

# Bullying

Everyone seems to be talking about bullying these days, and not just at school. Parents, organizations, celebrities, and even politicians all have something to say. But have you ever stopped to think: what exactly is bullying? And why should all of us care about bullying?

Bullying is any repeated behaviour meant to hurt someone else. People who bully may try to make it seem less harmful and say things like, ‘We were only kidding!’ or ‘It’s just a joke!’ But bullying is always serious and it is never acceptable. No one deserves to be bullied for any reason.

Bullying can happen in different ways:

Bullying can be **verbal** (using words to hurt) such as:

- Taunting, teasing, or making fun of another person
- Spreading rumours or lies meant to hurt someone’s reputation
- Making fun of another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity
- Comments that are racist or discriminate against a religion, culture, language, or ability

Bullying can be **physical** (using contact to hurt) such as:

- Hitting, kicking, or pushing someone
- Fighting
- Touching someone’s stuff to bother them

Bullying can target **social** relationships (influencing others’ opinions to hurt someone) such as:

- Excluding someone from a group
- Spreading gossip, rumours, or lies to damage friendships or relationships
- Humiliating someone

Technology has added new ways to bully. Bullying someone online or by phone is also called ‘**cyberbullying**.’ It might include:

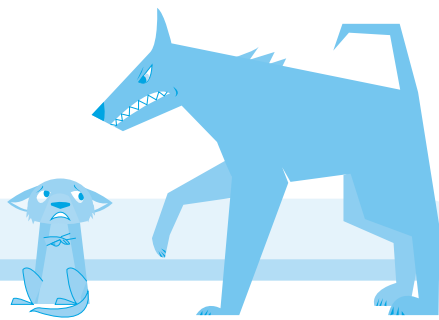
- Posting a tweet or Facebook status meant to hurt or humiliate someone
- Posting or sharing a photo or video meant to hurt or humiliate someone
- Messaging someone directly to tease them, make fun of them, hurt them, or make them feel ashamed
- Sending threatening text messages to someone



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## How can bullying affect someone?

While most young people can deal with one mean text or one episode of name-calling, bullying happens repeatedly. It can feel like it will never end, and young people can feel like they're constantly in fear of what might happen next. Bullying makes people feel like they aren't safe and feel like they aren't included or valued.



### **My friend told me not tell anyone that they're being bullied**

A lot of people don't want others to know that they are being bullied, but talking about bullying is a good way to deal with the situation. If a friend is having a hard time talking about their experiences in person, they might feel more comfortable talking on the phone or online (there's a list at the end of this info sheet). Bullying can have a big impact on how people feel about themselves, and bringing in someone like a parent or school counsellor can really help.

It's important to speak up if a friend is in trouble. Talk to a parent or someone at school. Your friend may be angry, but their safety is also important.

Young people who are bullied may feel sad, anxious or worried, lonely, embarrassed, or ashamed of themselves. Many experience physical problems like headaches, stomach aches, or sleep problems. They may avoid things that they used to enjoy, avoid going out or meeting new people, or avoid going to school. Some young people don't do as well in their school work if they're being bullied.

In some situations, bullying can add to a mental illness like depression or an anxiety disorder. Young people who are bullied are more likely to experience a mental illness later in life. While there is a small connection between bullying and suicide (ending your life on purpose) and a connection between bullying and thoughts of suicide, most people who are bullied don't end their life. But everyone still needs to take any talk of suicide seriously.

How bullying affects young people depends on a lot of different things. It can depend on the bullying itself, like how long it's been going on, or what exactly has been happening. It can depend on how others react and what kind of support others give.

The thing about people is that we're all unique. One difficult situation on its own usually doesn't lead to a mental illness, thoughts of suicide, or suicide. But when you start to add other pieces, some people start to experience problems. Add in personality, how a person reacts to problems, and other difficult situations that a person has already experienced. The things that take away from a person's well-being can become stronger than the things that protect their well-being. It's why two people can have very different reactions to the same thing.

## What if I'm being bullied?

### In the moment

It can be really hard to deal with bullies when they're upsetting you. Exactly what you do depends on the situation. Here are some ideas:

- Just walk away. Instead of responding or reacting to bullying, just ignore them and leave.
- Avoid physical violence. Fighting back can just get you into trouble.
- Act confident. If someone bullies you, act like you're calm and in control (even if you have to fake it).
- Find a healthy way to deal with anger and fear. This could mean talking with friends or someone you trust, or writing in a journal.
- Talk it over with someone you trust. Bullying is tough, but you don't have to deal with it on your own.
- Bullying can damage your self-esteem. Remember to keep people and activities in your life that make you feel good about yourself.

### Next steps and staying safe

- Get support from parents, school counsellors or other adults you trust. They can help you figure out what to do next. It's particularly important to report bullying if you're being physically threatened or feel like you're in danger. You can report bullying at school anonymously at [www.reportbullyingbc.ca](http://www.reportbullyingbc.ca).
- Try calling a phone line—there are a few options listed at the end of this info sheet. They can help you take action, and they can also help you deal with the difficult thoughts and feelings that bullying may bring up.
- Keep yourself safe. Avoid people who are causing harm, or block people on your social media accounts. If you're being physically bullied, it may be safer to avoid being alone. You can find a Bullying Safety Planner to help you find ways to stay safe at [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca).
- If you are being bullied online or by phone, take screenshots or save the texts.

**Call 911 if you are in physical danger or fear that someone will harm you**

## What if I see others being bullied?

Some people don't do anything when they see another person in trouble. They may even get caught up and start to encourage the bully, though they wouldn't think of acting that way on their own. When you see someone being bullied, you may think that it doesn't involve you or worry that you may get hurt if you don't go along with the group. But doing nothing is doing something. It makes bullying seem okay.

All of this applies online, too. Bullying someone online is just as hurtful as bullying someone in person.

If you see bullying, take a stand:

- Speak up when you see bullying
- Talk with someone who is being bullied to see if they need help
- Refuse to join in online—don't share, like, or repost something that was intended to hurt another person, and speak up in comments or posts
- Report bullying to a teacher, school staff member, parent, or caregiver
- Seek support for yourself

If you aren't sure what to do, try calling a help line listed at the end of this info sheet.



Read more about how you can help prevent bullying—search for “bullying” at [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)

## Where can I go for help?

If you or a friend is being bullied, here are good places to look for help:

### ERASE Bullying

Visit [www.erasebullying.ca](http://www.erasebullying.ca) to learn more about bullying and how to deal with bully. Parents can find tips for working with schools. You'll find BC resources for young people and parents, and you can learn more about the anonymous reporting tool.

### Youth in BC

Visit [www.youthinbc.com](http://www.youthinbc.com) to chat online with a volunteer (every day from 12:00 pm to 1:00 am). You can also talk with someone at any time at 1-866-661-3311 or 604-872-3311 (in the Lower Mainland). You'll find information on bullying and BC resources on their website.

### Youth Against Violence

Call 1-800-680-4264 at any time to talk with a support worker. This phone line is for young people and any adult who is concerned about a young person. They can help if you're concerned about a young person's safety and they can connect you to the police anonymously, if needed. To learn more, visit [www.youthagainstviolenceline.com](http://www.youthagainstviolenceline.com).

### Kids Help Phone

Call 1-800-668-6868 to talk with a counsellor at any time. It's free, confidential, and anonymous. You can also visit [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca) to talk with someone online through a web form or live chat or find more information. Kids Help Phone is for people up to the age of 20.

If you want to learn more about preventing bullying, check out these resources:

### Healthy Schools BC

This resource lists different programs or services that support healthy schools. You'll find lots of resources for bullying and many other issues that affect your life at school, like relationships and school connectedness. You can learn more at [www.healthyschoolsbc.ca](http://www.healthyschoolsbc.ca).

### Pink Shirt Day

If you want to see changes at your school, ask if your school can take part in Pink Shirt Day. On Pink Shirt Day, people wear a pink shirt to raise awareness of bullying and pledge to take a stand against bullying. You can learn more at [www.pinkshirtday.ca](http://www.pinkshirtday.ca).



**heretohelp**

Mental health and substance use  
information you can trust

### BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information

HeretoHelp is a project of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. The BC Partners are a group of nonprofit agencies working together to help individuals and families manage mental health and substance use problems, with the help of good quality information. We represent AnxietyBC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, Centre for Addictions Research of BC, FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health, Jessie's Legacy Program at Family Services of the North Shore, and Mood Disorders Association of BC. The BC Partners are funded by BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority.