



# WORKING WITH PARENTS TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO BULLYING





## PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Conversations with parents about incidents of bullying can be challenging and stressful for educators. Responding to bullying can be a delicate and emotionally charged situation to manage.

This practice guidance is an extension of the Bullying Prevention module: *Working with parents to prevent and respond to bullying* and aims to provide you, as an educator with:

- an effective process on how to manage interactions with parents around bullying incidents.
- specific skills that will help you navigate difficult conversations with empathy.
- ways you can de-escalate emotionally charged conversations and gently shift interactions in a more proactive direction.

### How to use this practice guidance:

-  Conversation starters
-  Action suggestions
-  Actions to avoid
-  Note-worthy point

### Look past the emotional delivery to get to the root of the issue

**It is important to remember that it is a parent's job to protect and advocate for their child.**

Recognise that parents might react strongly when their child is hurt or upset, or when they feel the school is not acting according to their expectations. Also remember that the school and parents might be relying on second-hand information about the issue, as most bullying behaviours occur when adults are not around.

### What we mean when we say parent

We recognise the diversity of families and the range of care arrangements that may exist for children and young people. When we say 'parent', we are referring to biological parents, legal guardians or people who are primary caregivers for children. This includes relative carers, kinship carers, foster carers, residential carers and others.

- ✓ Be conscious that parents might be unaware of their child's role in a conflict or bullying.
- ✓ It's important to **notice** your own physiological response and feelings when confronted with an upset parent. If you need to, centre yourself or have a couple of deep breaths, take that time and re-enter the situation.
- ! If a parent appears upset or distressed – encourage them to talk with you and **listen**
- ! Covert bullying may be overlooked which may have triggered an overtly aggressive reaction

### Is it bullying or not?

It is not necessary to agree that what is occurring is bullying. Although information about the national definition of bullying can be provided at an appropriate time, the focus is to respond to the concerns identified.

You **do** need to agree that:

- ✓ The school will investigate the issue further and follow up with the parent.
- ✓ Their child has a right to feel safe and included at school.

Parents might hold different perspectives based on their knowledge, values and life experiences. Be open to new information or information that challenges your own perspective and understanding of the situation.

- ✓ Check your understanding of what the parent has said and acknowledge the issue is important.
- ✓ Be aware there will be some truth in both perspectives.
- ="It is important your child feels safe and included here at the school. We are committed to finding a positive outcome to this situation."

### Listen to the parent's concerns

- ✓ Listen empathetically and work towards understanding the situation from the parent's perspective.
- ✓ Ask questions to better understand the parent's concerns.

- ✓ Thank the parent for approaching the school with their concerns or responding to the school's request for a meeting.
- ✓ Emphasise the importance of working together toward a positive outcome.
- ! Continue listening until you are confident the parent feels heard.
- "Thank you for letting me know about this situation. I know it can be hard to talk about these things sometimes."
- "Tell me what you know about the situation."
- "Have you noticed any changes in your child at home?"

### Highlight areas of agreement

- ✓ Search for points of agreement although this does not mean that you will agree on all things.
- ✓ Use this as an opportunity to foster strong partnerships using genuine curiosity and empathy.
- ! If your school uses restorative practice, this would be a useful tool in supporting parents.

### Identify some first steps for exploring and addressing the issue

Outline what the parent will do and what the school will do. Specific actions might include:

- ✓ Observing interactions in class and in the yard.
- ✓ Making note of changes in behaviour at home.
- ✓ Opening dialogue with the student.

### Adopting low risk strategies

- ✓ Help the student plan how to keep safe.
- ✓ Come up with a list of things they can do if they feel unsafe or upset.
- ✓ Improve supervision.

### Avoid high risk strategies

- ✘ Keeping their child home from school.
- ✘ Treating differently.
- ✘ Isolating during break time.
- ✘ Avoiding areas of the school.
- ✘ Relocating their desk in the classroom.

### Establish communication channels with parents and carers

- ✔ Agree how best to maintain communication (eg phone calls, emails).
- ✔ Establish an agreed timeframe in which to reconvene.
- ✔ Involve the parent in planning and action.
- ✔ Document what you have agreed to do in an email. If another staff member is going to follow up, then ensure a communication plan is established and information is handed over.
- ✔ Plan future meetings to review progress and document the agreements.
- ✔ Encourage the parent to continue communication with their child and monitor the situation.

It is critical that the parent feels confident that communication channels are always open.

