

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.

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