for a child to be bullied, there needs to be someone that doing the bullying. While we all want to assume the best of our children, it would be unfair to assume that your child is not capable of bullying others. Often, these roles get reversed, depending on the situation the child finds themselves in. Children that are bullying others require as much support from parents in order to change their behaviour.

5 signs that your child may be bullying others:

- Often gets into physical and verbal fights with others
- Struggles to accept responsibility for their actions
- Has difficulty understanding and expressing empathy for others
- Has friends who bully others
- Needs to win or be best at everything

5 ways in which parents can help:

- Do not freak out –be approachable and rational. If your child fears your reaction, they may be reluctant to tell you
- Constantly encourage open communication – create space and time where you talk daily
- Actively talk about and model more functional social skills that can help your child learn how to react in difficult situations
- Look out for and report bullying – even if your child is doing the bullying. Be aware of who your child spends time with, where they go and how they engage with social media
- Familiarise yourself with school policies and ensure that your child adheres to school rules.

If you are concerned about your child, I encourage you to raise those concerns with your child as well as the school. Often it may be useful to include parents of any other children involved, with all parties behaving in a respectful and mature manner. It is a valuable opportunity for parents to role model how to deal with conflict in a positive and constructive way. Professional support, such as counselling with a social worker or psychologist, may also be really valuable in supporting your child's emotional well-being.