



## Self Worth - Children and Bullying

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Bullying is a problem that many children experience outside the home, especially at school.

Contrary to the old-fashioned belief that bullying is a normal part of childhood, it's important for parents and teachers to get involved in their children's lives and make sure they are not being bullied. Bullying can have serious effects on Self Worth and physical health—effects that could last way beyond childhood.

### Bullying and low Self Worth

A child who is regularly bullied can develop low Self Worth. Self Worth is usually defined as an individual's perception of themselves. It can be measured by how much a person appreciates and loves who they are as a person.

A person's childhood years are extremely important. This is a crucial time that affects the formation of their Self Worth. If a child is constantly being harassed at school—whether physically or verbally—they will gradually come to lose confidence in themselves. They may even begin to dislike themselves for their so-called 'weaknesses' or 'flaws'. For instance, if a child is getting bullied because he or she is overweight, they will start seeing themselves as overweight whether they are or not. If they are getting teased by other children regarding their glasses, they might want to stop wearing them. Bullying can cause a child to act outside of their better judgement and parental guidance.

It is crucial to talk to the child and protect them against the effects of bullying.

### Bullying: Isolation and depression

If a child is a victim of bullying and has developed low Self Worth, they may experience feelings of isolation and depression as well. For fear of being bullied, the child may choose to stay away from social gatherings. They may prefer to stay home instead to watch TV or surf the web. It's also probable they will start showing a dislike towards going to school.

If a child used to be positive and active, but seems to be unhappy and withdrawn of late, they could be experiencing bullying behaviour. Be aware of sudden behavioural changes.

### Bullying: Overeating and weight gain

Overeating and weight gain are two common side effects of bullying in children. Since bullying can cause stress and depression, a child might choose to cope with these negative emotions by regularly



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consuming comfort foods. Since a child will want to spend more time indoors doing sedentary activities like playing videogames or watching TV, they will experience difficulty burning off excess calories and fats. Be aware of changes in diet and try to keep the kitchen stocked with healthy snacks.

### Strategies for children dealing with bullying

The first step in managing the bully is to recognise that bullying is occurring. All too often the target (many experts on bullying prefer the word 'target' to 'victim'), will not recognise that he or she is being bullied, or will believe that somehow he or she is the cause of the bullying behaviour.

1. **Report the Bully.** If bullying is occurring at school, report the bullying behaviour. Document the bullying for others (school/parents).
2. **Stand Up to the Bully.** Assert yourself and show that you won't be bullied. This is often hard to do, particularly if you have been bullied for a long time, lack confidence or if the bully persists despite being assertive. Remember, always put your safety first.
3. **Don't Show the Hurt.** The bully gets enjoyment from seeing the target's pain, suffering and humiliation. Bullies often hurt others to compensate for their own inadequacies or feelings of low Self Worth. Not showing the hurt can frustrate the bully.
4. **Get Some Support.** Although friends and relatives may not be able to intervene, they can provide support to help you deal with the stress of being bullied.
5. **You Are Not Alone.** Bullying in schools is rampant and bullying in the home is considered an 'unreported epidemic'. You're not alone in experiencing bullies. There is always going to be support for you if you just ask for it.

It is important to not let the bully get to you. A bully can attack because of their insecurities and inadequacies, and their attacks have no bearing on who you are as a person. If you witness others being bullied, intervene or provide support to the target.

According to The MindShift Foundation Clinical Psychologist Dr Lars Madsen, there is no doubt that bullying is toxic to someone's Self Worth, especially in circumstances where it is prolonged, intrusive and cannot be easily prevented or even recognised (by such methods as over the internet, via text messaging and in school playgrounds). Bullying is particularly corrosive to someone's Self Worth during childhood because it occurs at a crucial time when the child is learning about themselves and forming an identity through relationships with their peers. Being the target of ridicule and exclusion at this time can lead children to form negative beliefs about themselves and their general value and



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worth. These inaccurate beliefs can carry into a person's adult life causing unhappiness, disappointment and unsatisfying relationships. Whilst it is true to say that 'sticks and stones might break bones', the unfortunate reality is that words can do so much more damage.

There is no easy solution to bullying, however, there are things that can be helpful to deal with this problem. At a preventative level as a parent or teacher, having a '**no tolerance**' approach for bullying behaviour is important. This sets the culture for the environment and models appropriate responses to inappropriate behaviours. This 'no tolerance' must extend to even so-called humorous name-calling or mocking behaviours. What feels like fun and light-hearted banter can quickly turn out of control. Remember, the culture of a group matters, and bullying thrives in an environment that either tolerates or accepts the behaviour as somehow inevitable. The 'kids being kids', 'they don't mean it', and 'it doesn't hurt them' lines are all unacceptable responses.

When challenging bullies or holding them to account, it is important to focus on the bullying behaviour, and not the dispute they may believe they have with the other person. It is important to state clearly what it is you require of the bully in the future such as no name-calling and no violence. Remember, the goal of any intervention with young bullies is to stop the anti-social and negative behaviour first and foremost, and then replace it with more appropriate pro-social behaviour.

Being the victim of bullying causes us to feel alone, ashamed and sometimes even responsible for the ill-harmony, but remember bullies thrive in circumstances where others do not hold them to account. Talking to a teacher, a parent or someone that you can trust is important.

### Where to get help

Always remember you are not alone. Your doctor or registered health professionals are there to help you.

Our online resource page also has a full list of organisations where you can get further information. <http://mindshift.org.au/suggested-links/>.

### Things to remember

Dr Lars Madsen reminds us that words matter and bullying behaviour during childhood can cause long-standing difficulties for individuals. Bullies thrive in environments that accept and tolerate bullying type of behaviours. Creating no-tolerance environments is important and something that everyone can be a part of creating.



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### In summary

Bullying can lead to physical injury, social adjustment problems, emotional problems and even death. Children and adolescents who are bullied are at increased risk for mental health problems including depression, anxiety, headaches, and problems adjusting to school.

Bullying also can cause long-term damage to Self Worth. Children and adolescents who are bullied are at increased risk for illicit substance use, academic problems and violence toward others later in life.

The key to maintaining Self Worth in the face of bullying is to define a personal strategy that recognises that bullying is occurring, that holds the bully to account and that provides support to the child. A child must always have the ability to speak up and receive protection from bullying behaviour.

### Updates and Further information

For the latest updates and further information please visit [www.mindshift.org.au](http://www.mindshift.org.au).

### Our Mission

It is our mission to ensure that every person has access to the resources available to build healthy Self Worth, to have a positive sense of self and to find meaning in life.

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