

Bullying

Your voice matters

Your safety matters

STOPS





with me



You are not alone

a guide for children & caregivers

schools ● parents ● communities

Anti Bullying

CENTRE FOR CHILD LAW

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Does this feel familiar?



Sad and helpless?



Empowered and included?

Hello!

If you picked this booklet up because you are going through a tough time, we want you to know something right away; you are incredibly strong. Just by opening these pages and looking for information, you have taken a massive step. You deserve to feel safe, you deserve justice, and things will get better with the right support and care. REMEMBER, no type of bullying is okay. All of them cause harm; to your mind, your body, and your heart.
You do not deserve any of it.

We made this guide to be your personal toolkit. Think of it as a friend who always has your back. Inside, we are going to break down exactly what bullying is; and what it is not; so you, can spot it clearly.

Here is a quick look at what we will explore together:

The Facts: Exactly what bullying looks like and the different forms it takes.

Your Action Plan: Safe, smart steps to take if someone is targeting you.

Your Voice: How you can safely step in and make a difference, when you see someone else being bullied (no bystanders here!)

Your Rights: What the law says about your safety and responsibilities.

Your Team: A list of people and places that are ready to help you.

Your Tools: Ready-to-use letter templates to help you speak up, plus a personal anti-bullying pledge to take control of your space.

You do not have to figure this out alone. Turn the page and let's get started!

What is bullying?

Let's be clear about what it is, and what it is not.



"Bullying is when someone hurts you on purpose again and again and you find it hard make it stop."

Bullying is NOT a once-off argument or a bad day.
It happens repeatedly. The person being bullied feels helpless or afraid.

Bullying can feel different for different people.
Here are some things children who are being bullied often feel and experience.

You may feel:

- Scared to go to school or leave home.
- Embarrassed or ashamed even though it is not your fault.
- Alone, like nobody cares or understands.
- Angry but also too afraid to say anything.
- Like something is wrong with you; it is not.
- Helpless, like it will never stop.
- Sad for long periods without knowing why.

You may notice:

- You do not want to eat, or you eat too much.
- You struggle to sleep or have nightmares.
- You lose interest in things you used to enjoy.
- Your grades drop because you cannot concentrate.
- You get headaches or stomach aches before school.
- You stop talking to family and friends.
- You feel unsafe even when at home.



Why bullying is harmful and why should we talk about it:

Bullying is not just unpleasant. It causes real and serious harm.
Here is what children who have been bullied tell us and what experts know:

more info on the next page!

It harms your mental health

Children who are bullied can develop anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These feelings do not just go away. They can follow a person for years. You may start to believe the cruel things the bully says about you and that is one of the most damaging things bullying does. It makes you doubt yourself.

It harms your education

When you are afraid, your brain cannot focus on learning. Many children who are bullied start skipping school, fall behind in their work, and eventually drop out. Bullying steals your right to a proper education.

It harms your body

Stress and fear cause physical harm. Children who are bullied often have trouble sleeping, lose their appetite, and feel physically unwell. In cases of physical bullying, there can be real injuries too.

It harms your future

Children who are bullied and never supported are more likely to struggle with relationships, work, and mental health as adults. Early help makes a huge difference. That is why speaking up matters so much.

Bullying is never a normal part of growing up.

It is never something you should just accept.

You deserve better and the people around you have a duty to help.



Nobody in the world can insult me, because it is in my hands whether I except the insult.

If I reject the insult, the bully will have to carry it to his/her home!

The same with someone trying to humiliate me, humiliation needs my acceptance!

Types of bullying.

Bullying takes many forms; all of them are wrong.



Physical bullying

- Hitting, pushing, or kicking.
- Taking or breaking your things.
- Blocking your way.

Example: A learner takes Thabo's lunch every day at break time.



Social bullying

- Leaving you out on purpose.
- Spreading rumours about you.
- Telling others not to be your friend.

Example: A group tells everyone not to sit with Aisha.



Sexual Bullying

- Unwanted touching
- Sexual jokes or comments
- Sharing images without permission

Example: Someone comments on a learner's body and whistles at them despite their protest.



Verbal bullying

- Name-calling and teasing.
- Threatening you.
- Mocking how you speak or look.

Example: Learners mock Nomsa everyday about how she speaks.



Online bullying (cyberbullying)

- Mean WhatsApp messages.
- Sharing embarrassing photos or videos.
- Fake profiles to mock you.

Example: Classmates share a video of Sipho crying in a group chat.



Prejudice based bullying

- Targeting your race or culture.
- Mocking your religion.
- Laughing at someone's disability.

Example: Learners mock Fatima for wearing a hijab.

What to do if you are bullied.



Stay as calm as you can..

Walk away if it is safe.
Bullies want a reaction.
Take a deep breath.
Your safety comes first.

Tell a trusted adult.

A parent, teacher, or school counsellor.
Telling is NOT snitching.
It is protecting yourself and others.

Do not fight back physically.

It can get you in trouble, and may make things worse.
Use your voice or walk away instead.

For cyberbullying: block, report, show.

Block the person.
Report on the app.
Show a trusted adult.
Do NOT delete evidence before reporting.

Keep a record.

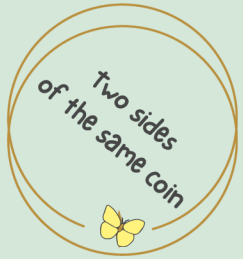
Write down what happened: the date, time, place, and what was said or done.
Take screenshots if it is online.

Stick with friends or groups.

Bullying often happens when you are alone.
Stay with others when you can.
There is safety in numbers.

Your rights & responsibilities.





" The Constitution of South Africa and the Children's Act protect you. But rights and responsibilities belong together. "

Your Rights

Right to Dignity
You have the right to be treated with respect. No one may humiliate or degrade you.

Right to Education
You have the right to learn in a safe environment, free from fear or disruption.

Right to Safety
You have the right to be protected from physical and emotional harm.

Right to Be Heard
You have the right to report bullying and to be listened to.

Right to Equality
You may not be treated unfairly because of your race, gender, religion, or disability.

Right to Privacy
No one may share your personal information, images, or messages without your permission.

Your Responsibilities

- Treat every person (online and offline) with kindness and respect.
- Think before you post; words online hurt just as much as words in person.
- Speak up when you see bullying happening.
- Know and follow your school's Code of Conduct.
- Include others in activities; make sure no one is ever left out.

You can make a difference.

Child participation means your voice counts.





Why being a bystander is part of the problem.

A bystander is someone who sees bullying happening but does nothing.



When you watch bullying and say nothing, the bully takes that as a sign that what they are doing is okay. Your silence gives them permission to continue. Research shows that bullying stops within 10 seconds in most cases when a bystander steps in. Being a bystander also harms YOU. Watching someone being hurt and feeling unable to help causes anxiety and guilt. *Many young people say that not speaking up is one of their biggest regrets.*

Example: Lerato watches Sipho gets teased everyday. Fearful of becoming the next target, she laughs along. Shipho ends up feeling hated by the entire class; including Lerato, who wants to help but doesn't know how.

Example: Liam notices a WhatsApp group targeting Zanele with cruel comments. He doesn't join in, but he doesn't report it either. Because Liam is visible online, Zanele sees his silence as an agreement.

When you SEE bullying happening: Do not be a bystander.

Do not laugh or cheer. Stand near the person being bullied. Say calmly: "That is not okay." Help them walk away. Report it to a teacher. You do not need to confront the bully physically, your presence and your voice are powerful enough.

What happens when people DO speak up:

The bullying slows down or stops
Bullies lose their power when others refuse to watch or participate.

The victim feels less alone
Knowing even one person cares makes a huge difference to a child who is suffering.

The school becomes safer for everyone
When students speak up, it creates a culture where bullying is not accepted.

Ways to take action at your school:

Start a conversation
Talk to your class about bullying. Ask your teacher to run a discussion.

Write a letter
Write to your principal asking for anti-bullying rules. Use the template in Section 8.

Make a poster
Create an anti-bullying poster for your class or corridor.

Speak at assembly
Ask your teacher if you can share a few words about bullying at assembly

Start a buddy system
Make sure no one eats alone or walks alone.

Join the SRC
The Student Representative Council is YOUR voice at school.

Ways to take action in your community:

Share this booklet

- Give a copy to a friend.
- Leave one at your local clinic.
- Share it with a younger sibling.

Talk to adults

- Tell your family about your rights.
- Ask community leaders to talk about bullying.
- Raise it at church or youth group.



Remember:
When you stay silent while someone is being bullied, you give the bully power.
When you speak up, you take that power away.



What the law says.

South African laws are on your side.

The Constitution of South Africa: Your protection.

Section 28 says every child has the right to be protected from harm, abuse, and and neglect. These rights apply to you every single day; at school, at home, and online.



The Children's Act of 2005: Adults must act.

All children must be protected from harm. Teachers, parents, and caregivers must act when a child is at risk. If an adult finds out you are being bullied and does nothing, they are breaking the law. Failure to act is a criminal offence.





SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996: Schools must keep you safe.

Schools must have a Code of Conduct that includes rules against bullying. Schools are required by law to provide a safe and supportive environment for every learner. Serious bullying behaviour can result in suspension or expulsion of the person doing the bullying.

The police must be called when bullying involves:

- Physical assault; hitting, kicking, or injuring someone.
- Sexual harassment or any sexual offence.
- Extortion; forcing someone to give you money or things.
- Threatening someone with a weapon.

In plain language:
If the bullying is serious, the police can and must be called to your school. It is no longer just a school matter. It becomes a criminal matter.

BELA ACT

The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (BELA Act): Stronger protection in schools.

- Specifically refers to bullying (including sexual harassment of a learner) as serious misconduct.
- Your school's Code of Conduct must specifically address bullying. It cannot be vague.
- The School Governing Body may suspend a learner who is repeatedly engaged in bullying other learners.
- Corporal punishment: which includes acts of punishment such as teachers hitting learners, is not allowed. Corporal punishment is a crime.
- Tell your school principal and if they do nothing. The Head of Department at your school is the next step. If nothing happens, approach the District responsible for your school. Remember you do not have to do this alone, approach adults you trust to assist.

In plain language:
the government now has stronger tools to hold schools accountable. Your school cannot ignore bullying and get away with it.

THE CYBERCRIMES ACT

The Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020: Online bullying is a crime.

- Sending harmful messages or sharing embarrassing images online can lead to criminal charges. This applies to learners too.
- If someone shares a photo or video of you to humiliate you, that is a criminal act. Think before you share.

THE FILMS & PUBLICATIONS ACT

The Films and Publications Act 37 of 1996 (as amended): Protecting you from harmful images and content.

This law protects you when people use images, videos, or content to harm or humiliate you especially online. **Here is what is means for you:**

- If someone shares a photo or video of you online without your permission to embarrass or hurt you; that is a violation of this Act.
- It is illegal to create, share, or distribute content that humiliates or degrades another person. This includes videos of fights shared on WhatsApp or TikTok.
- Any content that sexualises a child in any way is completely illegal and carries serious criminal penalties.
- You or a trusted adult can report harmful content to the Film and Publication Board (FPB). They can investigate and refer the matter to the police.

In plain language:
If someone posts or shares something online to embarrass or hurt you, that is illegal. You have the right to report it.

CHILD JUSTICE ACT

The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008:
Being young does not mean there are no consequences.

This Act explains how children who break the law are dealt with by the justice system. It is important for every learner to understand this;

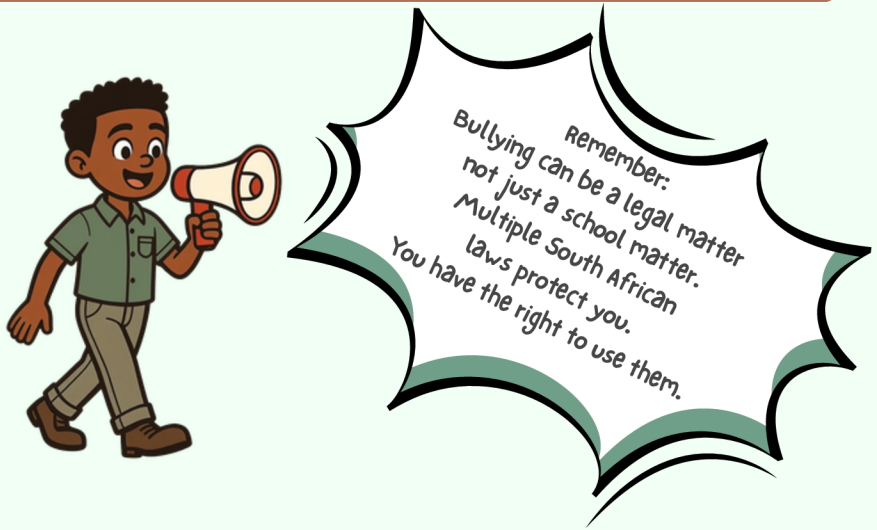
- A child above the age of 12 and older can be held criminally accountable meaning they could be charged at the Police Station in South Africa.
- If bullying involves assault, sexual harassment, extortion, or threats, a child can be charged and arrested.
- The child will appear before a Child Justice Court. The process is designed to rehabilitate but consequences are real.

In plain language:
Being a child does not protect you from the law.
If you bully someone in a serious way, you can be arrested and taken to court.
Think carefully about your actions.

PROTECTION FROM HARRASMENT ACT

The Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011: Stopping repeated harassment.

- If someone keeps harassing, threatening, or intimidating you, a Protection Order can be issued against them by a court. This applies to cyberbullying too. Breaching a Protection Order is a criminal offence and can lead to arrest.



Who can help you?

You do not have to face this alone

At school: your teacher, school counsellor, or principal. **At home:** a parent, grandparent, or trusted family member. **In your community:** a social worker, religious leader, or clinic staff member.

Childline, Free call, 24/7
For all children.
PHONE: 116

SADAG Mental Health,
Emotional support and counselling
PHONE: 0861 322 322.

HELP NOW!

SAPS Emergency,
If you are in immediate danger.
PHONE: 10111.

GBV Command Center,
For gender-based violence, including sexual bullying.
PHONE: 0800 428 428.

Film & Publication Board,
Report harmful images.
PHONE: 012 003 1400.

SA Human Rights Commission (SAHRC),
Monitors and Protects Children's Rights
PHONE: Free 0800 212 116.

Centre for Child Law
Legal Assistance.
PHONE: 012 420 4502

Access Chapter 2
Legal assistance for LGBTIQ + Girls.
PHONE: 010 100 3177

Department of Social Services, Social Workers.
PHONE: 012 312 7727

A letter or complaint.

Sometimes it is hard to speak out loud. That is okay.
You can write it down instead.

You do not have to speak face to face to be heard. A written letter or complaint is just as powerful and sometimes even more effective.

Option A: Write a personal letter to a trusted adult.

Use this when you want to tell someone you trust about what is happening.
Fill in your own words.



Date: .....

Dear ..... (your teacher / principal / parent)

I am writing this letter because I need your help. I am being bullied and I do not feel safe.

What is happening:
.....
.....

Who is doing it:
.....
.....

Where and when it happens:
.....
.....

How this is making you feel:
.....
.....

What I am asking you to do:
.....
.....

I am writing this because I know I have the right to be safe. The South African Schools Act, the Children's Act, and the BELA Act say that schools and adults must protect learners. I am asking you to please take this seriously. Thank you for reading this.

From: ..... (your name or leave blank to stay anonymous)

Option B: Make a formal complaint to the school.

Use this when you want the school to take official action and keep a record.
A formal complaint must be investigated.

Date: .....

To: The Principal / School Governing Body / School Counsellor (circle one)

I am formally reporting a bullying matter that has been affecting me at this school.

Description of incidents (include dates where possible):

.....
.....

Names of any witnesses:

.....
.....

Action I am requesting:

.....
.....

I am aware that under the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) and the BELA Act (2024), this school has a legal duty to ensure my safety and to report serious incidents to the Head of Department. I am also aware that under the Children's Act (38 of 2005), adults who become aware of a child at risk are required to act.

I respectfully request a written response to this complaint within 5 school days.

Signed: ..... Date: .....





Option C: Stay anonymous.

Staying anonymous is okay. You do not have to give your name. Your safety matters more than having your name on a piece of paper. Adults still have a duty to act on anonymous reports.

Date: .....

To: The teacher on duty / Principal / School Counsellor (circle one)

I am writing this anonymously because I am scared, but I cannot stay silent. Someone needs your help.

Who is being bullied:

.....
.....

What is happening to them:

.....
.....

Where and when it happens:

.....
.....

Who is doing it:

.....
.....

I am asking you to please look into this. Under the Children's Act and the BELA Act, you have a duty to protect children at this school. Please act, even though I cannot give my name.
Thank you.

It takes courage to speak up

Whether you speak out loud, write a letter, or slip a note under a teacher's door. Every act of courage makes a difference. You are not just protecting yourself. You are protecting every other child who is too afraid to speak.



My Anti Bullying Pledge

I will treat every person with kindness and respect.
I will not bully others: online or in person.
I will speak up when I see bullying.
I will support anyone who is being bullied.
I will use my voice in any way I can.
I believe every child deserves to feel safe.

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

The Centre for Child Law developed this resource to aid learners in their understanding of their right to safe environments and applicable legal protections.
If you are reading this because of your own experiences; you have shown strength by seeking information, you deserve support and justice, and healing is possible with time and appropriate care.

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