



# EAP Educates: Is your child being bullied?

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Bullying is an increasingly significant problem in schools in South Africa with more suicides being recorded that can be attributed directly to this scourge. Recent research (2012) puts bullying in the top 3 concerns in South African schools. According to Dr Crystal Watson from MTR Smit Children's Haven, 6 million boys and 4 million girls are involved in physical fights at school every year. Every 7 minutes, on some part of the school grounds, a child or teenager is bullied. The chance of adult intervention is only 4%. The chance of student intervention is 11%. The chance of no intervention is a staggering 85%. Watson says that contrary to what many people believe, bullying is not a children's problem, it is an adult problem. She says adults are entirely to blame for bullying in schools as they don't do anything to stop it. Bullies bully because they can, because they get away with it, and because adults decide when and who will get away with it. Here in South Africa, we have a double standard regarding harassment and bullying. If an adult harasses or bullies an adult at work, or even his or her own child in the home, then the law can punish the perpetrator. However, when it comes to a school setting, if an adult or a child harasses or bullies another child, many state laws neither protect the victim nor punish the perpetrator, bully or harasser.

## What constitutes being bullied?

Bullying comes in various forms. Some people believe that this is only a physical problem, but sometimes the more subtle and less visible forms can be more damaging. The point here is that bullying can ultimately kill.

Physical bullying	Hitting, kicking etc
Verbal bullying	Insults, name calling, swearing
Subtle bullying	Ignoring and leaving children out of games and activities etc.

## Who gets bullied?

- Most people are bullied at some time in their life
- Usually it is because they are perceived as being different in some way
- It can happen because the child is good / bad at sport, or they get better marks than the bullies. Their clothes may not be considered cool enough, or they may have an unusual body shape or wear glasses.
- They can bully children for nothing, or for everything. Your child may just be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

## Why do children bully?

- It is often a sign of insecurity or anger
- Bullies themselves have probably and are probably being bullied or neglected, often at home. Bullying is their way of getting their own back.
- They take out their anger on children they perceive to be weaker than they are.
- Bullying is a mean and cowardly act. Bullies often don't understand the effect this has on the victim



## Indicators that your child may be being bullied.

Often children who are bullied will try and get out of going to school either by pretending to be ill or in many cases, they are genuinely sick. The symptoms are brought on by the stress of being bullied or the anxiety of having to face the bully again.

Children who are bullied often exhibit the following symptoms

Emotional

Fear, hurt, isolation, low self-esteem, anger, anxiety and depression

Physical

Loss of appetite, stomach pains, nausea, it worsens conditions like asthma and eczema

## How to help your child cope with bullies

- Encourage your child to tell you or someone else whom they trust about the bullying – give you child support (and help them cope with the bullying). It is important that the child feels “heard”.
- Encourage your child to never keep quiet or give up trying to find help.
- Encourage your child to prevent being on his own where the bullies can get to him. Encourage him to do things with groups of friends.
- Educate your child about bullies and encourage them to be empathetic.

## What can you do to prevent bullying

- Tell the school and ask them to arrange class discussions on the subject
- Keep communication lines open with your child and encourage your child to be open with you – ALWAYS listen to your child.
- Build self-esteem in your children – confident, well adjusted children are less likely to be bullied.

(source in part article by Khanyisa Sinqe globalgirlmedia)

CONTACT THE EAP FOR MORE INFORMATION OR CONFIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE