

ACTION NOT REACTION

A Bullying Action Guide for Parents, Caregivers and families.



by Donna Mahoney

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Dear Parents, Caregivers and Families,

Thank you for purchasing the Bullying Action Guide - "Action not Reaction".

This guide has been created as your "go to" Action Plan for dealing with bullying in an easy to follow, step by step process that will not only empower you, your child and your family, it will ensure that the necessary action has been taken for all involved.

This guide is designed to help you find your way through the maze of information that is available and is designed for those parents dealing with bullying for the first time.

When we Act not React we achieve greater outcomes and take the focus off being a victim and empower our children to be action takers even in the face of adversity.

As a Counsellor who specialises in Trauma Therapy, I have worked with many children and teens who are dealing with bullying including the emotional and physical trauma it causes. I work with them individually and also through delivery of empowerment workshops directly through schools.

My aim is to ensure that our children are protected and empowered with the skills they need to live life to its fullest. **I cannot change what has happened in someone's life, however I can change how it impacts the rest of their life.**

Yours in healing,

Donna Mahoney

Principal Practitioner

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STEP ONE - STAY CALM & REASSURE

When our children are hurting, regardless of the cause, the first thing we want to do is immediately react in a negative way against the person or thing that is causing the harm. In the case of bullying, this is the worst thing you could ever do, not only for your child but for your family and for the outcome you want to achieve - ending the bullying!

The first thing is to stay calm and reassure your child that you believe them and that they are not going to deal with it alone. It may seem ridiculous but part of the fear that comes from bullying is that a child doesn't think anyone will believe them and also that the parent will create a fuss at the school and it will make it worse.

When you reassure them and they see you remaining calm, it brings a different perspective to the issue and you can then calmly sit down and work through it to form an action plan together.



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STEP TWO - REFLECTION

When your child is in danger it is a normal response to want to rush out and protect them at all costs. Most of the time this comes from a place of love for the child. Sometimes however, it can actually be driven equally from a place of our own experiences.

It is really important that you ensure you are taking action for your child from the place where your child is and not from your own experiences.

Before you take any further action, ask yourself these questions:

Were you bullied as a child?

Was action taken or did you have to suffer through it for an extended period?

What impact has it had on your life?

Can you rationally deal with your child's situation without your judgment being clouded by your past experience?

It is really important that you be honest not only with yourself but with your partner/other family members.

If you don't feel you can rationally deal with your child's situation, then now is the time to involve another family member to support you and be the voice of reason to guide you through your action plan to ensure the best outcome for your child.



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STEP THREE - GET THE FACTS

Once you have had a chance to listen to your child about what is happening for them and everyone is a little calmer, it is at this point that you need to get the facts of the bullying incident or incidents. Write notes. Don't leave this step up to your memory or the memory of your child. Having it all written down even in point form will allow you to create your action plan based on the facts not on what you or your child may or may not remember.

The things you need to write down:

- When did the bullying occur?
- *Where did it occur?*
- Who was involved?
- *Were there others standing around but not taking part? Who?*
- Did anyone intervene? Who?
- *What was the bullying about?*
- Was your child physically harmed? If so, determine the level of physical harm i.e. were they shoved or pushed or were they severely harmed that they now have bruising and injuries. If there are bruising and injuries present it is imperative that you take photos and that you take your child to a Doctor and have them checked out properly and the incident is then recorded on your child's medical file. For severe injuries you may also need to make a report to Police for investigation.
- *Were there any adults close by?*
- Does your child feel threatened even when the bully isn't around?
- *Is your child afraid to attend school (or any place the bullying happens)?*

"I allowed myself to be bullied because I was scared and didn't know how to defend myself. I was bullied until I prevented a new student from being bullied. By standing up for him I learned to stand up for myself."

- Jackie Chan

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STEP FOUR - DETERMINE THE BEHAVIOUR

We all know that children can be extremely mean. Most people have experienced schoolyard teasing, name calling, taunts etc, however when your child comes home telling you they have been bullied, it is really important that you determine whether the behaviour they are experiencing is teasing or bullying (remember bullying can be emotional or physical).

How do you know which it is and why does it matter?

Teasing: When a child says something to another child that is meant to be hurtful however it only happens once, that is teasing. Whilst still not pleasant to experience and it is extremely mean, it isn't bullying.

Teasing can be hurtful however as children learn and grow they push the boundaries not only at home but also with classmates and friends. It is this behaviour that we sometimes see a child come home one day and say "John isn't my friend anymore because he was mean" and the next day they are best friends again. It is part of growing up, learning resilience to external factors and an understanding of others.

Bullying: When a child says or does something to another child that is intentionally meant to hurt (either emotionally or physically) AND they repeatedly do it and ignore requests for it to stop or they can see it is hurting, this is bullying!

This behaviour is beyond schoolyard teasing and if left unaddressed can lead to ongoing health issues such as anxiety, eating disorders, depression etc.

It should not be tolerated. Your child should not be told to "suck it up" and get over it. The should be taken seriously by all involved including the school the children attend.

It is so important that this be handled correctly to ensure that all parties realise the level of action that needs to be taken.

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EXAMPLES OF BULLYING:

Repeated name calling, taunting or insults

Pushing, shoving, punching, spitting etc

Aggressive or threatening looks that occur day in/day out

Gestures that indicate harm

Stealing or damaging property

Taking a child's lunch, demanding money, demanding their property

Intentionally leaving the child out of group activities

Spreading rumours and lies, encouraging others to repeat lies, damaging a child's social position, mimicking a behaviour, playing nasty jokes intended to humiliate

Cyber bullying, social media, texts, phone messages

Intentionally not taking action when seeing someone being bullied (important to note that you should only encourage your child to intervene if it is safe for them to do so)



Bullying is repeated actions designed to cause harm to another whether physically or emotionally.



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STEP FIVE - DISCUSS YOUR OPTIONS

It is really important to discuss the action options with your child and to keep them informed at all times. This empowers them with the knowledge that they can do something about the situation they are in and that they have your full support. This in itself can make a vast difference to the way they handle being bullied.

So what are your options?

Discuss the actions your child can take when the bullying occurs:

- Can they walk away safely;
- Act indifferently to the bully so they don't see any reaction;
- Using a firm voice to tell the bully to stop;
- Go immediately to a teacher or someone in charge

If the above doesn't stop the bullying then further action will need to be taken by you.

Talk to your child's teacher as the first point of contact and make them aware of the situation. Discuss with them how they will assist in keeping your child safe and put a plan in place to follow up with your child and the teacher in a week's time to ensure your child is no longer being bullied.

If your child comes to you before that time with further bullying incidents then it is important to contact the teacher immediately and based on their response it may be necessary to speak to the Principal as well.

Keep in mind the school may also have their own bullying procedures and it is important to work with them to ensure the safety of your child. Do not become aggressive, abusive or yell at school staff as this will only alienate them from you and put the focus on you rather than on stopping the behaviour that is impacting your child.

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STEP SIX - EMPOWER YOUR CHILD

Once you have taken the necessary action with your child's school it is important that your child keeps talking to you and keeping you informed of how things are going. Demanding that they tell you or continuously asking them may alienate them so it is important that you simply keep the communication channels open but give them the space to know they can come to you when they are ready.

It is at this point that it is a good time to think about your child's demeanour, personality and overall well-being and whether there are ways you can assist them to build self-esteem, self-worth, resilience and inner strength. Each of these play a huge part in not only coping with bullying but in dealing with difficult situations in general.

Are there local courses or workshops your child can attend to build self-esteem and resilience?

Would they benefit from joining a martial arts class to not only build self-esteem but to also build a physical resilience and empower them with self-protection skills?

If your child is someone who tends to shy away from sports and other group activities, are there other things they are interested in that you can get them involved in a group scenario i.e. if they love music then perhaps joining a community band, or if they love art they may be able to join a local kids art program.

The more of these types of events your child attends, the stronger their resilience will become. **Remember though, if your child does not want to attend these things - forcing them will not have a positive impact. Take baby steps and build them up don't give them reasons to withdraw.**

"Each of us deserves the freedom to pursue our own version of happiness. No one deserves to be bullied."
- Barack Obama

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STEP SEVEN - EYES WIDE OPEN

In our busy, modern world, it is often very easy to not really see what is going on around us as we rush to work, school, after school activities and rarely get time to stop and just take it all in. When an incident such as bullying impacts your family it can often do so with deep reaching impact for parents as you start wondering what you could have done differently so this didn't happen.

The reality is that no-one thing creates a bully or how your child responds to it and nothing you did or didn't do created the bullying situation. It takes a combination of timing, personalities, home environment (i.e. a child that has an abusive home life can often become a bully at school as a way of coping), peer pressure, societal pressure and opportunity.

Now you have put in place actions with your child and his/her teacher etc, the best thing you can do is to now think about the behaviours that are exhibited around your child whether from family, friends or other outside influences and determine if any of these need to be addressed in order to ensure your child has the best chance of being able to cope with situations such as bullying.

Are the behaviours from family/friends, positive behaviours designed to lift them up, or are there others closer to them who may constantly be eroding their self-esteem. It isn't until we truly look around us that we see what we may otherwise have missed.

An example of this would be a relative who may be a regular visitor and perhaps always makes a negative comment about your child, i.e. always commenting on their weight, commenting on them wearing glasses or any other thing that may be "different" about your child. While often these comments are said in jest and "as a joke" they can erode a child's self-esteem to the point where the child then believes they are not worthy of praise and good things in life and the downward spiral continues to where they feel they deserve to be treated badly.

It is important that you don't rush in to take action but simply observe and see what happens with your child when these situations occur and then formulate the best way forward to deal with them. That may be speaking to the other person and making them aware of the impact of their words (they honestly may not be aware of how they come across), or speaking to your child and discussing how it makes them feel.

Communication is key!

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STEP EIGHT - BE PROACTIVE

Unfortunately bullying may not be a one off incident in your child's life. You may eradicate one instance only to find yourself dealing with it again at a later stage and quite possibly through cyber bullying as opposed to traditional bullying methods.

In our technological world there are now more opportunities for bullies to get to our children a lot easier than ever before. Cyber bullying is just as relevant as physical bullying is and should be treated with the same level of intervention from you.

It is easy to say well we will just take away the devices and then they can't get to our child however that is not reality in today's world. This is the world in which your child is growing up. Devices and the internet are a normal part of life for them and it is vital that you teach them how to be safe online and as a family put together a plan for use of devices and the internet. When you are prepared and expectations are laid out from the outset you eliminate the risk of alienating your child through restricting their devices and internet usage. Again, communication is key!

What can you do?

Be open and honest with your child from the time they are able to use devices. Explain that not everyone uses them for good and that they need to adhere to the family plan for device use to ensure that you can keep their devices and them free from any harm.

Decide on a realistic timetable for usage and what is allowed etc and give your child the ability to have input so that the plan is a true family plan and everyone is then happy to work with it.

Consider investing in Family Zone - this device has been created to make life much easier to protect your child and their new FZ phone is also ensuring you can keep the kids safe while they have a smart phone. <https://www.familyzone.com/au>

Note: We are in no way affiliated with Family Zone and in no way financially compensated by them.

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WHERE TO FROM HERE

This guide was written to help you through the bullying process and was in no way intended to be an exhaustive action plan for dealing with bullying that is severe or ongoing.

If your child is still being impacted by bullying and you are not being given the support by your child's school then it is time to take the matter further based on your own situation. This could mean involving other parties such as the Education Department, removing your child from the school and moving to a new school, seeking counselling or speaking to the Police.

First and foremost take the relevant action needed to keep your child safe as that is the most important thing and then enlist the help of others whether they be professionals or family/friends to help you achieve this. Do not think you have to do this alone.

Often it is the overwhelming nature of bullying that causes us to panic and feel overwhelmed. I hope you have found this guide to be helpful and it has provided you with a structured way to move forward through your current situation and helped you to negotiate your way through what is always a difficult time for those involved.

I have included a page of resources that you may find useful in addition to this guide.

I wish you and your family well.

Warm Regards

Donna Mahoney

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RESOURCES

Act Smart Be Safe: a gateway for parents/carers, students, teachers and the community to access information to help improve youth safety. <http://education.qld.gov.au/actsmartbesafe/>

Alannah and Madeline Foundation: a national charity protecting children from violence and its devastating effects. <http://www.amf.org.au/>

Bullying. No way!: an online resource providing information for parents/carers, students and educators. <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/who/default.shtml>

ReachOut: an online resource that assists young people by providing information to improve understanding of the issues that relate to mental health and wellbeing. Reach Out also has information on how young people can get the best help from services, as well as opportunities to connect with other young people. <http://au.reachout.com>

Cybersmart - Providing activities, resources and practical advice to help young children, children, teens, parents, carers, teachers and library staff safely enjoy the online world, so their experiences are safe and positive. <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/>

Headspace - supporting young people and their mental health. Ensuring we meet the evolving and unique needs of young people and those who support them. Therefore, young people are at the centre of everything we do and they play an active role in designing, developing and evaluating our programs. <http://headspace.org.au/>

Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services. <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

We provide individual and family counselling through our practice at www.innatetherapies.com as well as providing in school programs around bullying and self-esteem.