Tip sheet 8:
Talking about bullying



8.1 Why this matters

- Bullying can hurt a young person's mental health, safety and sense of belonging.
- Bullying can happen in person or online (cyberbullying). Both can have a big impact.
- In the 2025 Mission Australia Youth Survey, 30% of young people said they were bullied or treated unfairly.
- About 1 in 4 students in Years 4–9 say they are bullied every few weeks or more.
- Bullying someone because of their race, religion, gender or disability is discrimination. It often needs adult support to make it stop.
- Many young people wait to tell an adult because they're afraid it will get worse or they'll be told to 'ignore it.'
- Schools, clubs and community groups have a duty to keep their spaces safe and free from bullying.

8.2 What you might notice

Young people experiencing bullying or cyberbullying may:

- withdraw from friends, activities or online spaces
- avoid school or change their online habits suddenly
- have headaches, stomach aches or trouble sleeping
- act irritable, ashamed, withdrawn or emotionally flat
- hide their screen or get upset after being online.

These behaviours can be signs that a young person needs support.

8.3 What helps

Believing and supporting	You can say: *'What you're feeling makes sense'* or *'You don't deserve this.'*
'Banter' check	Ask: *'Is everyone laughing? Does it stop if someone is upset?'* If it's one-sided, it is bullying, not banter.
Naming it clearly (without shaming)	Use the word 'bullying' when the behaviour is repeated and on purpose. Naming it helps young people feel believed.
Talking about online bullying	Talk about how bullying can happen in group chats, direct messages (DM) and gaming. You can use eSafety tools to help. For more information, see **Support services for adults** from the Trusted Adult Guide.
Build a 'safe' list	Identify the specific teachers or staff at school or other adults who the young person feels OK talking to. Don't assume every adult feels safe to them.
Supporting upstanders	Talk about low-risk ways peers can help, like checking in privately or offering to sit with someone.
Taking back control	Write down what happened and save screenshots of online harm. It helps you have the proof you need. Report serious cyberbullying to the eSafety Commissioner.
Following up	Bullying rarely stops right away. Check in often. Don't assume silence means it's over.

8.4 What to avoid

Minimising	Avoid saying *'It's just drama'* or *'Ignore it.'* This can stop a young person from seeking help.
Blaming	Avoid: *'Why didn't you tell me sooner?'* This puts the blame on the young person.
Lecturing	Focus on safety and support. Don't judge their social choices.
Promising to keep secrets	If a young person is at risk, taking action is the best way to keep them safe. Let them know that telling a professional is how you protect their right to be safe.
The phone ban	If a young person is afraid of losing their phone, they may stop telling you about what's happening. Removing their phone also cuts off their access to help. Instead of taking the phone, use these tools to support safety: • **eSafety Commissioner**: Advice, reporting pathways and help removing harmful online content. Report cyberbullying via eSafety. • **Kids Helpline**: A free, private and safe place for young people to talk or web-chat 24/7. • **eSafety Guide**: Step-by-step instructions on how to block, mute and report people on specific games and apps.

8.5 Quick responses

These are suggestions. Use your own words and adapt them to suit you and the young person.

If the young person says…	You can say or do…
'It's just banter… I think.'	*'If it doesn't feel safe or respectful, it isn't banter. Your feelings matter.'*
'I'm being bullied in the group chat.'	*'That's cyberbullying. It's not OK. Let's look at how to block and report it.'*
'I tried to tell them to stop and it got worse.'	*'That's not your fault. Some patterns need adult support to change.'*
'I don't want to be a snitch.'	*Reporting is about protection. Ther's a big difference between 'tattling' to get someone in trouble and 'reporting' to get someone safe.'*
'I tried ignoring it, but it didn't work.'	*'That wasn't a mistake. It just means we need more support. Let's look at new steps together.'*
'It's because of who I am.'	*'Identity-based bullying is never OK. You deserve respect for being you.'*

If the young person shares something that feels unsafe, stay calm and follow the steps in **How to respond: The 6-step-framework**. If you're unsure what to do, check in with another trusted adult or a professional. You don't have to make decisions alone.

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(unless Excluded Material)