

Signs Of Bullying

It can come as a shock to parents and teachers to discover that their child or student is being bullied. They may ask themselves questions such as:

- How long has the bullying been going on?
- Should I have realised something was wrong?
- Were there signs that I should have picked up on?

It is difficult to tackle bullying if we are unaware that it is going on. However, here are certain signs to look out for that may indicate there is a problem. If you notice any of these signs, it may be a good idea to have a private word with your student.

There may be a problem with bullying if you notice that a student:

- Refuses to go to school
- Is unhappy when going to school
- Complains frequently about headaches or abdominal pains
- Is nervous and irritable
- Complains of sleeplessness, nightmares, waking early and unable to go back to sleep, waking up more tired than when they went to bed
- Plays truant
- Has poor or no self-confidence
- Has aggressive outbursts or temper tantrums
- Is constantly worried and anxious
- Avoids team games
- Is frequently the target of ridicule
- Has few or no friends
- Is extremely nervous when answering in class
- Does not mix well with other children



- Is unwilling to go out into the playground at break times
- Poor concentration, can't concentrate on anything for long
- Has unexplained torn or stained clothing
- Has unexplained cuts and bruises
- Lacks academic achievement — a noticeable drop in standard of work and grades
- Is overly sad or depressed
- Has a strong tendency to be alone — at home they prefer to stay in their bedroom and at school they are frequently alone in the playground, at lunch or in class
- Starts to take an unusual and longer route to school for no obvious reason
- Is often hungry after school even though he/she was given adequate lunch money or a packed lunch

This list is not exhaustive as there may be other signs that only a parent or someone close to an individual recognises. Also, there may be other reasons for the above behaviour which need to be investigated and ruled out.

The Bystander

In all cases of bullying, there are those who see what is occurring but who stand by and either watch or turn away and do nothing. These people are bystanders.

Explain to the group that if someone encourages a bully, either by cheering him on or laughing as the bully taunts, ridicules or uses physical violence against the target, they are actually providing a supportive environment for the bully. In other words, that person is partly responsible for the bullying. If the situation became serious, they could be excluded from school or more serious action could be taken against them. It is therefore very important that they think carefully about their actions if they are supporting a bully.

Even if a bystander does not support the bully, by turning away and doing nothing, they are allowing the bullying to continue which causes more distress to the person being bullied.

Why would someone support the bullying behaviour? There could be a number of reasons including:

- They view the bully as a positive influence because he/she is strong/popular/aggressive
- They receive protection from the bully for supporting him/her
- They actually regard bullying as acceptable
- They receive an elevated status among their peers due to their friendship with the bully

What of those who witness the bullying but turn away without doing anything to prevent it? The reasons for behaving this way include:

- They fear retaliation and may become a target of the bully if they intervene
- They may get physically hurt if they waded in to stop the bullying
- They fear making the situation worse for the target
- They don't know what to do, who to talk to, where to go for help
- They feel it is not their problem and they would rather have nothing to do with it

Have you ever witnessed someone being bullied? Perhaps a friend is being bullied, or maybe it is someone you don't know very well. Maybe the bully is a friend of yours and you don't want to get them into trouble. What can you do to stop the bullying?