

Bullying & cyber bullying: what is the difference?

The national definition of bullying for Australian schools states:

Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.

Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and 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.

Online bullying (also called cyber bullying) is bullying that is carried out through technology, including the internet (e.g. on social media sites) and mobile devices.

Research indicates that the majority of young people who bully online also bully others in person.

Communication technologies allow for different ways to bully others, but does not change the fact that the bullying behaviour (and not the technology itself) is the main issue. Technology expands the opportunities for people to bully others and creates new challenges for dealing with bullying.

One action – such as a comment or an embarrassing photo – which is repeated through sharing and forwarding to others, can be bullying if the individuals involved know each other, and have ongoing contact either online or in person.

Research continues to investigate the experiences of children and young people related to bullying.

- Approximately one in four Year 4 to Year 9 Australian students (27%) reported being bullied every few weeks or more often (considered to be frequent) in a national study
- Frequent school bullying was highest among Year 5 (32%) and Year 8 (29%) students
- 83% of students who bully others online also bully others in person
- 84% of students who were bullied online were also bullied in person
- Peers are present as onlookers in 85% of bullying interactions, and play a central role in the bullying process
- Hurtful teasing was the most prevalent of all bullying behaviours experienced by students, followed by having hurtful lies told about them
- Online bullying appears to be related to age (or access to technology), with secondary students more likely to engage in bullying online than primary school students
- Young people over the age of 15 are less likely than students between 10 and 15 years of age to be involved in online bullying
- Approximately one in five young people under 18 (20%) reported experiencing online bullying in any one year