Bullying: tips to prevent and how to help

Whether you are concerned about bullying in the workplace or want to combat bullying in schools, there are some creative and effective tactics you can use. These include preventive measures to reduce the likelihood of bullying behaviour, defend against the actions of established bullies, and help to heal the scars caused by bullying.



Tips to prevent bullying

Education: In schools, it is possible to reduce the prevalence of bullying through carefully designed social education. For example, you can increase awareness of the emotional damage caused by bullying by challenging students to write essays exploring how they would feel if they were the target of such abuse. Parents can also start educating their children at a young age, explaining the types of behaviour that constitute bullying and discussing why these behaviours are wrong. In the workplace, both training and accessible Human Resource policies can educate the workforce and create an environment of zero-tolerance.

- **Lead by example:** If you are in a leadership position within the school system or workplace, make it clear that bullying will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Reinforce policies when needed and ensure those you are leading have access to the policies and procedures that support zero-tolerance.
- **Watch out for secondary bullying:** People can unwittingly lend support to a confident bully. If someone in your environment is behaving cruelly towards others, do not allow your own behaviour to reflect tacit support for their misbehaviour.
- **Guard against cyber bullying:** Take measures to protect yourself from becoming an online target. Set complex passwords, never share any information that could make you vulnerable online, and choose strict privacy settings on social networks.

How to help yourself

- **Report bullying:** Although bullies often warn that things will get worse if you report them, this is typically an empty threat designed to make sure the bully remains in control of the situation. If possible, keep a record of emails and text messages that you can present to a parent, teacher or employer. Even if you lack records or witnesses, be sure to confide in at least one trusted friend or colleague so that you have someone looking out for your interests at work or school.
- **Do not respond to abuse:** Wherever possible, refuse to engage with a bully. They may increase the intensity or frequency of their taunts in an attempt to draw you into an exchange, but if you systematically ignore them, there is a good chance the bully will eventually become bored and move on. This tactic can be especially effective when dealing with cyber bullies.
- **Do not give in to demands:** If a bully succeeds in forcing you to do degrading or professionally questionable things, this sends a clear message that you can be manipulated. Bullies will find you much less interesting (and may even be intimidated by you) if you calmly refuse to play by their rules.

How to help others

- **Offer support:** If you notice someone being bullied, you do not have to wait for them to confide in you; they may be too frightened or anxious to discuss their situation with anyone. Instead, approach the person and gently explain what you have observed. Invite further discussion about what has been going on, and emphasize that they do not have to deal with this problem alone.
- **Help to protect the target:** You may offer to accompany a victim when they want to officially report the bullying. Thereafter, you can help by keeping an eye on the person being bullied, helping to make them feel safe and supported.

Dealing with the aftermath of bullying

- **Consider counselling:** There is no shame in seeking professional help if you are feeling overwhelmed by the damage inflicted by a bully. In the safe environment provided by a counsellor, you can discuss the painful memories and develop coping mechanisms to help you heal and move forward. The bully's cruel remarks may also have damaged your self-image, leaving you insecure about your appearance, abilities, social skills or other things. Counselling can make a positive difference to enhance your self-confidence.