

Schools, Peer Groups & Parents

Everyone has a part to play in developing a positive culture and encouraging students to look out for each other.

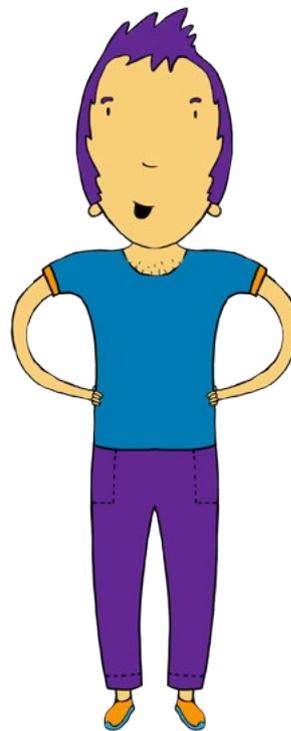
How can schools counter bullying?

The vast majority of students do not want bullying to occur, but often don't know how to stop it. The rate of bullying in schools is consistent over time—it hovers around 1 in 5 students and has done so for years.

The reason for this is not that prevention programs are ineffective, but that there is consistently a percentage of young people who believe that bullying is an acceptable way to interrelate. These people need to be educated that bullying is not acceptable—ever.

This means that schools should have ongoing campaigns and programs to prevent bullying, to intervene effectively when incidents occur, to celebrate diversity, and to promote friendship and positive social behaviours.

The culture of a school is set by the leadership and teachers, but it is students and parents that can really make it strong. When students feel empowered to tell adults when bullying occurs, to create opportunities for positive relationships and make commitments not to engage in bullying they can establish a positive peer group culture that makes a huge contribution to the school culture.



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How can peer groups counter bullying?

Most students are heroes in waiting but they need to be encouraged to realise it. The idea that you can and should stand up for others, rather than being a passive observer to bullying, is an important value which should be actively promoted.

There are several ways schools can do this:

- Students can sign a pledge or an agreement not to passively condone or accept bullying wherever it occurs and whoever is involved. This reduces anonymity and increases positive commitment.
- Students can receive training in 'resilience': a set of skills which predicts good outcomes for young people and is also associated with less bullying in schools. They are then empowered to develop projects to create a positive change in their school or community. These students are often called Resilience Ambassadors.
- Festivals of friendship—these are student run and organised days that broaden connections between students and have been shown to be effective in increasing resilience and reducing bullying.
- Bullying partly occurs when we see other people as less human and less sensitive than they truly are. When we connect people and encourage them to act heroically in the face of bullying, the cultures of schools change. Heroism is the enemy of bullying.
- Groups or alliances can celebrate diversity in the school population, and take a stand against racism, sexism and homophobia.

How can parents support their children in countering bullying?

- Be vocal supporters, in a positive manner, for the importance of schools being safe and friendly places where no one feels bullied or intimidated.
- Encourage teachers to conduct programs that involve students in creating great schools.
- Support your child in effectively intervening in bullying incidents. Teach children to use comments like 'that's not cool', 'don't be mean' and 'come on, you're a better friend than that'. The effects are powerful and can change schools.

