

Most of us have seen some form of bullying... maybe at school or university, in the workplace, among families, or in sports teams, groups or clubs.

It's sad but true - bullying happens in all areas of our lives. It's important to know how to deal with it, because it can have negative effects. It might prevent us from coping at school, university or work, losing self-esteem and, in some cases, developing depression or anxiety.

What is bullying?

Bullying isn't a one-off incident (like a friend calling you a name because they were in a bad mood and then apologising later). It becomes bullying when the name-calling or the hitting or the threats go on for some time.

There are many forms of bullying. Some examples are:

- If people call you names, start rumours about you or make up things to get you in trouble
- If people make abusive phone calls, send mean or rude text messages to your mobile or post insulting stuff about you on the Internet
- When people steal your money or things you own, or intentionally leave you out of group activities
- If anyone hits, pushes, or touches you against your will, or threatens you with weapons.

When does it happen?

Bullies themselves often have problems that lead to them acting the way they do. They may need to talk to someone about what's going on in their lives as well.

Mostly people get bullied because they're different in some way. It might be because they do well, or have a disability or a different religion or culture, or are older or younger than their classmates or workmates.

Often bullies can work out what to say to make you upset. Being depressed, scared or sensitive can also make you a target for bullying.

Why it needs to stop.

Bullying is a serious problem. It disrupts your life and may cause ongoing physical and emotional health problems. It can cause you to:

- Dislike your school, university or workplace (which could lead you to leave or drop out)
- Lose self-esteem
- Develop depression or, in more severe cases, even contemplate suicide.

What can you do if you're being bullied?

If you're being bullied, it's really important to let someone know. Tell a friend, a teacher or school counsellor, a lecturer, a supervisor or your parents. If you don't want to talk to someone face to face, you could try writing a note or an email to someone you trust that lets them know what's happening and how you feel.

Sometimes it's easier to talk to someone you don't know. That's where services like Youthline, Kidsline, What's Up, Lifeline and of course The Lowdown team come in handy. We've contact details for these services in the box below.

Stick to areas where you feel safe and hang out with people you trust. Bullies won't normally pick on you as much when there are other people around.

You might not want the bully to know you're telling someone about them. It's best to choose a time and a place where the conversation won't be noticed by others.

What can you do if someone you know is being bullied?

It's important to listen to them and encourage them to talk about what's going on (and don't blame them for what's happening). If you think they might have anxiety, depression or an emotional problem which is causing or resulting from the bullying, they may need to get help from a counsellor, doctor or other health professional.

If the bullying is occurring at school, you should discuss the problem with the school authorities such as a senior teacher or a school counsellor. If it's happening at work, the employer has a responsibility to prevent it. They should do their best to find a solution.

Want to talk to someone about it?

You don't have to deal with bullying alone. It can really help to talk to someone about what's going on.

Where to get help:

If you want to chat about how you're feeling, or you've got any questions, you can;

Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626.

Email The Lowdown team in the Chat section of www.thelowdown.co.nz. You can also ask them to give you a call back if you want to talk on the phone.

Kidsline: is where you can talk to a Kidsline Buddy - a bit like an older brother or sister who is trained to help callers. Call any weekday between 4-6pm on 0800 Kidsline (0800 543 754).

What's Up: is a free phone counselling service for 5 to 18 year-olds. It operates 7 days a week from noon to midnight on 0800 WHATSUP (0800 942 8787).

Youthline: Youthline provides a free, confidential and non-judgemental telephone counselling service. They will listen to you and help you talk through your problems. You can call toll-free on 0800 37 66 33.

Lifeline: is a nationwide 24-hour counseling service on toll-free 0800 543 354.