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Evidence for practice: whole-school strategies to enhance students' social skills and reduce bullying in schools

Donna Cross (Ed.)

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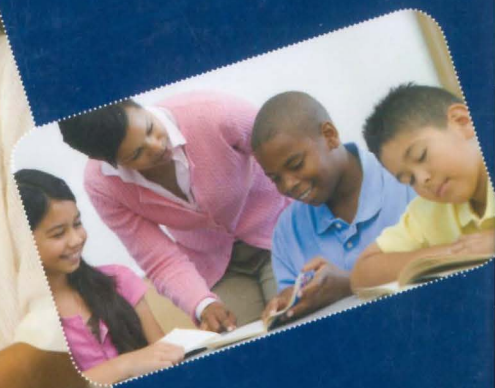
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Evidence for Practice

whole-school strategies to enhance students' social skills and reduce bullying in schools



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Introduction

While bullying behaviour is widespread and harmful in schools, research conducted at the Child Health Promotion Research Centre (CHPRC) at Edith Cowan University and elsewhere^[1-3] suggests bullying behaviour can be reduced. The CHPRC research team's ongoing empirical research, conducted since 1999, has focused primarily on what schools can do to effectively prevent and reduce bullying behaviour.

One of the most effective means to reduce bullying among young people is to enhance their social and emotional understandings and competencies, in developmentally appropriate ways throughout their schooling, using a whole-school approach. *Friendly Schools Plus* addresses the social and emotional learning of young people, both formally through explicit classroom pedagogy and learning strategies and informally through the development of a whole-school culture, organisation and structures that reinforce and uphold these essential understandings, skills and competencies.

The seven-step *Friendly Schools Plus* process, described below, is a strengths-based, whole-school participatory process that enables schools to implement current and robust evidence-based policy and practice to enhance social and emotional learning and reduce bullying among school students in accordance with the needs of the school. In particular, *Friendly Schools Plus* has provided toolkits to assess and augment school staff capacity to recognise, develop and sustain those components of a whole-school approach that support their students' unique social and emotional learning and foster the prevention of bullying behaviour.

What is a whole-school approach?

Multi-component whole-school initiatives involving all the school community are more likely to reduce bullying behaviour than single-component programs, such as those involving only classroom curriculum.^[4]

A whole-school approach, sometimes referred to as a Health Promoting Schools model, recognises that all aspects of the school community can promote (or reduce) students' health and wellbeing, and that students' learning and their health are inextricably linked. Given young people spend much of their first 17 years in a school environment, it is not only the focal point of their academic development but also their social development, where they make friends and develop healthy relationships. *Friendly Schools Plus* recognises the importance of a whole-school approach and is organised to provide support to schools, not only through formal classroom teaching and learning, but through all aspects of the whole-school environment. To achieve sustainable behaviour change that is integrated, holistic and strategic, it is necessary to implement a whole-school approach rather than focus only on individual behaviour. The essential elements of the Health Promoting Schools approach^[5] include:

- Healthy school policies
- The schools' physical environment
- The schools' social environment
- Individual health skills and action competencies (through formal teaching and learning)
- Community/family links
- Health services

The multi-component *Friendly Schools Plus* program has integrated these components of the Health Promoting Schools model into a comprehensive whole-school program with an emphasis on:

- building staff capacity to implement programs to enhance students' relationships and reduce bullying
- providing policies that shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment
- building quality relationships between school students and staff
- maximising family and other members of community's involvement
- scaffolding students' learning of social and emotional skills, such as self-awareness, self-management and social awareness
- enabling students to be advocates for and to encourage positive social interpersonal development behaviour online and a targeted behaviour offline
- supporting students who are frequently bullied or helping perpetrators of bullying to change their behaviour.

Friendly Schools Plus brings together the whole-school community to contribute to the development and ongoing maintenance of the friendly and safe culture of the school.

Key components of the *Friendly Schools Plus* process

As can be seen from Figure 1 the *Friendly Schools Plus* process comprises seven steps using a whole-school approach, grounded in quality longitudinal research evidence.



Figure 1: *Friendly Schools Plus* whole-school process

How to use the *Friendly Schools Plus* whole-school process

The *Friendly Schools Plus* resource helps schools to respond effectively to the social behaviour, strengths and needs of its students while concurrently supporting schools to review, plan, build capacity and implement critical evidence-based actions to effectively respond to these strengths and needs. This approach is critical for school improvement and long-term planning.

Seven steps of the *Friendly Schools Plus* process:

1. Survey students, parents and staff to gather evidence of their current perceptions of bullying.
2. Assess current whole-school practices and processes, including deciding how to build whole-school capacity. *The Map the Gap* Screening Tool and the Planning and Action Tool have been provided for this purpose
3. Plan priorities and strategies for school policy and practice using school process and survey data.
4. Build collective capability of all staff, through professional learning, to implement whole-school priorities and classroom actions.
5. Use the evidence-based whole-school toolkits from *Evidence for Practice* to respond to identified priorities for positive change.
6. Implement teaching and learning activities from the Teacher Resource Books to develop the social and emotional skills of students, based on their strengths and needs.
7. Review changes in school processes, teacher practice and gather evidence of student outcomes to inform future practice.

1 Survey Students, Parents and Teachers

Friendly Schools Plus assesses students' strengths and needs to help schools to know what to target to enhance social and emotional learning and reduce bullying.

Student, staff and parent surveys are a reliable and relatively quick method of gaining a school community perspective on pastoral care practices or bullying related issues. To ensure school strategies meet students' social and emotional strengths and needs, schools must determine students' understandings, attitudes, competencies and behaviours. Schools would not implement a reading program, for example, without first assessing and understanding student reading behaviours. The same is true for social behaviours, which can vary significantly between schools. *Friendly Schools Plus* provides three self-administered online (or hard copy) *Survey Tools* to be completed by students from 10 to 15 years, and their teachers and parents. (Teachers and parents only would complete the questionnaires for students younger than age 10.) The results from these online surveys are aggregated into school level reports to help schools determine their priorities for student social and emotional development and to guide decision-making about current and future actions implemented at a whole-school and classroom level.

2 Assess Whole-School Practices and Processes

Friendly Schools Plus assesses school resources and practices to help schools to know what action to take to enhance social and emotional learning and reduce bullying.

The objective of this stage is to examine what is happening in the school to inform school planning. *Friendly Schools Plus* recognises that schools are implementing many positive whole-school actions to improve students' social and emotional development and to reduce bullying behaviours. However, school leadership teams often need help to map all of the strategies currently being implemented against a quality evidence-based framework to determine gaps and possible overlaps. To this end the *Friendly Schools Plus* has developed a unique online *Map-the-Gap Screening Tool* to help schools to determine what whole-school actions they are currently undertaking, and in what areas they need to take further or different action to get more positive student outcomes.

The whole-school practice *Map-the-Gap Screening Tool* (see *Building Capacity Toolkit 1.1*), encourages members of the school staff to broadly assess the balance of health promoting school actions they are providing to students, to build and reinforce their social and emotional learning and to reduce bullying behaviour. A school profile is created based on this staff data which consequently identifies the school's strengths and challenges in this area.

3 Plan Priorities Using Data

Friendly Schools Plus helps schools to plan what specific actions they need to take, by whom and by when to make the most of strategies they are implementing to enhance social and emotional learning and reduce bullying.

A review of past and current school policies and practices using findings from the student, staff and parent survey tools and the *Map-the-Gap Screening Tool*, will facilitate discussion for future planning. School staff can knowledgeably and comprehensively determine if the whole-school activities currently provided by the school meet the identified needs of students (and staff and parents) using the whole-school practice *Planning and Action Tool* (see *Building Capacity Toolkit 1.2*).

These survey and screening findings are particularly helpful for:

- a) describing the extent and nature of students' social behaviours and actions taken by the school to address these
- b) raising staff and other members of the school community's awareness of these behaviours and the schools' efforts to encourage positive social change
- c) determining the school policies and practices that are working well, what can be improved and what is missing
- d) making decisions, setting priorities and planning for sustainable school action (policies and practices)
- e) benchmarking, monitoring and evaluating changes in school processes and student outcomes.

From these findings a course of action can be planned using the *Friendly Schools Plus* whole-school practice *Planning Tool* to record intended short- and longer-term priorities and strategies, the staff involved, and dates for action and monitoring. This plan will address the needs and gaps identified by the school community and identify ways to build staff capacity to implement the chosen activities. Each school's plan will look different as it is tailored to their local context such as the behaviour of students, what practices are currently in place, and what has previously been implemented.

An important part of the planning process is engaging a team of individuals who are responsible for leading the change process. A template action plan is included in each component of *Building Capacity Toolkit 1.2*, which may assist the school's implementation preparation. As well as the staff who are formally appointed to coordinate this role and who may have dedicated time to carry out the tasks, other school leaders or champions are also important. Staff in these leadership roles are often the 'first users' of the intervention and may require specific capacity support to fulfil their role. Other staff who are involved in the school's planned activities also need to be engaged and prepared with appropriate information, training and support to convince them of the need and advantage of implementing the proposed change.

4

Build Collective Capability

Friendly Schools Plus provides professional learning to build collective capability of all staff to implement policy and practice to enhance social and emotional learning and reduce bullying.

In achieving successful change within the school environment staff should feel part of the decision-making process and be prepared for any proposed changes to their work practices. Professional learning for staff to build their knowledge and skills to prevent, identify and respond effectively to bullying behaviour is essential. However, building their belief that a) the change will be better than what they were doing before; b) they can easily implement the intervention proposed and c) the program is compatible with their role and professional identity only, comes with being involved in decision-making. Commitment from staff to implement new strategies and make changes to their daily practices will improve if they are provided with capacity that enhances their motivation and increases their competence. Staff who are part of the school's core team responsible for facilitating change will need additional training to build their capacity to support other staff to implement the new practices in their school.

5

Use Whole-School Toolkits to Respond to Priorities

Friendly Schools Plus provides whole-school practice toolkits to implement changes to policy, the schools' social and physical climate and links with families and the community to enhance social and emotional learning and reduce bullying.

As already described *Friendly Schools Plus* is based on the Health Promoting Schools model or a whole-school approach. To help schools to build and maintain a more comprehensive whole-school approach a summary of evidence-based practice is provided in each chapter of this book and a series of implementation tools provided to help schools achieve positive change. For example, to enhance the school social environment, evidence is provided to better understand why this component of a whole-school approach is important and how it can be enhanced, and then tools such as newsletter items are provided to help schools to implement the changes recommended. So based on the findings from the *survey, screening and planning tools* and the *actions prioritised* by the school, practical tools are provided to help schools initiate the necessary actions with minimal effort.

6

Implement Teaching and Learning Activities

Friendly Schools Plus provides explicit multidisciplinary learner-centred teaching and learning resources for students aged 4 to 14 to enhance their social and emotional learning and to reduce bullying.

The *Friendly Schools Plus* teaching and learning resources for 4 to 14 year old students use a strengths-based approach that focuses on what creates positive health rather than emphasising risk factors or causes of ill-health.^[6] It is designed to address three key aspects of students' school experiences shown to be related to improved social and emotional development: promoting positive peer relationships, promoting positive teacher-child relationships, and explicit teaching related to emotions, social knowledge and social skills. These resources aim to develop students' social and emotional competencies to enable them to recognise and control their emotions; build positive relationships; show consideration for others; make thoughtful and sensible choices; and cope successfully with difficult situations. Outcomes are developed through the following five focus areas:

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Social Decision-Making

Teachers are encouraged to teach from each of the social and emotional learning focus areas in the order presented, as each builds on the vocabulary, concepts and skills covered in preceding focus areas.

7

Review Changes in Practices, Processes and Student Outcomes

Friendly Schools Plus assessment tools can be used to monitor and review the effectiveness of whole-school and classroom level actions taken to enhance social and emotional learning and reduce bullying.

The *Friendly Schools Plus Survey*, *Map-the-Gap Screening Tool* and *Planning Toolkits* can be used for ongoing monitoring and review or evaluation of school processes and student outcomes. Importantly, as data is collected over subsequent years, behavioural trends can begin to be observed and predicted within the school to enable more responsive school action and school improvement.

About the Child Health Promotion Research Centre

The CHPRC was established in 2004 at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. It conducts highly applied (practical) research to improve the physical, mental, emotional and social health and wellbeing of children, adolescents and their families. The CHPRC achieves this by:

- conducting innovative high quality health promotion research in areas of national priority for children and adolescents
- actively fostering strong collaborative links with industry, the professions, government agencies and the community to ensure the findings are relevant and can inform State and national policy and practice
- creating a supportive and stimulating learning culture for undergraduate, postgraduate and other researchers.

The CHPRC's large multidisciplinary research team is nationally and internationally recognised for conducting evidence-based research to develop and evaluate practical school and community-based programs and training to promote child and adolescent health through family, school and community-based projects in the areas of:

- bullying prevention and cessation (including cyberbullying)
- mental health promotion
- drug use prevention and cessation
- road safety and injury control
- healthy body weight.

Through significant partnerships with government, non-government organisations, industry and community, the CHPRC's research has generated new knowledge which has served children, families, communities and government throughout Australia. Their research outcomes have focused critically on understanding issues in diverse contexts, seeking locally relevant solutions for communities while informing State and national direction and policy. This is evident in CHPRC's research outputs, described in detail for the area of bullying prevention in the next section.

Further information about the CHPRC can be found at www.chprc.ecu.edu.au

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CHPRC *Friendly Schools Plus* research publications

Books:

Cross, D., Hall, M., Hamilton, G., Pintabona, Y., and Erceg, E. Australia: The Friendly Schools Project, in *Bullying in Schools: Global Perspectives on Intervention*, Editors: Smith, P.K, Pepler, D., and Rigby, K. Cambridge University Press, Ambidge, UK, 2008

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The Research Supporting the *Friendly Schools Plus* resource

The *Friendly Schools Plus* program is based on 11 major research projects conducted since 1999 involving more than 27,000 Australian school-age students from pre-primary to Year 10 (see Figure 2). This research has focused critically on understanding student bullying behaviour and seeking locally relevant and practical outcomes, while informing national and international policy and practices. It is recognised nationally and internationally as a successful whole-school evidence-based bullying prevention program.

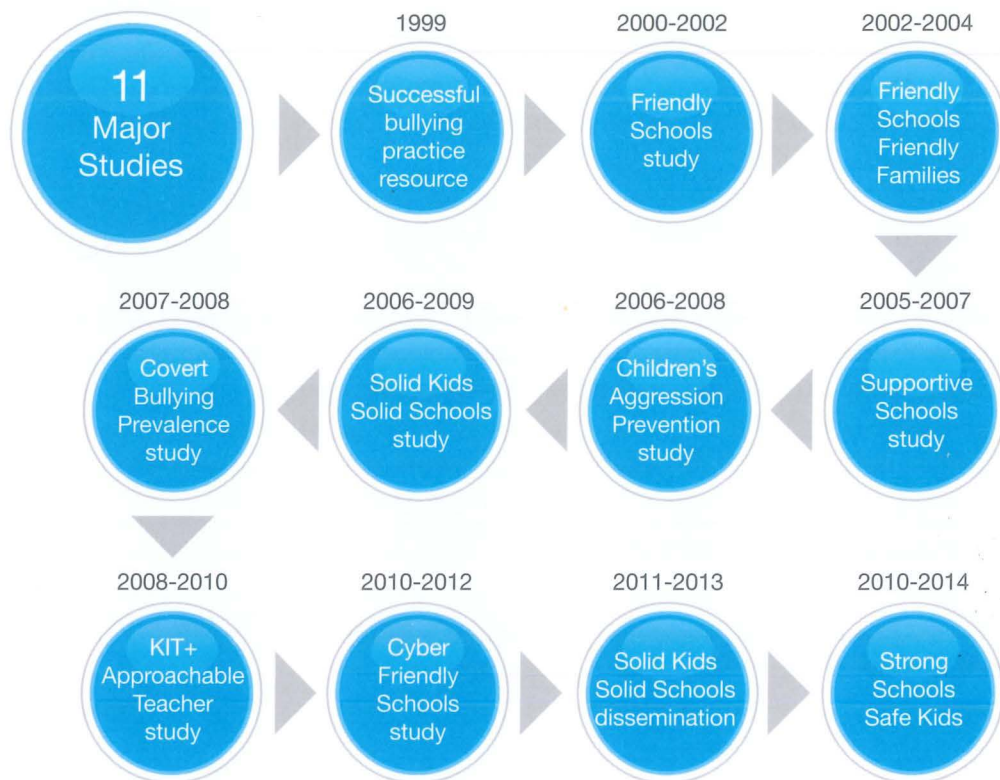


Figure 2: Bullying Related Research 1999-2014 (Source CHPRC)

CHPRC research studies have identified ways to strengthen whole-school approaches to reduce all forms of bullying (including cyberbullying) in primary through secondary schools, bullying in Aboriginal contexts, and importantly the prevention of early childhood aggression. These projects have reduced intentional harm from bullying among children and adolescents, and raised awareness of the impact that peers, families, schools and communities can have in preventing bullying behaviour.

The *Friendly Schools Plus* research began in 1999. The first study, a formative review of research, provided a significant summary of evidence-based findings from international bullying-related research, validated by experts from around the world. These findings were synthesised and operationalised into the primary school-based program, *Friendly Schools*. The *Friendly Schools* resource was rigorously tested as part of a randomised control trial (2000-2002) with a cohort tracked for three years of approximately 2,000 Year 4 students and their teachers and parents. Year 4 students were targeted initially as more Australian children bully and are bullied in Years 5 and 6 than any other age at school. The *Friendly Schools* study aimed to ameliorate the increase in bullying behaviour at this age. The results from this study were positive^[7] but further research was needed to understand how to reduce the high levels of bullying in primary school children.

The follow-up three-year study, *Friendly Schools Friendly Families* (2002-2004), involved a randomised control trial of over 4,000 students, comprising Year 2, 4 and 6 students, as well as their teachers and parents. The results showed a significant reduction in bullying among the students who received the intervention.^[8, 9]

From 2005 to 2007 the Centre's research extended into secondary school students to address the second major increase of bullying behaviour that occurred following students' transition from primary to secondary school. This project, *Supportive Schools*, involved a randomised control trial of a whole-school intervention that provided schools, students and parents with strategies to help students prevent or deal with the increase in bullying that typically occurs post-transition. Results indicated that this project reduced the mediators associated with bullying among this age group.^[10]

The CHPRC's fourth largest randomised control trial, the *Child Aggression Project* began in 2006. This research project followed over 2,000 pre-primary school children (and their families) for three years in their schools until they were in Year 2. This study was part of a larger international study with the Montreal GRIP Research Unit in Canada, designed to promote supportive school environments and social relationships that limit aggression and disruptive behaviours among children in the early phases of schooling. The results from *Child Aggression Project* indicate positive process results and significant interest in these resources from early childhood teachers.^[11]

These four large studies recruited insufficient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to determine whether mainstream approaches to bullying prevention were effective for these children and adolescents. To address this need, the CHPRC initiated the four-year qualitative *Solid Kids Solid Schools* research project in 2006. This research project engaged an Aboriginal Steering group and local Yamaji people to help develop and pilot test a variety of resources targeting young people, their teachers, families and community to reduce the bullying experiences of school-age Aboriginal people. The process data from this research show these resources (www.solidkids.net.au) are well received and used by the Aboriginal community. The *Solid Kids Solid Schools* project was extended in 2011 until 2013 to enhance the dissemination and use of this resource in Aboriginal communities.

From 2008 to 2010 the CHPRC conducted a study called *Keeping in Touch Plus* in conjunction with School Drug Education and Road Aware. This project investigated ways to enhance school teachers' approachability in times of need, as perceived by students. This process evaluation project provided many important insights and strategies to encourage and enable students to seek help, in response to a problem they may be experiencing. It also enhanced the capacity of teachers to provide more effective support to these students. These findings were used to improve the support offered by schools when students who are bullied, or observe bullying, seek adult support.

Since 2007, with the growth of communication technology and the subsequent use of this technology to bully, the CHPRC has been funded to conduct five major formative projects and one summative research project to investigate student cyberbullying. The first of these studies, the *Cyberbullying Formative Study*, involved focus groups and interviews with several hundred students, parent and school staff to develop a deeper understanding of the nature and effects of this 'new' behaviour.

In 2007, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations funded the CHPRC to conduct the *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*. This represented the first national prevalence study benchmarking covert bullying in Australia. The study investigated young people's experiences with covert bullying, including: the nature and types of covert bullying behaviours used by young people; how often and where these behaviours occur; and risk and protective factors that may inhibit or encourage covert bullying behaviour. The study involved triangulation of covert bullying behaviour data collected using mixed methods across three separate studies from a total of 20,832 Australian students aged 8-14 years from over 200 schools and 456 school staff. Results shed new light on covert bullying, especially cyberbullying among school-age children, identifying effective and sustainable policy and practice.^[12]

In 2008 a follow-up study called the *Cyber Leaders Project* actively engaged the input of young people to better understand cyberbullying. This study led to the first Australian state-wide Student Cyber Leader Summit involving 200 Western Australian students. This summit has since been replicated with the training of student 'cyber leaders' in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia. A further large formative study called the *Cyber Friendly Parents Study* was funded in 2009 to investigate ways to help parents to help their children avoid cyberbullying.

These four formative cyberbullying studies led to the world's first major randomised control trial called the *Cyber Friendly Schools Project*, specifically testing interventions targeting student leaders, teachers, students and parents to reduce the prevalence of cyberbullying. The results from this study will become available in 2012. The cyberbullying strategies included in the *Friendly Schools Plus* resource are based on promising findings to date from this research. Until the *Cyber Friendly Schools Project* has concluded, the recommended cyberbullying intervention strategies do not have the same high level of evidence rigour as the previous bullying research conducted by the CHPRC.

Lastly, in 2010 the CHPRC began a five-year study to understand the best ways to enhance the capacity of schools throughout Western Australia to provide quality policy and practice to reduce bullying and other forms of social aggression. This project is called *Strong Schools Safe Kids*. This research and other new research conducted by the CHPRC will continue to inform the *Friendly Schools Plus* resources produced by the CHPRC at Edith Cowan University.

Bullying: The evidence before the action



This chapter presents an overview of the research evidence describing the nature, causes, correlates and impact of bullying behaviours, as well as strategies for managing bullying in the classroom. Importantly, this chapter will help to ensure a consistent and accurate understanding of what is meant by the term *bullying*, its causes, outcomes and the consequences.

Defining and measuring bullying

What is bullying?

The definition used by most researchers today is:

'Bullying is a repeated behaviour; that may be physical, verbal, and /or psychological; where there is intent to cause fear, distress, or harm to another; that is conducted by a more powerful individual or group; against a less powerful individual or group of individuals who is/are unable to stop this from happening'.

The key elements of a bullying incident include both a perpetrator's and target's perspective— the perpetrator has more perceived power, he/she repeats the behaviour and with intention, while the target feels the bullying is unprovoked or unjustifiable and he/she is not able to stop the behaviour from happening to them. If these elements are not present, using this definition the behaviour would be considered an aggressive act and not an incident of bullying.

When talking with young people about bullying it is more understandable to describe bullying as a series of descriptive behaviours, rather than one broad term that has many negative connotations, especially when discussing cyberbullying. The behaviours commonly used to describe bullying include being repeatedly:

- ignored or left out on purpose
- made fun of and/or teased in a mean and hurtful way
- made to feel afraid of getting hurt
- stared at with mean looks and/or gestures
- embarrassed by nasty stories or rumours spread about you
- forced to do things you don't want to
- hit, kicked or pushed around.

There has been much discussion about cyberbullying and how it should best be defined. Proposed definitions range from a focus on only behaviour to only technology. Following six years of assessing, evaluating and addressing cyberbullying in schools, the CHPRC defines cyberbullying as follows:

'Cyberbullying is when a group or an individual use information and communication technologies (ICT) to intentionally harm a person over time, who cannot easily stop this bullying from continuing'.^[13]

The most important aspect of this definition is that it is not focused on ICT but stipulates that cyberbullying is bullying via ICT. That is, it is about the behaviour, not about the technology.

What is *not* bullying?

Given the complex definition of bullying, it is important to also consider what behaviours are not bullying. One example of what is not considered bullying is a fight between two equally matched students. Friendly teasing is also not considered bullying. These examples seem very clear from a perpetrator's perspective but are less so from the perspective of the target or student who is being victimised. Sometimes alleged perpetrators report they were only joking when accused of bullying. The accurate identification of 'true' bullying cases is even more complicated when the bullying occurs online or by mobile phone.

Imagine the following: Tracey is a Year 9 student who comes to see you because she is being bullied. She tells you that students in her year group are saying nasty things and posting hurtful pictures about her on the Internet. You find out that it was Rachel, another Year 9 student. Rachel tells you that she only posted one picture and it was just meant to be a joke.

If bullying is defined as a repeated act (that is, the definition is from Rachel's perspective) then one act, such as posting an embarrassing picture, may not be considered bullying. However, from the target's perspective (Tracey's), this act may very well be bullying given the picture is available online and can be viewed repeatedly by her and others. To address this definitional challenge, many schools refer to these cyber-related behaviours in their policies, for example, as 'cyber aggression' without trying to determine if they are bullying or not, while acknowledging that these behaviours are unacceptable.

Are there different types of bullying behaviours?

A large variety of behaviours can be used to bully others. For example, bullying can be *physical, verbal, social, relational*, delivered through non-cyber (for example, face-to-face) or cyber means (for example, via phone texting). *Physical bullying* includes behaviours such as hitting, kicking, pushing, tripping and spitting.^[14, 15] These overt behaviours (easily seen) are typically more common in boys and it is relatively easy to identify both the perpetrator and the target.^[15] *Verbal bullying* involves using words to hurt or humiliate others and includes behaviours such as threats, hurtful teasing and insults.^[14, 15] These behaviours are less easy to detect and likely to be a component of nearly all bullying interactions.^[15]

Covert bullying refers to behaviours that are hard to see^[12] and include indirect, relational and social forms of bullying. The term *indirect aggression* was introduced in the late 1980s to describe aggressive and bullying behaviours that were not easily noticeable and where the perpetrator's identity was largely concealed.^[16] Indirect aggression could, in fact, include very overt acts that are carried out at times where the likelihood of being discovered is minimal (for example, engaging in property damage at night). In addition, indirect aggression could consist of behaviours enacted through a third party so that there is no direct contact between the perpetrator and the target.

Crick and colleagues (1998) conceptualised *relational aggression* as including behaviours that were intended to harm others by damaging relationships or feelings of social acceptance, friendship, or inclusion in peer groups.^[17] Thus, relational aggression can comprise many different behaviours, such as playing practical jokes and embarrassing a person, imitating them behind their backs, breaking secrets, being critical, spreading hurtful rumours, sending abusive notes, whispering, and/or maliciously excluding them.^[18, 19]

Social bullying (or social aggression) refers to a broad behavioural concept encompassing both indirect and relational aggression that includes behaviours intended to damage or harm a person's social status or self-esteem (or both). These behaviours may include verbal rejection, negative facial expressions or body movements, or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumours or social exclusion.^[20]

Of course, *cyberbullying* behaviours are different again given the reliance on ICT as a medium to bully. The measurement of cyberbullying behaviours represents a challenge for researchers, schools and the community alike because the dynamic environment of the Internet (and mobile phones) means the strategies used to cyberbully others can change. The *Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study*^[12] revealed some very interesting patterns of cyberbullying behaviours which highlighted, for example, the developmental nature of strategies used to victimise others.

Given the uptake of social networking and the use of social media in later adolescence, it is not surprising that social media are used as one of the most common ways to cyberbully young people.^[21] In contrast, relatively more young children use email than social networking compared to the number of older teenagers who use email versus social networking.^[21] However, this is likely to change as interest in and uptake of social media becomes more popular. Interestingly, significant differences were found in bullying behaviours between students who were the same age but located in primary versus secondary schools.^[21] This is most likely related to issues related to social changes that occur when young people transition from primary to secondary school.

Examples of bullying behaviour

	DIRECT	INDIRECT
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hitting, slapping, punching • kicking • pushing • spitting, biting • pinching, scratching • throwing things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting another person to harm someone
Verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mean and hurtful name-calling • hurtful teasing • demanding money or possessions • forcing another to do homework or commit offences such as stealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spreading nasty rumours • trying to get other students to not like someone
Non-verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • threatening and/or obscene gestures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliberate exclusion from a group or activity • removing and hiding and/or damaging others' belongings
Cyber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • filming someone without their knowledge or permission • updating someone else's social networking status without their permission • pretending to be someone else on the phone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • telling someone else the words you want them to type as a message • explaining to someone how to engage in bullying via a website the other person may not be familiar with • watching someone engaging in cyberbullying and not trying to stop the bullying

(Adapted from Rigby, 1996^[22])

Why do most students *not* bully?

Although bullying situations are experienced in most schools at some time, bullying does not occur amongst all young people all the time. In fact, most students do not bully others. In general, young people who have developed good social and emotional skills, have positive friends and who have supportive environments at home, at school and in the community are unlikely to bully others.

Nevertheless, some students may use bullying behaviours for a variety of reasons.

Why do some students bully?

Children use bullying behaviours for a variety of reasons. These are mainly personal in nature and typically have little to do with the person who is the target of the bullying. Some of the reasons children bully others include:

- to get what they want
- to be popular and admired
- because they are afraid of being the one left out
- jealousy of others
- it seems like fun/boredom
- it has worked for them before
- they enjoy the power
- they see it as their role (e.g. *leader*)
- their significant role models use bullying behaviours.

While these reasons help to explain why children bully others, they don't explain how and why the behaviour first starts. Some of the factors associated with the development of bullying in children and young people include:

- experiencing aggressive behaviour at home and elsewhere
- being harshly, physically punished at home
- spending time with peers who bully
- insufficient adult supervision
- bullying gives them the social rewards they seek
- bullying others to prevent being bullied
- getting attention.

What theoretical evidence supports an understanding of bullying behaviour?

Social information processing and bullying

A number of theoretical models are proposed to describe and explain how young people process social information that drives aggressive and bullying behaviours. To date, the most empirically supported model is proposed by Crick and Dodge (1994).^[23] The social information processing (SIP) model describes five interrelated cognitive processes (stages) believed to underlie social behaviours:

1. internal and external stimuli are encoded
2. encoded information is interpreted and attributions of intent and causality are made
3. a social goal is generated
4. responses are generated that will lead to its attainment
5. the response that is attributed the highest overall value is chosen.^[24]

In terms of aggression research, the stages of attribution (Stage 2) and response decision (Stage 5) are the most frequently addressed.

The SIP model is used to describe and distinguish between different forms of aggressive behaviour. The most common distinction between forms of aggression is using the terms reactive and proactive aggression. Reactive aggression is impulsive, highly emotionally charged and most often occurs in response to a frustrating experience. Proactive aggression, on the other hand, is premeditated, controlled, or has the specific intent to harm another.^[25, 26] When this form of aggression is repeated, it is usually considered bullying. Proactively aggressive children attack others to dominate, steal, tease or coerce.^[27, 28] An important distinction between reactive and proactive aggression is that the latter is usually displayed in the absence of provocation or anger.^[29] This type of initiated and intentional aggression has its theoretical roots in social learning^[30-32] and is argued to be motivated by a desire for interpersonal dominance or an expectation that aggression is a suitable means of achieving some desired reward (such as money or toys).^[26, 33, 34]

Social information processing and proactive aggression

Proactive aggression has been linked with a number of positive and negative outcomes both short- and long-term. The positive qualities of proactive aggression sometimes cause confusion as it is not always clear why aggression in any form would be considered positive. Proactively aggressive younger children for example, can be seen as positive leaders with a good sense of humour, high self-esteem qualities and positive early friendship qualities and popularity.^[26, 35] However, these early positive outcomes soon give way to more functionally and socially negative aspects and by the age of nine these proactively aggressive children are considered to be the most disruptive and aggressive in their peer group.^[26, 33, 36-38] Among the most concerning long-term correlates of proactive aggression are adult criminality,^[39] bullying in school,^[40] delinquency and delinquency-related violence, externalising problems later in life^[29, 39, 41] and affiliation with delinquent peers.^[41, 42] Proactively aggressive children also show specific cognitive biases where they are likely to overestimate positive outcomes for aggressing.^[27] Connor et al (2004) suggest that substance use disorders, a family history of substance abuse and family violence are specifically associated with proactive aggression.^[43]

Proactive aggression is also associated with unique impairments in SIP. Unlike reactive aggression, proactive aggression is associated with the response decision stage of the SIP model.^[44, 45] As discussed earlier, proactive aggression is maintained by processes such as reinforcement that involve being rewarded in some way for aggressive behaviour. It is logical to assume that being rewarded for aggressive behaviour would lead to positive expectations regarding aggressive behaviour. Proactively aggressive children also report more positive intrapersonal consequences for aggressive behaviour (as in they reported that being aggressive would make them feel better about themselves) and report a greater belief in their ability to successfully carry out an aggressive act.^[27]

To date, no studies have examined SIP in relation to cyberbullying. Nonetheless, it is likely that the patterns of information processing associated with cyberbullying will be similar to proactive aggression. However, given the media typically used to engage in cyberbullying and that those who engage in cyberbullying behaviours do not necessarily engage in face-to-face bullying, there may be some subtle differences between how social information is processed in these interactions. For example, the expectation of positive outcomes after aggressive behaviour may be the same for the person cyberbullying but, importantly, the motivation for this behaviour may differ. If, as was suggested by Vandebosch and van Cleemput (2008) those who bully others are more motivated by revenge then the explicit goal is to hurt rather than to dominate or to acquire.^[46]

Importantly, due to the nature of the medium in which cyberbullying is enacted, those who bully may not be immediately reinforced for their behaviour. For example, if a person engaging in face-to-face bullying behaviours is motivated (and goal-oriented) to inflict harm primarily using fear, then they will likely be reinforced for this behaviour by the body language and facial expression (as well as the verbal response) of

their victim. The reinforcement is immediate and tangible. In contrast, a person engaging in cyberbullying who is motivated to socially hurt others may have to wait for a period of time before the impact is apparent (at least until the text message, picture or other material is distributed among the group). Similarly, the person engaging in cyberbullying behaviours who is motivated to inflict harm using fear has limited external sources of reinforcement and may have to, at least initially, rely on their own reactions to their acts. The reward for engaging in some forms of cyberbullying could be based to a larger extent on the expectations the person engaging in bullying behaviours has for how the target person *will* react versus how the target person *is* reacting, than is the case with face-to-face bullying. This delay between the act (for example, creating a fake website) and the outcome (for example, sharing secrets with the school) would likely result in a heightened sense of expectation and a built up level of excitement and anticipation for the time when the target person realises what has been done. Thus, it is feasible that a difference exists between those engaging in cyberbullying behaviours versus face-to-face bullying behaviours, according to the generation of goals and the expectations related to the outcome of an interaction. It may be the case that these differences are only observed in relation to different types of cyberbullying.

There are several other theories that could be used to describe aspects of cognition and behaviours associated with bullying. Rather than conduct an exhaustive review, the following addresses the most empirically tested and influential theoretical models that have relevance to bullying behaviours. To date, relatively little theoretical work has been conducted specifically on bullying (and less on cyberbullying) so most of the theoretical models that follow outline the processes that impact on social behaviours and functioning.

Theory of Mind

Theory of mind is generally described as the ability to recognise and make inferences about the feelings, beliefs or intentions of other people^[47] and it has been regarded as a crucial component of effective social communication.^[48, 49] Nonetheless, to engage in the higher order cognitive functions required to engage in complex social interactions, it is necessary to firstly have self-awareness to be able to self-reflect.^[50] Thus, to be able to reflect on the functions of other people, it is first necessary to have an internal awareness or understanding of those abilities. These skills usually develop around three to five years of age so that by five years most children recognise that other people can have different beliefs than they.

This is a little different than Piaget's model (1983)^[51] which talks about egocentrism around this age – consistent with the models of moral reasoning and sociomoral reasoning (see following descriptions). Importantly, the awareness that a person has a set of beliefs distinct from my set of beliefs is necessary for me to be able to experience an emotion in response to a situation that I did not directly experience. Therefore, theory of mind must be interpreted as a basic social cognitive skill such that other skills, like empathy, don't develop as well without the existence of the more basic skills. This does not suggest that students who bully others are less able to recognise emotional reactivity in other people but does provide some basis to explain those who continue along the antisocial trajectory into adulthood and show traits described as psychopathic – that is, lacking in empathy.

Social learning theory and bullying

Another theory that has influenced aggression and bullying research is Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Bandura (1971) proposed that aggression was the result of learning and, as such, was no different than any other form of learned behaviour in that it could be acquired, instigated and regulated by the same processes.^[30, 31] At the base level, aggression can only be enacted if a person has acquired the requisite skills (for example, a person is not born with the knowledge necessary to shoot a gun but learns how to do this). Bandura argued that a child is not born with aggressive repertoires but can acquire them by observing the actions of others. Through observation, a child can also develop a set of expectations about the likely outcome or response for aggressive behaviour. It has long been known that if these aggressive repertoires are used in the home (especially by the child's parents) then there is a much greater likelihood that this style of social interaction will be used by the child.^[52]

Bandura also suggests that modern media, through observational processes, has a significant influence on the development and maintenance of aggressive behaviour.^[31] He suggests media violence desensitises and habituates children to aggression, especially when it is presented in terms of good triumphing over evil. Other research also suggests there is a strong relationship between self-reported violent behaviours and television-viewing habits and exposure to violence.^[53] Anderson and Dill (2000), in their meta-analytic review, reported a positive relationship between exposure to violent media (specifically violent video games) and aggressive behaviour and delinquency.^[54] Moreover, Anderson and Bushman (2001) reported that violent video games increase aggressive behaviour in both children and young adults.^[55]

In terms of the acquisition of aggressive behaviour through direct experience, Bandura noted that it may be possible to acquire a large repertoire of aggressive skills by being directly rewarded for them.^[30] Presumably, these behaviours would initially be rewarded in the home and then later by peers. Similarly, many researchers have found that aggressive children are more likely to associate with peers who behave inappropriately^[42, 56, 57] which can lead to the maintenance of aggressive behaviour.^[58] Bandura suggested that when an aggressor has a positive experience from an aggressive act (for example, when they obtain a desired object through aggressive means) this form of behaviour is reinforced and more likely to be used again.^[31]

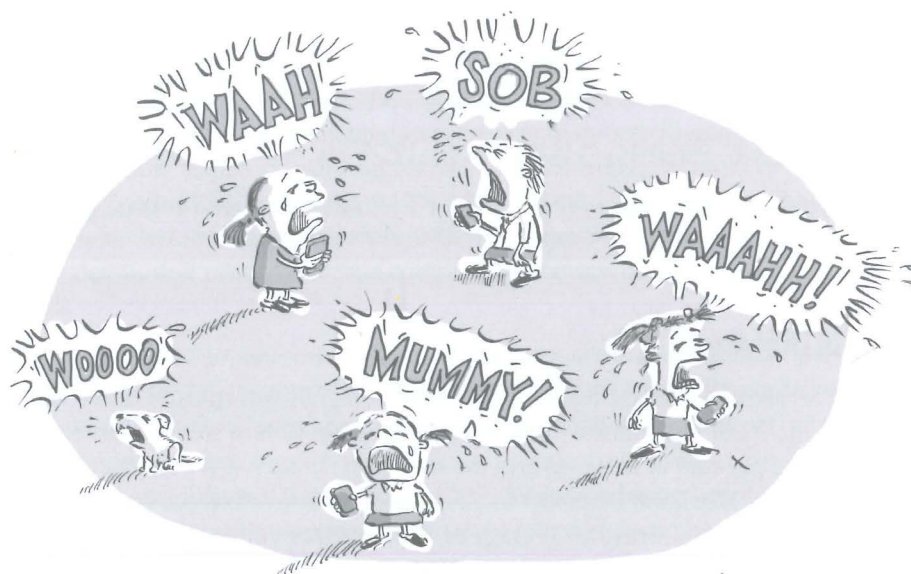
Bandura suggests reinforcement and punishment are central to the regulation and/or maintenance of aggressive behaviour.^[31] If an aggressive child obtained the object of their desire (the reward can be a tangible item or improved or elevated social status) by using aggressive strategies, this behavioural style of interaction will be reinforced both by external influences as well as by the person themselves. This form of self-reinforcement would be expected if the aggressor placed a high value on being able to enact aggressive strategies competently. According to Bandura, punishment regulates aggressive behaviour by both strengthening or weakening the tendency to be aggressive based on the likelihood this behaviour will be punished, and the nature, severity, timing, and duration of the negative consequences.^[31]

What about cyberbullying?

It is interesting to ask if we need separate theories to describe or explain cyberbullying. Although cyberbullying is, in many ways, bullying, the use of technology adds a level of complexity that can impact both the engagement in and experience of these behaviours. It is important to consider if people cyberbully for different reasons than they bully in non-cyber ways. Although the literature is sparse it can be concluded that the motives are varied. The main reasons provided by students for their cyberbullying behaviour include:

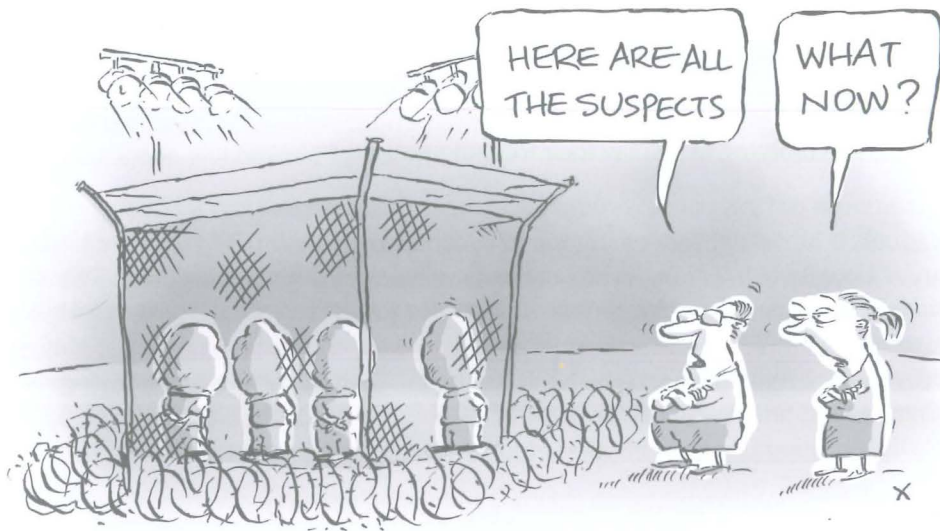
- revenge for being bullied in real life^[46, 59]
- a reaction to a previous argument
- a means for the person bullying to display their technological skills
- for fun.

Given the motivations, it is highly likely, as suggested by Slonje and Smith (2008), that not having to see the fear in the target's eyes and being less aware of the consequences reduces the potential for empathy and remorse^[60] – factors which would lessen the likelihood of future acts of aggression and bullying. However, these reasons offer only anecdotal evidence and, to date, no studies have thoroughly assessed the motivation that drives cyberbullying and whether it is different than for face-to-face bullying.



CYBER-BULLYING BECAME
A NATIONAL CRISIS WHEN
SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES
INTRODUCED THE "HATE" BUTTON

How much of a problem is bullying?



THE "WAR ON BULLYING" MOVED QUICKLY FROM BEING HUGELY POPULAR, TO BEING AN ETHICAL AND POLITICAL NIGHTMARE

How common is bullying?

A study of bullying prevalence in 28 countries highlighted the significant cultural differences associated with bullying. (Due et al., 2005) The highest rates of bullying victimisation were observed in Lithuania (41.4 per cent of males and 38.2 per cent of females) and the lowest in Sweden (6.3 per cent of males and 5.1 per cent of females). The 2001/2002 *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* cross-national research study found that across the 35 participating countries, an average of 11 per cent of young people (aged 11, 13 and 15) were bullied at least two or three times a month in the previous couple of months, and 11 per cent bullied others at this frequency. (Craig and Harel, 2004)

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In Australia around one in four Year 4 to 9 students are bullied at school every few weeks or more often (27 per cent).^[12] Students in Year 5 across Australia are the most likely to be bullied (32 per cent), closely followed by students in Year 8 (29 per cent).^[12] These national data are consistent with many previous smaller scale studies which have reported prevalence rates of around 25 per cent and appear to have remained consistent since the early 1990s.^[61]

Use of direct physical (for example, punching, kicking) and verbal aggression (such as calling names, yelling) is more common among boys, whereas indirect aggression (such as spreading rumours, exclusion) appears to be more common among girls.^[20, 62-67] Rates of aggression between boys and girls have been shown to even out when the different forms that aggression may take (*verbal* – yelling, teasing, insulting, indirect – secrets, gossip, telling stories, influencing friends) are taken into account in the comparisons.^[68]

The prevalence of cyberbullying remains largely unclear. This is primarily related to the emerging behaviour, changing technologies and difficulties in defining and measuring the problem accurately. Internationally, cyberbullying prevalence rates have been reported as high as 25 per cent in the United States, Canada and England and between 5 per cent and 15 per cent in many European countries^[69] and Australia.^[12]

One of the most interesting aspects of the bullying/cyberbullying debate relates to gender differences in the rates of these behaviours. Traditionally, males engage in more bullying behaviours than females.^[65, 70-74] However, Blair (2003) reported that females are more likely to communicate using text messaging and email than are males;^[75] this, combined with the more covert (and social) nature of cyberbullying, would make it reasonable to expect that the gender differences demonstrated in face-to-face bullying are, at the least, not as strong in cyberbullying. Indeed, some have reported that males and females were equally likely to report harassing others online.^[76, 77] Similarly, Slonje and Smith (2008) reported no gender differences in the self-reported rates of either engaging in, or being the target of, cyberbullying behaviours^[60] (a trend suggesting boys engaged in more acts of cyberbullying than girls was not statistically significant). Although these results do not suggest that females engage in more cyberbullying than males, they do indicate that the gender differences reported in relation to face-to-face bullying are not as strong. Further, girls tend to have more close relationships/friendships and, therefore, may be more willing to exchange intimate details and personal secrets compared to boys who tend to socialise in larger groups and share fewer details.

An important issue in relation to determining prevalence rates is the measurement method used. Solberg and Olweus (2003) suggested that some of the methodological differences^[78] include reporting source (teacher, parent, peer nomination), providing participants with a definition or not, variations in the time period participants are asked to reflect on, different response and rating categories, global versus behavioural items used and different thresholds used to determine frequency. All of these factors can result in significant differences in the reported prevalence rate which can have important implications for intervention strategies, extent and intensity of service provision, and perception of the extent to which bullying behaviours are normative in schools.

What are the consequences of bullying?

Being bullied contributes uniquely and directly to mental health problems among young people, and the consequences of bullying can be severe and long-lasting.^[79] Recent research evidence has found a wide range of mental health harms associated with being bullied, including suicidal ideation,^[80] eating disorders,^[81, 82] deliberate self-harm,^[83] and low self-esteem.^[84] Being bullied also results in impaired social and emotional adjustment, difficulty making friends, poorer relationships with peers, and increased loneliness^[85-88], increasing the social isolation of those who are bullied.

Both students who are bullied, and students who bully others, are at a higher risk of experiencing psychosomatic symptoms such as anxiety,^[82] depression^[82, 89] and suicidality.^[90] Bullying can impact negatively on the mental health of not only the perpetrator and the target of bullying, but also those students who witness the bullying.^[91] The detrimental consequences of bullying can extend into adulthood, with involvement in bullying being predictive of future psychiatric disorders.^[92]

Being bullied is also associated with physical health harms^[93] and poorer ratings of health-related quality of life.^[94] Students involved in bullying (either as a perpetrator, target or both) are at a high risk of suffering from injuries that are accidental, self-inflicted or inflicted by others.^[95] Involvement in bullying has also been linked with higher risk of abusing over-the-counter medications, intentionally harming animals or people, and using weapons that could seriously hurt someone.^[95]

Additionally, *students who bully others* are at greater risk of other delinquent behaviours,^[96] including setting fires, runaway episodes, weapon carrying^[95] and violence,^[89] as well as increased substance use, alcohol use^[82, 85, 95] and binge drinking.^[89] Childhood bullying perpetration can have long-lasting outcomes, and has been linked with higher risk of violence, heavy drinking and marijuana use at age 21.^[97] Recent research has found that bullying others at age 14 may predict violent convictions, self-reported violence and low job status in later adolescence and early adulthood. Self-reported bullying may also predict drug use at age 27-32 and poor life success at age 48.^[98] Of greatest concern is that students who are both bullied and bully others (commonly known as bully/victims) experience all of these ill-health effects to a greater extent than students who are bullied or who bully others (but not involved in both).

Academic harms also result from school bullying, as students who are bullied are more likely to dislike and wish to avoid school^[86, 87], and thus have higher rates of absenteeism^[88, 99]. In addition, their academic achievement and sense of academic self-efficacy are diminished in comparison to other students^[99-101]. This may be because students who are bullied report more negative consequences for concentration, completion of work and enjoyment of work in the classroom^[102, 103]. Finally, students who bully others also tend to dislike school^[86] and have decreased academic achievement and self-efficacy.^[100, 101]

What role do bystanders play in bullying?

Bullying occurs within a group context, with peers present as onlookers in around 85 per cent of bullying interactions.^[104, 106] Bystanders can have active, diverse and involved roles in the bullying process, from facilitating to inhibiting bullying.^[107] It appears that around 20-30 per cent of students actively assist or reinforce bullying, and another 26-30 per cent of students try to stay outside the bullying situation.^[108] Unfortunately, less than 20 per cent of students act to stop the bullying and defend the student being bullied.^[108]

Research has observed some age and gender differences with regards to the different roles that students may take on as a bystander to bullying. Younger students show more positive attitudes towards students who are bullied^[109] and are more likely to intervene to stop the bullying than are older students.^[110, 111] Girls are more likely than boys to try to help the student being bullied or stay outside the bullying situation, whereas boys are more likely than girls to assist or reinforce the bullying.^[12, 108, 112-116]

Although many students do not agree with bullying, most do not intervene to stop the bullying, but instead act in ways which enable and maintain bullying.^[117, 118] Possible reasons for students' failure to intervene in a bullying situation and help a person being bullied, include their desire for peer acceptance,^[119] uncertainty about what action to take,^[120] fear of becoming the next target of the bullying,^[105, 120] lack of knowledge about appropriate strategies to use to intervene,^[117] and/or assuming that another observer will take action to stop the situation.^[121]

Bystanders who are witness to repetitive abuse, such as bullying, experience considerable distress that can continue into adulthood.^[122] A recent study found that witnessing bullying was associated with elevated mental health risks among 12-16 year olds, that were over and above those mental health risks posed to students directly involved in the bullying, either as targets or perpetrators of the bullying.^[91] When students do decide to intervene positively to help a student being bullied, this can have very beneficial effects on the outcome of the bullying situation, with observational research finding that bullying stops within ten seconds of peer intervention.^[106] Bystander intervention has also been associated with better interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustment of the student who is bullied and less peer-reported victimisation one year later.^[123] When bystanders intervene to stop bullying, these positive actions appear to be strongly endorsed by other students and students are less likely to assign blame to the student who is bullied.^[109] Conversely, when bystanders join in the bullying or ignore the bullying, these actions are not endorsed by other students, and when bystanders remain passive, other students have a greater tendency to blame the student being bullied.^[109] Further, a recent study found that students who are bullied perceive positive actions from peers as more helpful than positive actions from adults, or their own positive actions to address bullying.^[124] Bystanders who try to help a student being bullied also report feeling good about themselves following their attempts to intervene.^[115]

How can bystanders be mobilised to reduce bullying?

Bystanders represent a key population for intervention in bullying, as their behaviour may be easier to change than students directly involved in the bullying.^[112, 116, 125] Peer support is a strategy used by several anti-bullying programs; however, it is important that schools emphasise through its policies and ethos that it is the responsibility of all students to reduce bullying, not just those in a peer supporter role. By only bestowing upon selected students the responsibility to help or support another student being bullied, a phenomenon called Diffusion of Responsibility can occur.^[121] Students may fail to intervene to help when other bystanders are present because they assume that another student will take action to stop the situation.

Very little research has been completed investigating bystanders to cyberbullying, however, considerably more opportunities exist in cyberspace to demonstrate positive bystander behaviour and this role is even more important for young people as there are few adults in this environment to support students who are bullied. This bystander support is especially important given the potentially increased harmful effects of cyberbullying associated with the unlimited audience,^[126, 127]. But similarly there is also an infinite audience who could also stand up to the bullying and provide support to the student being bullied. More research is needed to identify the effectiveness of bystander intervention strategies that are effective in a cyber-context.

What can bystanders do?

The following are tips for children and young people who may witness bullying:

- ask a teacher or trusted adult for support
- let the person doing the bullying know that what they are doing is bullying
- refuse to join in with his or her bullying and walk away
- support the student who is being bullied
- support their friends and protect them from bullying by being there for them (children who are alone are more likely to be the target of bullying).