



Bullying. No Way!

It doesn't matter whether it's physical or psychological — bullying hurts.

Queensland schools are working hard to prevent and resolve bullying with good communication and education programs for young people.

Mackay State High School is having success in reducing bullying with the introduction of a peer mediation program run by students.

'We trained 50 students from a cross-section of the school to be peer mediators with skills in recognising and dealing with bullying,' Mackay State High School Peer Mediation Coordinator Ms Cheryl Bryan said.

'Giving students ownership and responsibility for resolving issues sends a clear message to all young people that bullying in any form is unacceptable, and it also helps to nip any incidents of bullying in the bud.

'There has been a definite lessening of physical conflict and difficult behaviour since the inception of the program, and many of the lower level bullying issues are resolved by the students without intervention from staff.'

Deputy Principal Petrea Rawlinson from Goodna's St Francis Xavier School in Brisbane's south-west has also developed an innovative anti-bullying initiative to help educate students.

'We created four cartoon characters — Bully Bulldozer, Crazy Conflict, Icy Isolation and Roving Random — to show students how to deal with bullying and other negative behaviours,' Ms Rawlinson said.

'Using stories, "stop, think and do" charts, classroom incident boxes, and role-playing scenarios, all of our 430 students learned about the different behaviours associated with the cartoon characters and how to deal with them.

'An important part of the program is encouraging resilience and self-esteem so that students have the ability to "bounce back" if they are subjected to bullying.

'As a result we have seen a reduction in incidents and students are comfortable reporting bullying or other negative behaviour to staff members straight away.'

Cyber-bullying is also prevalent in the 21st century, and is carried out in internet chat rooms, instant messaging, and even mobile phone text messages.

It can take the form of spreading rumours online, sending unwanted messages, defamation and making fun of someone in online communities, often anonymously.

Parents can help to protect their child from harassment and cyber-bullying by closely monitoring internet use and installing free internet filters (see 'Navigating the technology maze' on page 18).

For more information and ideas to understand and deal with bullying, visit the Bullying. No way! website www.bullyingnoway.com.au or Kids Help Line's www.kidshelp.com.au

Signs of bullying

- Loss of confidence.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits, possibly bedwetting.
- Health problems such as headaches or stomach aches.
- Unhappiness or mood swings with sudden temper tantrums.
- Reluctance to go to school and changes in academic performance.

What you can do

- Take preventative measures such as helping your child develop social and emotional resilience, high self-esteem and confidence.
- Talk to your child to find out what has happened. Be sensitive because children often don't like to admit they are being bullied.
- Tell them you believe them, it's not their fault and you're sorry it has happened.
- Work with your child to determine how best to handle the issue, which could include reporting the incident to a teacher. Don't try to sort out the situation yourself.
- Talk to the school and ask about the school's policy on bullying.
- Work out a plan with the school, making a note of what the school says it will do and arrange to make a follow-up call.

