

## Perspectives on bullying

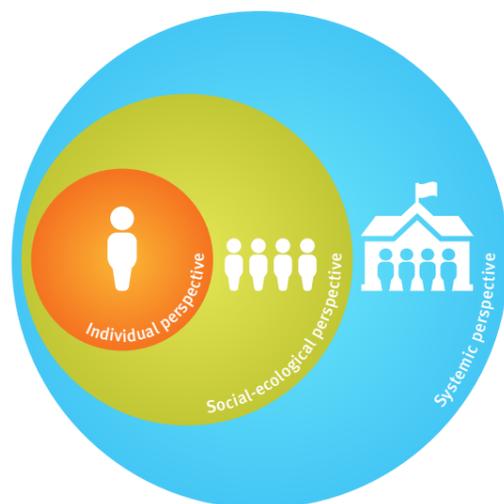
Broadly speaking, there are three perspectives on bullying.

The three perspectives represent different ideas of what bullying is, why it happens, and how it can be prevented or reduced. They are:

- **Individual perspective** – views bullying as an individual, psychological and behavioural problem
- **Social-ecological perspective** – views bullying as an interpersonal relationship dynamic problem and the expression of the varying status and unequal power relations between individuals and groups (social) in that context (ecology)
- **Systemic perspective** – views bullying as a cultural and system-wide problem related to the power dynamics inherent in all institutions.

Every approach to preventing and responding to bullying is drawn from one perspective, even if it is not clearly stated. Some approaches, particularly whole school frameworks and multi-faceted programs, may draw on more than one perspective.

The three perspectives can be represented as concentric circles with the individual within the social context within the wider society.



Contemporary definitions of bullying incorporate all three perspectives into a comprehensive understanding of bullying.

Perspectives	Bullying happens because of:	Bullying can be prevented or reduced by:	Issues, limitations and risks:	Approaches drawing on this perspective
<p><b>Individual perspective on bullying</b></p> <p>From the individual perspective, bullying is viewed as an individual, psychological and behavioural problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>natural instinct towards social dominance</li> <li>individual psychological attributes and personality traits</li> <li>the tendency of the 'target' to annoy and provoke</li> <li>lack of understanding about appropriate behaviour</li> <li>failure to conform to rules and regulations</li> <li>age and developmental phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>counselling to improve self-awareness and self-respect</li> <li>training for impulse control and anger management</li> <li>training for problem solving and social skills</li> <li>supporting 'targets' to be less vulnerable by modifying their behaviour</li> <li>the development and enforcement of firm rules and boundaries</li> <li>limiting of opportunities and risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>emphasises measurement and remediation of individual 'deficits'</li> <li>does not engage with underlying social causal factors, such as values about diversity, social beliefs and attitudes</li> <li>conflict resolution and peer mediation are not effective because bullying is not the same as 'conflict'</li> <li>zero tolerance is unlikely to assist the person doing the bullying to learn alternative ways to interact with others</li> <li>punitive and threatening measures may deter reporting and undermine efforts towards attitudinal change and unforced cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental Health, Mindfulness</li> <li>Resilience training</li> <li>Skills training</li> <li>Social and emotional (SEL) learning programs</li> <li>Support group method</li> <li>Peer support, mentoring, buddy and friendship approaches</li> <li>Mediation and Restorative justice</li> </ul> <p><i>Examples: You Can Do It, Power Up, Bounce Back, Rock and Water, Reach for the Stars, Better Buddies, The Helping Friends Program, Friends for Life, parts of Friendly Schools if done in isolation, zero-tolerance, exclusion and expulsion, boot camps</i></p>
<p><b>Social-ecological perspective on bullying</b></p> <p>From the social-ecological perspective, bullying is viewed as an interpersonal relationship dynamic problem and an expression of unequal social status and power between individuals and groups in that context (ecology). It is more than just the interaction between two people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>peer pressure and the desire to conform to social norms</li> <li>social dynamics between students</li> <li>community norms, including the modelling of parents/carers, staff and other school community members</li> <li>beliefs about people that are used to justify discriminatory or victimising behaviour</li> <li>social messages about appropriate or desirable characteristics and behaviour (e.g. aggression is okay, toughness means strength) which lead to acceptability of bullying-like behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>modelling and developing values in students and school connectedness</li> <li>developing students' knowledge and skills in positive bystander behaviour to positively influence responsible individual action</li> <li>using activities, language and resources to recognise, critically examine and confront discriminatory attitudes and behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inadequately trained practitioners or poorly executed procedures may make matters worse</li> <li>requires a focus on the knowledge and skills of teachers, and requires teachers to investigate their own beliefs and biases about individuals and groups in society</li> <li>substantial time and resource investment required</li> <li>requires whole school community engagement which may be challenging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social and emotional (SEL) learning programs that provide opportunities for real life learning</li> <li>Critical pedagogy and critical literacy</li> <li>Community of inquiry, inquiry learning</li> <li>Method of shared concern</li> <li>Promoting positive and active bystander/peer norms</li> <li>Respectful Relationships</li> </ul> <p><i>Examples: Philosophy in schools, Growing Respect &amp; RespectED (NAPCAN), Friendly Schools, Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)</i></p>
<p><b>Systemic perspective on bullying</b></p> <p>From the systemic perspective, bullying is viewed as a cultural and system wide problem related to the power dynamics inherent in all institutions – families, schools, industries, governments, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the power differential between different social groups</li> <li>institutional, political and cultural assumptions e.g. dominance of individualist paradigm</li> <li>failure to recognise systemic violence, e.g. punitive approaches, bullying by teachers and principals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>articulation of the role of the whole school and wider community in promoting positive and respectful behaviour in policy and procedures</li> <li>professional learning for informed leadership, critical pedagogy and inquiry approaches</li> <li>employment of a sociological and political lens in the development of school curriculum</li> <li>improvement of the overall school climate and relationships amongst staff and students</li> <li>increasing civic participation through building collaborative community networks, and cross-sector and interagency activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>school climate/cultural change approaches take a significant amount of time and effort to become established</li> <li>coordination and monitoring - require schools to develop and create compatible activities, tasks, policies, and procedures</li> <li>requires considerable investment in informed and strategic leadership</li> <li>without adequate implementation support, social, environmental or psychological factors may be neglected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Whole-school' organisational approach</li> <li>Critical pedagogy and critical literacy</li> <li>Equity and inclusion/anti-discrimination focus</li> <li>Education or curriculum-based approach</li> <li>Human rights and democracy</li> <li>Participatory action research</li> <li>Student voice and activism</li> <li>Cross sector and interagency projects</li> </ul> <p><i>Examples: Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support, Productive Pedagogies, Excellence in Teaching</i></p>