

Media release

Childhood bullying hurts parents too, poll finds

Australian parents are crying out for more help to tackle and prevent childhood bullying as research shows one in five report one or more of their children was bullied in the last school term.

Almost every parent (89 per cent) of a child who was bullied said the experience had affected the whole family. One in six parents had felt physically sick, and one in five felt depressed or anxious. Almost half (48 per cent) worried about the long-term effects of bullying on their child, while many were angry (44 per cent) and frustrated at being unable to help (44 per cent). One in three (32 per cent) felt guilty for not being able to stop the bullying while one in four felt helpless (28 per cent).

[The Royal Children's Hospital \(RCH\) National Child Health Poll](#) on childhood bullying found while most parents have a good understanding of what bullying is, and the serious potential effects on children, half of all parents still said they needed more information on how to protect their child.

The poll of 1575 parents caring for 2548 children also found:

- One in four (23 per cent) parents think bullying is a big problem at their child's school
- Late primary school aged children or 'tweens' (aged 10 to 13 years) were more likely to have been bullied (21 per cent) compared with early primary school-aged children (14 per cent) and teenagers (17 per cent)
- Most children (85 per cent) who were bullied experienced the bullying at school
- Only half of parents (48 per cent) think their child's school manages bullying well, and one in four (23 per cent) were unaware of their child's school bullying policy
- One in three (36 per cent) think they can help make a difference in reducing bullying at their child's school and one in ten said it was up to teachers not parents to educate children on how to respond to a bully
- Among those bullied, parents reported that verbal bullying was most common (78 per cent), followed by social bullying (56 per cent), physical bullying (49 per cent) and online bullying (30 per cent). Most children who were bullied (79 per cent) experienced two or more types of bullying, with one in eight (12 per cent) experiencing all four types of bullying
- Children with a physical or mental health disorder were twice as likely to have been bullied
- Most parents (87%) are not confident they would know if their child was being bullied, and only half (46%) said they would know if their child was bullying others

Poll Director, Paediatrician Dr Anthea Rhodes, said: "Bullying is not just a schoolyard problem, it is a whole community problem – it is serious and common and it can have harmful effects on the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. While it was great to see that most parents understand what bullying is and how it can affect kids, many are feeling out of their depth and are crying out for support on how to help their children."

Despite a lack of confidence in their knowledge, the majority of parents are aware of strategies to support their child, including encouraging them to tell a teacher (94 per cent), encouraging them to make new

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friends (76 per cent), encouraging them to tell the bully to stop (77 per cent) and to seek help from other children (51 per cent).

"However, only half of parents spoke to their kids last school term about bullying or what to do if they saw someone being bullied. Parents are telling us they need help to have these conversations," Dr Rhodes said.

"Of concern, some of the actions parents said they would use to try and deal with bullying are considered less productive, and could actually aggravate bullying situations. For example, more than half of parents (56 per cent) said they would directly approach the parent or carer of the child doing the bullying, and a third (36 per cent) said they would be likely to directly approach the child doing the bullying.

"One in three parents (32 per cent) said they would keep their child home from school for a break from the bullying, which ultimately does not help deal with the problem and can further socially isolate the child."

When it comes to online bullying, the poll found:

- Among those parents who reported that their child had experienced bullying in the past school term, one in three said the bullying had happened online
- Most parents (55 per cent) are not confident they could tell if their child was being bullied online
- Almost all (93 per cent) teenagers have access to online communication, yet one in six (17 per cent) parents have not spoken with their teen about how to protect themselves and others from cyberbullying

Dr Rhodes said: "Nearly half (49 per cent) of parents said they would stop their child using social media and 35 per cent said they would ban mobile phones if they were experiencing cyberbullying. But research shows children are likely to find other ways to access online communication if their parents ban them from it at home, and that they will be less likely to talk to their parents about what they are doing online as they fear getting in trouble.

"Parents need to keep communication lines open so their child is more likely to share concerns with them. They can help protect their child by talking with them regularly and helping them to understand how to navigate online worlds safely."

Dr Rhodes also advised parents to get help and support for themselves.

"Bullying can be emotionally draining and can bring out a parent's own past experiences. It's important to reach out for support. Schools are a good source of help, as well as government websites and the eSafety Commissioner's office. Seeking help from their own GP or counsellor can also help parents support their child," Dr Rhodes said.

Note - Please include the following with your reports:

If you or someone you know needs help call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636.

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TIPS FOR PARENTS

Bullying

1. Talk with your child regularly and listen to what they have to say
2. Reassure your child that it's not their fault and bullying is never ok
3. Contact your child's school for support
4. It's best not to approach the bully or their parents yourself
5. Seek help from a counsellor, psychologist or GP if needed

Cyberbullying

1. Block or defriend the offender
2. Discuss the situation with a school staff member
3. Collect evidence with screen shots
4. Report inappropriate behaviour to the app or social media site
5. Report inappropriate behaviour to the eSafety Commissioner