



# SUPPORT GROUP METHOD

## PRACTICE GUIDANCE





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This practice guidance is an extension of the Bullying Prevention module: *Effective Interventions and Support*.

It will provide you, as an educator with practical strategies to help form stronger and positive relationships in your school community and successfully undertake the Support Group Method of intervention.

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### How to use this practice guidance:

-  Conversation starters
-  Suggested actions
-  Actions to avoid
-  Note-worthy point

### There are two things that can help children and young people feel confident when reporting bullying:

1. Positive relationships with adults and peers at school – refer to the CO-LATE model practice guidance.
2. Helping children and young people to help each other – using the Support Group Method.


### Support Group Method

The Support Group Method aims to change behaviours by

- raising awareness of the impact bullying is having
- building empathy for the person affected.

The method uses social dynamics to increase supportive actions by bystanders and the likelihood of positive behaviours for all children or young people involved.

The Support Group method works best when

- there is a desire or need to maintain relationships
- the problem or issue is observed to be mild/moderate but ongoing
- educators can identify peers who are supporters of the child or young person experiencing the bullying.
-  It shouldn't be used for severe or extreme bullying situations.

## 5 steps in support group method

1. Staff (who acts as facilitator) has a conversation with the student impacted.
2. Ask a select group of students to help.
3. Hold a support group meeting.
4. Monitor signs of change.
5. Support group review meeting.

### Conversation with the student impacted

It is important for the facilitator to hear and understand how the bullying has affected the child or young person on the receiving end.

Some of the things the facilitator could talk about:

- “How does what happened make you feel?”
- “Has it changed their behaviour? In what ways?”
- “Who is involved, including bystanders or witnesses?”
- “Who are the friends or peers who can support them?”

The goal here is **not** to get details about incidents but understand the impact.

- “I hear you have been having a hard time at school. How are you feeling about being at school?”
- “I’ve heard you are experiencing bullying. Tell me about what’s happening and how you are feeling.”
- “Can you describe what you saw?”

### Ask a select group of students to help

Approach members of the impacted person’s peer group to help in the situation. This might include those directly involved or bystanders.

Some things to think about:

- ✓ Approach the students individually.
- ✓ Keep the details of the meeting brief and the details confidential.
- ✗ Refrain from sharing who else will be at the meeting.
- ✗ Avoid gathering details of the situation.

### Hold a support group meeting

Gather the members of the support group together to discuss the situation.

- ! The staff member acts as a facilitator and impacted person does **not** attend this meeting.

Some things to think about:

- ✓ Move quickly to solutions.
- ✓ Encourage others to generate ideas to develop supporting actions.
- ✓ Encourage students to develop a shared plan. This helps to create ownership and increase student empathy.
- ✓ Redirect negative attitudes or comments
- ✗ Don’t ask for personal accounts of the incidents.
- “What actions have you seen that helps make others feel like they belong or safe?”
- “What would you like to happen if you were in X’s shoes?”

### Monitor signs of change

Keep a record of the shared plan and discuss with the impacted student. Keep an eye out for these agreed actions to ensure the plan is being followed.

- ✓ Monitoring behaviour changes increases student accountability for their agreed actions.
- ✓ Share the recorded plan and student actions to staff so they can watch for positive behaviours and reinforce actions. For example, staff on duty or teachers taking additional lessons.
- ! Children and young people are also more likely to act positively and feel safer if they know that staff will be monitoring social interactions.

### Hold a review meeting with support group

Follow-up with the support group to assess whether the situation has resolved and reinforce the positive behaviour changes.

- ✓ Review the shared plan.
- ✓ Encouraging positive and supportive behaviour.
- 💬 "You have shown some awesome support toward X by including them in your soccer game."
- ! If the issue isn't fully resolved, reschedule a meeting for the following week to reinforce positive changes

With parents:

- ✓ Involve parents in the process and other members of staff to support their child to act on their positive commitments.
- ! Some parents might be frustrated with a non-punitive approach or an approach that doesn't focus on the specific incident. It is important to clearly communicate the increased safety and support for their child.  
**Refer to Module 6 – Working with parents in Bullying prevention and response.**

