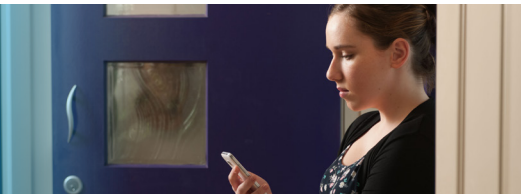


Research snapshot from a literature review

by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group



What is bullying, including online bullying?

- The way that schools and the community respond to bullying and other forms of conflict will be influenced directly by their underlying understanding of the phenomenon.
- There is general consensus on the defining features of bullying, despite ongoing discussion in academic circles.
- Online bullying has the same defining features as bullying in face-to-face (offline) contexts, with some added specific attributes.
- Contemporary definitions include both face-to-face and online bullying.
- Research has highlighted that children and young people can hold very different ideas from adults about what bullying is and why it happens.
- There is limited research on including students in the schools' work toward establishing a common understanding of bullying for the school community.
- The two main ways to consider bullying are the 'individual' perspective and the 'social-ecological' perspective. Each leads to different recommendations about best practice.
- The individual perspective locates the source of the 'problem' within the individual rather than anything about that individual's context. It leads to solutions which focus on identifying who is involved in bullying and modifying their behaviour.
- The social-ecological perspective locates the source of the 'problem' within the relationships between people as they interact within the values and norms of the wider culture. It leads to solutions which focus on modifying the attitudes and social norms in the school and wider culture.
- The different contexts of research, the law and education use slightly different ways of defining bullying. While the core concepts are shared, the definitions differ slightly in relation to what aspect is emphasised.

- The national definition of bullying for Australian schools is:

Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons. Bullying can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert).

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying. However, these conflicts still need to be addressed and resolved.

- The national definition draws on decades of research, and considers the educational context and the aims and needs of schools. It places an emphasis on the relationships involved, and working with students and the whole school community to promote respectful relationships.

Implications for schools

- It is important for schools to ensure a common understanding of bullying is shared by all school community members (staff, students, parents and carers).
- A collaborative and inclusive process of establishing a shared understanding of bullying within the school community is an investment in positive and lasting solutions.
- Positive school-home collaboration is more likely to be achieved by involving parents and carers and students in the discussion about what bullying is and how it can be changed. Respecting and including students' ideas and views about bullying leads to a shared understanding.
- A shared definition of bullying in the school's policy underpins school action.
- School approaches to bullying need to encompass both face-to-face and online bullying.
- Schools can benefit from considering both the individual and the social-ecological perspectives so that they focus both on individual characteristics and behaviours, and school social and cultural norms related to behaviour, aggression and power.

- The national definition of bullying for Australian schools recognises the needs of the educational context for a definition that emphasises relationships and potential areas for action. It provides a starting point for discussion within schools. The national definition is found on the Safe Schools Hub and on the Bullying. No Way! websites.
- Some attributes specific to the online social context may generate additional concerns, but may also provide schools and families with broader options for supporting students to self-manage, protect themselves, report incidents, and learn appropriate ways to relate to other people in the online context.
- Schools need to respond to all types of inappropriate behaviour of students, not just bullying. When school communities have a shared understanding of bullying and how it differs from other types of conflict or aggression, they are able to respond appropriately.

Want to know more?

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Research snapshot from a literature review

by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group



What is the prevalence of bullying in schools?

- There is no single 'student population' prevalence rate for bullying that can be used across contexts with confidence. All research on this topic includes cautions and limitations about the use of prevalence figures.
- Differences in research design and methodology — including varied reporting and data collection, varied student population characteristics, and differing forms of bullying investigated — mean a single prevalence figure for bullying has not been firmly established.
- Where a single prevalence figure is suggested for general use, it is usually calculated using the prevalence figures found across a large number of studies.
- A single prevalence figure may hide complex and important details about which students are more likely to be involved and when, which, if left unacknowledged, could contribute to the failure of anti-bullying strategies.
- Research has established that, not only does bullying prevalence vary at different times of the year, there is also a need to distinguish between persistent bullying and bullying that is time-limited.
- Prevalence also varies across student age ranges, with well-recognised peaks at various stages of certain ages (mid-primary school) and at times of transition (primary to high school). As well, some subgroups of students appear more likely to experience bullying than others.
- With this complexity potentially obscured, a single 'student population' prevalence figure from research may be of limited value for schools in informing their response to bullying.
- Another issue in establishing the prevalence of bullying in research is some students' unwillingness to report, or the reluctance of many to talk about bullying with adults. This affects data sources and the validity of research findings.
- Students have told researchers that they do not report bullying because they fear not being believed or not having their concerns appropriately and thoughtfully addressed by relevant adults. Different understandings of what constitutes bullying may also contribute to a failure to report.

- The reluctance of students to report bullying could potentially misinform research hypotheses and recommendations for practice because they are based only on the experiences of those who are willing to report bullying.
- Research has shown a strong relationship between positive relationships with teachers and students' willingness to report bullying.
- The best estimate extrapolated from the research is that one student in four reports bullying occurring in person, and one student in five reports online bullying, but these figures should be used with caution.
- Debate continues on whether the rate of bullying is increasing, or whether the community is less tolerant of bullying, leading to greater awareness and higher levels of reporting.
- The 'need to know' the scale of the problem of bullying is understandable, but quantifying what is essentially a social relationship dynamic is indeed challenging. Some academics suggest it is not quantifiable.

Implications for schools

- Prevalence figures from research provide general information for schools, but have limited value to inform schools' approaches to bullying.
- In order to identify important variations in bullying prevalence across time and across student subgroups within the school community, schools need to gather rich local data which will better inform their anti-bullying initiatives.
- Collecting data on the number of incidents is only part of getting a full picture of the school. Student surveys and school 'audits' integrated within the school's regular and ongoing monitoring will provide rich detailed information on which to plan prevention and responses.
- Data-based decision-making at a local level allows schools to plan, communicate and monitor the effectiveness of their approach.
- Schools can target their resources to those student ages/stages with an identified peak in bullying, i.e. during Years 4–5 and at the transition to, and first year in, high school.

- Students' willingness and confidence to report bullying may depend on the appropriateness of the processes the school provides for students to talk to staff, and on appropriate and respectful responses.
- Finding ways to encourage accurate and timely reporting of bullying helps schools to gain a more accurate picture of bullying in their community.
- Enhancing positive teacher–student relationships is a key area for school action to promote student reporting of bullying.
- The nature of bullying points to the need for schools to investigate and understand their local situation well, and to target anti-bullying strategies according to their own findings.
- Schools need to ensure they treat any report of bullying as an opportunity for all students involved to learn how to behave more appropriately, to resolve conflict in appropriate ways, and to navigate their social networks through respectful relationships.

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Research snapshot from a literature review

by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group



Who is involved in bullying?

- Bullying is highly dynamic, and can vary according to the interactions involved, and across social and physical contexts.
- Individuals can play various roles in bullying, including the individuals being bullied, those bullying others, and bystanders who may be assistants, reinforcers, outsiders or defenders. One individual can play one role, e.g. assistant, in one context while taking a different role, e.g. the person being bullied, in another.
- It is more useful for understanding the bullying dynamic in a group of students to focus on the roles played by everyone within the peer group context, and the often varying roles within and immediately around this group, rather than focusing on one individual.
- In school environments, the labels 'bully', 'bully-victim' and 'victim' can lead to rigid or essentialist thinking (i.e. the 'problem' is permanent and existing within an individual), and to blaming and punitive approaches.
- Recent research has looked at the social purposes of bullying within students' interpersonal and social development. This work provides insights into the reasons some students are more likely to be involved in any of the roles.
- While research over many years has suggested that the characteristics of certain students makes them more likely to be bullied, the overall picture is that any 'non-normative' characteristic that sets a child apart from the group places them at greater risk of being bullied.
- Standing out in any way increases the risk of being bullied. This suggests that the social function of bullying for students is often to 'enforce' the accepted social norms within the peer group. The social norms of a student group are drawn from what they observe in the wider community, e.g. norms about gender-appropriate behaviour, ability, appearance.
- Understanding the motivations, values and beliefs of all students in all roles involved in bullying provides a basis for prevention and responses in schools that acknowledge bullying as having a social purpose for the students involved.

- Understanding how children and young people make sense of bullying within their peer social cultures is central to understanding their actions, and to developing appropriate anti-bullying approaches with them.
- Young people commonly identify enhancing social status as a key motivator for bullying.
- Disengagement and emotional distancing are often exhibited by students who engage in bullying, and those who witness bullying without intervening.
- Although most incidents of bullying are witnessed by peers, most will not intervene to stop it, thus providing tacit approval for the behaviour.
- Students commonly express a belief that bullying is wrong, but may experience concern about losing social status themselves through intervening.
- Bystanders consider a number of factors in making a decision to act, including their relationship to those involved, the apparent seriousness and emotional impact, the social hierarchy, the perceived 'contributing' role of the student being bullied, and the social roles and responsibilities of everyone present.
- The role and motivations of bystanders to intervene have been a key focus in recent bullying research. It has been proposed that bystanders are the key to stopping bullying.
- The research suggests that working with bystanders to provide skills and support to safely intervene may be more successful than working only with those students directly bullying or being bullied.

Implications for schools

- The pejorative labels of 'bully' and 'victim' are not helpful for finding positive solutions; a more useful approach is to describe the roles of students involved in bullying.
- Schools should examine whether they are promoting thinking about bullying in a way that only considers the attributes of those targeted. This can potentially lead to blaming the 'victims' for their fate by allowing others to distance themselves from the harm or hurt caused.
- Given that any non-normative behaviours or physical characteristics that make students stand out increase the likelihood of them being bullied, it is important for schools to overtly and directly promote the value of diversity and inclusion.

- Schools can bring students' attention to how 'norms' in the wider community that restrict or marginalise some people's behaviour and appearance may be 're-created' at the school level.
- As bullying is a social and group process, intervention is more successful when targeted at the peer-group social level, rather than only at the individual level.
- As young people commonly identify enhancing social status as the key motivator for bullying, effective school policy and practice addresses social hierarchy and competition in schools.
- School can enhance students' awareness of the roles they play in the bullying interaction, as well as increasing their empathetic understanding of the experience of the person being bullied, in order to reduce bullying.
- Schools can teach all students appropriate and safe bystander strategies and encourage students to intervene in ways that do not compromise their own safety — this encompasses physical safety and social status.
- The assessment made by students regarding their own safety and wellbeing when they decide whether or not to intervene in bullying should be respected by the school.
- Schools may positively influence bystanders by respecting and addressing the range of complex factors which drive their behaviour choices; schools can support students to be active and safe bystanders through support, information and skilling.
- Understanding the motivations, values and beliefs of all students in all roles involved in bullying provides a basis for intervention programs, and helps to enable schools' responses to appropriately reflect bullying as a social dynamic.
- Despite whole-school approaches, some students will continue to persistently bully others and some students may continue to be more frequently bullied. These students do not necessarily respond to processes and strategies that work for most students, and require more intensive and focused intervention or case management.
- Because disengagement and emotional distancing are often exhibited by students who engage in bullying and those who witness bullying without intervening, schools can counter bullying by focusing on student engagement and on social-emotional development.

Want to know more?

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Research snapshot from a literature review

by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group



What are the impacts of bullying?

- Research has identified negative impacts, not only for those who are bullied, but for those who bully others and those who witness bullying.
- The negative social and health outcomes observed in children and young people who persistently bully others suggest that such behaviour is a warning sign to educators for closer attention and action from parents and schools. There is a strong rationale for intervention with those who bully others that goes beyond punishment for their inappropriate behaviour.
- Negative impacts for students who have been bullied have been observed in school engagement, academic achievement and many aspects of wellbeing while at school, and long-term impacts have been identified for physical and mental health. It is likely the relationship between being bullied and these later problems is complex and reciprocal (rather than simply causal), possibly reflecting a cycle of harm over years.
- The most commonly described forms of bullying are verbal, physical and social. Verbal, physical, and social actions in bullying can be overt or covert, direct or indirect, face-to-face or online.
- In terms of negative impacts, the most significant problems have been noted in students subjected to direct and relational forms of bullying.
- Young people consider online and offline (face-to-face) settings to be connected rather than separate. The connection is their social lives being 'lived' across two environments involving interactions with people they know in both.
- While some previous research has suggested that online bullying leads to more significant negative outcomes, the majority of students in a recent Australian study considered face-to-face bullying more harmful than online bullying.
- As well as harm that may be apparent to others, the social dynamic nature of bullying means that individuals can be harmed through experiencing contempt and exclusion from peer relationships. More recent work has also explored how social anxiety, abjection and contempt production are created through bullying.
- These negative feelings of social anxiety, fear and distress about being treated with contempt can continue while away from the school, not just for online bullying, but for bullying that occurs face-to-face at other times.
- Many factors have been identified as relevant to students' assessment of whether unwanted actions are harmful, so it seems the effects of bullying are specific to each individual.
- Many students who are bystanders to bullying experience moral distress and social anxiety from witnessing or having to act in response to a disturbing incident which they consider to be wrong. Students feel distress about not knowing how to act and feeling concerned about their own status or safety.
- It would be simplistic to attribute poor life outcomes to a single aspect of a student's life, i.e. bullying experienced at school, without also considering the complex influences of other environmental, personal and developmental differences.
- It is clear that bullying is associated with numerous and lasting negative impacts on individuals' physical and mental wellbeing into adulthood.

Implications for schools

- The correlation of student bullying with a range of adverse impacts later in life provides a strong rationale for intervention and preventative support to students.
- Bullying should not be dismissed as an innocuous, harmless or 'normal' part of growing up.
- Bullying can be harmful for everyone involved, and all students involved in bullying need support, including those who are bullied, those bullying others and those who are bystanders.
- It is imperative that schools' interventions and responses are respectful of students and do not trigger further social anxiety or potential harm for them.
- Approaches to countering bullying within the school community will be more comprehensive and appropriate when students' views about why bullying is happening and how harmful it is for them are included. Adults' interpretations may not be accurate and may result in responses which are inappropriate.

- Regardless of the type of bullying, students can experience harm and negative impacts at school and continuing into life, so schools need to be aware of all 'faces' of bullying — verbal, physical and social; covert and overt; direct and indirect; face-to-face and online.

Want to know more?

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Research snapshot from a literature review

by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group



What role do parents and carers have in relation to bullying?

- Bullying seeps into and out of the school context, and it is impossible to ignore the role of families and communities in this situation.
- The quality of a child's relationship with their parents or carers and the parenting style they experience have a significant influence on a child's risk of experiencing bullying.
- Child-centred, authoritative parents appear to have an overall positive influence in reducing the likelihood and the impact of bullying.
- Children whose parents were bullied in their childhood are more likely to be bullied, suggesting familial patterns of behaviour and social interaction may be involved.
- Parental warmth is associated with a lower risk of being bullied, and with reducing the impact.
- Parents and carers were the most likely adult for students up to Year 6 to tell about bullying, with friends and peers being relied on as confidants as students grew older.
- There is currently no empirical evidence about the effectiveness of specific strategies that parents use to respond to bullying. Practical strategies suggested to parents are based instead on what is considered good practice in wider behavioural research.
- Solution-based, person-centred approaches are considered more effective than autocratic, punishment-based strategies for parents to respond to bullying.
- Cooperation and communication between home and school about preventing bullying is essential, but can be challenging.
- Some parents may be reluctant or unable to engage with schools, some are unaware of issues due to their child's unwillingness to disclose bullying, and some grapple with their own emotional responses to their child's bullying experience.
- The responsibility rests with schools to accommodate parents' involvement as much as feasible.
- Community services have a role in complementing the work done by schools, providing targeted support to young people and their families outside the school setting.
- Wide-scale community engagement, including national awareness campaigns about bullying, supports parents and carers to develop skills and knowledge which can assist positive collaboration between home and schools.
- Research suggests that attempts to address bullying cultures and experiences are unlikely to succeed when school and home are treated as separate and distinct settings without overlap.

Implications for schools

- Involving parents in whole-school planning is a way to improve student relationships and reduce bullying, and allows schools to communicate their plans and processes to the parents in a variety of ways.
- Involvement of schools in broad community awareness campaigns about bullying supports cooperation between home and school.
- Children and young people can be supported in both home and school settings when active and genuine attempts are made by schools to create positive conversation opportunities to facilitate the exchange of ideas and information with parents and carers.
- Collaboration can be challenging. Schools need to develop their capacity to engage with parents and carers using strategies suitable to their local context.
- Schools may find it productive to communicate with parents and carers about the importance of the home environment and the quality of the relationship between children and young people and their parents.
- Through parental engagement strategies and communication, schools can promote person-centred approaches as being more effective than autocratic, punishment-based strategies to address bullying.
- Schools can promote the value of 'checking in' — maintaining open communication between parents and children to increase the likelihood that parents will notice signs of bullying.

- School policy and other documents which include parents as vital partners in countering school-based bullying foster collaboration between parents and carers and schools. Collaboration is central to positive solutions to bullying.

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Research snapshot from a literature review

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What is the role of school culture and school climate in countering bullying?

- Patterns of social interaction, including bullying, do not occur in a vacuum — they are influenced by the setting in which they occur.
- Through their social interactions, children and young people participate and 're-create' the social world around them. The school culture and climate have a significant impact on students' interactions.
- Classroom and school climate appear to be the main variable between schools seen as either effective or ineffective in dealing with bullying.
- School climate is generated through the behaviour and relationships of everyone within the school community.
- The effectiveness of bullying prevention approaches may depend on how well they target the school climate and address the school 'ecology'.
- Because bullying occurs within a multi-layered context — the layers being individual, peer and whole-school — successful school-based interventions need to take a multi-level approach, and involve students, staff and parents and carers.
- The explicit teaching of values to students has been shown to promote a positive school climate.
- A strong correlation has been found between positive teacher–student relationships and both lower levels of bullying and increased feelings of safety for students.
- Specific training about bullying is a significant factor in teachers' ability to effectively respond to bullying. Calls for urgent attention to in-service teacher education are very common in contemporary studies about countering bullying in schools.
- It is critical to take teachers' personal perspectives and skills into account in implementing anti-bullying approaches.
- Teachers' perception that they would be supported by their principal is strongly related to their sense of self-efficacy in working with students involved in bullying.
- Teachers (as well as other staff and parents and carers) have a key role in modelling appropriate behaviour to students.

- Research highlights a strong link between adult behaviour and the frequency of student bullying, emphasising the importance of considering positive whole-school and community relationships in tackling bullying.
- The issues of workplace bullying for teachers is outside the scope of this work. However, the multi-level approaches identified as most effective to address student bullying need to involve staff relationships and behaviour as well.

Implications for schools

- The importance of a positive school climate suggests embedding anti-bullying responses and prevention within a whole-school approach.
- Teachers' everyday role in countering student bullying should be recognised in school policy and practice.
- Effective school-based anti-bullying initiatives promote positive social interactions between students and teachers in particular, and also between all members of the school community.
- The explicit teaching of positive school values to students has been shown to promote a positive school climate, which in turn is related to lower levels of bullying.
- Given that teachers' ability to respond appropriately to bullying depends on beliefs, knowledge, and skills, teacher professional development about countering bullying is essential.
- Given that teachers' responses are related to their perceived support from the principal, genuine support from the school's administration for staff is central to a whole-school approach.
- Taking the personal perspectives and beliefs of teachers into account when preparing bullying prevention and intervention strategies will lead to more effective outcomes.
- A link between adult behaviour and the frequency of bullying is highlighted in research, emphasising the importance of considering positive whole-school and community relationships in tackling bullying.
- Adults within the school setting need to be aware of providing positive social role models, and to avoid engaging in bullying.

- Fostering positive relationships across the whole school and the community should be incorporated into schools' anti-bullying approaches.
- The response by schools to an incident of bullying can be seen as an opportunity to explore and enhance a positive and supportive school climate.
- Schools need to be alert to all forms of bullying occurring at all levels of the school system.
- Addressing student bullying through whole-school, multi-level approaches would need to involve staff relationships and behaviour as well.

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Research snapshot from a literature review

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What is the role of school policy?

- School staff must make sense of theory and research on bullying while operating within the legal framework, jurisdictional requirements, standards for best practice in learning and teaching, and the complexities of children's and young people's personal and social development.
- Limited research is available on the effectiveness of schools' anti-bullying policies.
- Each school is a unique, diverse and dynamic social community, with particular characteristics which need to be reflected in local school policy.
- The school's anti-bullying policy is the vehicle to articulate the school community's shared understanding of bullying and how best to respond, and the agreed preventative and responsive strategies implemented by the school on the basis of this understanding.
- The actual process of developing a school policy is an exercise in exploring, developing and articulating the school community's values and beliefs about students and about bullying.
- Guidelines for good practice in policy development and implementation are provided for Australian schools in the *National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF)*. The NSSF is based on extensive expert consultation.
- Research reinforces the importance of school policy being relevant to students. Understanding how children and young people make sense of bullying within their peer social cultures provides a basis for developing relevant anti-bullying policies and approaches.
- Policy can fail to make any practical difference unless it is relevant, representative, well developed and used as a 'living' document.
- The involvement of students as well as parents and carers in development and implementation helps to create a policy document for all members of the school community.

Implications for schools

- There is no 'one size fits all' policy recommended for addressing bullying in schools, but the NSSF and jurisdiction-specific frameworks provide guidelines for school policy development.
- Schools can use policy development and implementation as a way to involve everyone in the school, and to take a systemic whole-school approach to preventing and responding to aggression, including bullying, on all levels within the school.
- School policy related to countering bullying needs to be relevant to students; involving students in policy development helps to create a 'living' document.
- Including statements in policy about the schools' values, perspective and approach to countering bullying helps to reduce fragmented approaches or reliance on unproven fad programs.
- Given the social role of bullying based on the key motivation of enhancing social status, schools' policies and practices must encompass social hierarchy and competition in schools.
- School policy focuses on creating positive, safe and supportive learning environments, rather than issues. A school's anti-bullying policy may appropriately be incorporated within other school policies, such as the student wellbeing or positive student behaviour policy. However, the policy that relates to how the school responds to bullying should be clearly identified for the whole-school community.
- Schools need to promote their anti-bullying policies and communicate to the school community.

Policy guidelines from the *National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF)*

Element 3 of the NSSF provides guidance to schools on the development of policy and procedures.

Element 3: *Whole school, collaboratively developed policies, plans and structures for supporting safety and wellbeing.* *Examples of actions/practices include:*

- *The school's policies on safety and wellbeing have been drafted, refined and reviewed in **collaboration** with teachers, parents, carers and students.*
- *The policies include **clear plain language** definitions of terms including student wellbeing, aggression, violence, bullying, cyberbullying, cyber harassment and acceptable use of technology.*

- The policies should include information about:
 - the school's **expectations about students' positive behaviour** towards others in the school, including when outside school hours and off school grounds
 - all school community members' **rights to and responsibilities for safety and wellbeing**
 - the **school's role in managing** any behaviours that occur that are not consistent with school policy
 - **procedures for dealing with critical incidents** that impact on the effective operation of the school or create a danger or risk to individuals at the school or on school related activities (i.e. a critical incident management policy).
- School policies on safety and wellbeing are **communicated to all members** of the school community at regular intervals (e.g. through assemblies, house meetings, school website, diaries).
- **Students have an opportunity to voice issues and concerns** on emerging safety and wellbeing policies (e.g. use of mobile phones, acceptable use of technology and uniforms).
- Staff implementation of safety and wellbeing policies is **fair and consistent**.
- **School regularly audits** its obligation to mandatory legislation and jurisdiction policies on safety and wellbeing at regular intervals.
- The school maintains **easily accessible and current comprehensive information** on aspects of safety and wellbeing (e.g. road safety, water safety, first aid, sexual safety, drugs and alcohol and OHS).

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What evidence-based practices can schools adopt?

- While research evidence for some Australian whole-school approaches to prevent and respond to bullying is available, many bullying programs have no research evidence or demonstrable outcomes.
- A sense of urgency about finding solutions to bullying can lead to calls for untested or un-researched programs and interventions to be rapidly adopted. While the desire to 'do something' is understandable, there is no 'quick-fix'.
- Effective school practice is informed by research; information about what doesn't work is as valuable as information about what does work.
- Approaches to countering bullying are either primarily preventative or responsive, but some are a combination. Both prevention and appropriate responses if bullying does occur are necessary.
- The emerging evidence suggests that a well-managed, comprehensive, whole-school, multi-pronged and integrated approach to bullying, which necessarily requires time, skills and resources to implement effectively, is the most likely to result in sustained positive change in the school and wider community.
- A social-ecological view of bullying leads to prevention and responses in which children and young people are encouraged to learn about how relationships work, and how values and norms are formed (and reformed) in society by each generation.
- Exploring the nature of social groups, norms, membership, hierarchy and power are important in empowering students to navigate their social world in positive and respectful ways.
- The views of students about what works to counter bullying have not yet been sufficiently explored in high-quality research.
- Even for those approaches and programs for which evidence exists, effectiveness ultimately rests with appropriate implementation by the school.
- The most frequently identified issues in implementation are the 'shortcuts' or changes that schools make to suit their context and capacities, which can change the approach or program to such a degree that effectiveness is compromised.
- While there is much yet to learn about how to influence good practice and support change in schools, the growing field of implementation science is beginning to reveal important factors for schools relevant to anti-bullying approaches.
- Fundamental to gaining wider use of research-informed practices in schools is the genuine support and agreement of educational sectors at all levels for such practices.
- Understanding the realities of the school context and teachers' necessary focus on delivering curriculum is important for establishing reasonable expectations of everyone within the wider school community.
- In addition to formal research, school-directed and school-initiated studies on the effectiveness of various approaches to respond and prevent bullying can refine and bolster knowledge.
- 'Practice-based' evidence from schools, combined with the best evidence provided by research, equips schools to take on the challenge of addressing the pervasive cultural phenomenon of bullying.

Implications for schools

- Effective school practice is informed by high-quality evidence. Schools should avoid untested approaches which may offer little more than the sense of 'doing something'. Schools need to be alert that enthusiasm and promotion can outweigh the evidence for an approach.
- Knowing what does not work is also important to guide schools' practices. Schools need to avoid strategies or programs known to be ineffective or with no evidence; not only are they a waste of time, they may have negative outcomes for students.
- Schools need to be realistic that a well-managed, comprehensive, whole-school, multi-pronged and integrated approach to bullying will necessarily require time, skills and resources to implement effectively.
- While focused on the school setting for implementation, whole-school programs require parent and community support to maximise their effectiveness for the student population.

- Bullying will be most effectively addressed through a ‘multi-pronged’ approach involving cooperation between all stakeholders (parents, teachers and students), and investment in resourcing and capacity building for schools, police, legal services and community organisations to support their involvement in preventative and responsive actions against bullying.
- Frameworks guide schools to undertake the necessary range of actions and strategies to counter bullying, and reduce piecemeal approaches, poorly coordinated efforts, and doubts being raised within the school community.
- Approaches which focus on social-emotional learning and equipping students with skills to deal with problems, conflict and other adversity show considerable promise in terms of countering bullying.
- In terms of maximising limited time and resources, research on the ages, patterns and forms of bullying suggests that the largest positive effect may be produced through concentrated effort in the middle primary school years, just prior to the transition to secondary school, and within the first two years of secondary school.
- Schools can bolster program effectiveness by planning well for implementation and sustainability.
- Implementation entails a change process that embeds and sustains the intervention in a real-world setting (staged activities and drivers to build infrastructure and capacity), and enables the school to change its way of doing things.
- Even evidence-based anti-bullying approaches cannot be effective without being implemented ‘with fidelity’ (as intended) and without the inclusion of the whole-school community.
- Schools can share their school-directed and school-initiated research on the effectiveness of various approaches to respond and prevent bullying to add to the picture provided by formal research.
- Schools can access reviews of programs and approaches at [KidsMatter](#) and [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) websites.
- The time and effort to investigate the evidence base for a particular anti-bullying approach is an investment in the school and the students. Schools are too busy to waste time on ineffective programs, and students rely on schools to implement anti-bullying approaches that work.

Want to know more?

This research snapshot is based on *A review of literature (2010–2014) on student bullying by Australia’s Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group*. (2015).

Other research snapshots on student bullying are available at [Bullying. No Way!](#)

Further information on bullying and on student safety and wellbeing can be found at: www.bullyingnoway.gov.au and www.safeschoolshub.edu.au