

First response guide

This resource is for when you are concerned that your young person (in secondary school) may be experiencing bullying or other harmful behaviours.

If your child or young person, or any other child, is in immediate danger, call **Triple Zero (000)**.

Acting on your concern is one of the most **important things** you can do.

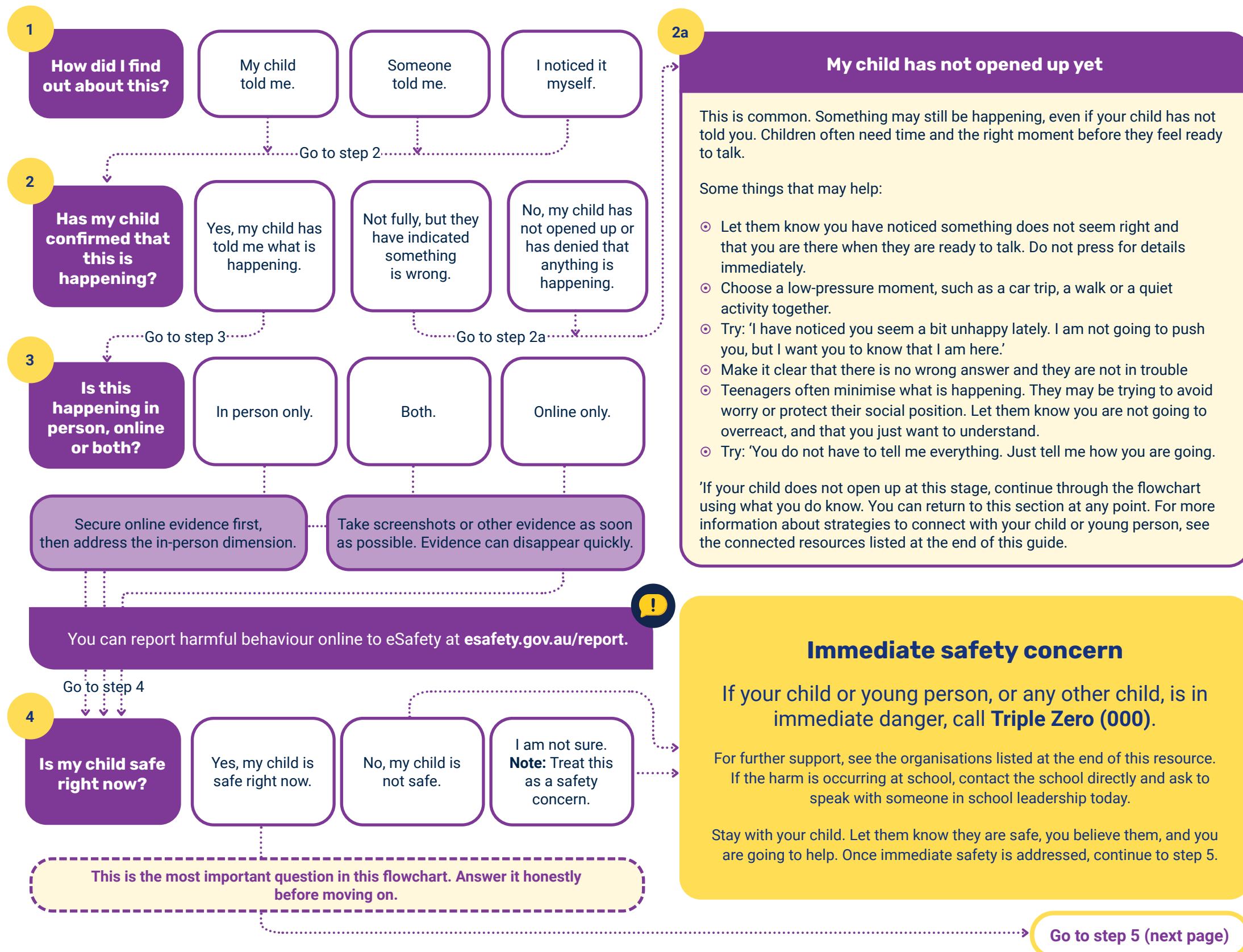
This flowchart will help you make sense of the situation and decide what to do next. Move through each question in order and follow the path that fits your situation. Before you begin, take a moment.

It is normal to have strong feelings about this situation. You will be more effective in supporting your child if you can stay calm as you work through this.

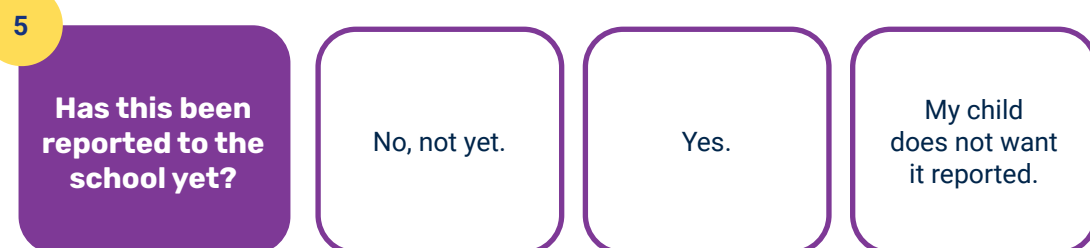
If your child is being targeted because of who they are (for example, their race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, body or any other factor), this must be taken seriously. For further advice on harm involving discrimination, including identity-based targeting, contact the **Australian Human Rights Commission** at humanrights.gov.au.

Note

If you already know your child or young person has been harmed, you do not need to start here. Go to 'My child/a child I know has been harmed' for guidance on responding and supporting their recovery.



Parents and carers: Secondary students



Go to step 6a

Go to step 7

Go to step 6b

6a

Reporting to the school

Contact the school as soon as possible.

The year level coordinator, form teacher or a wellbeing staff member is usually the best starting point. They are experienced with situations like this and have clear processes to follow.

Keep a record of the date, time and name of the person you speak with. Follow up any verbal contact with a written record, such as an email.

Schools should have policies and processes for preventing and responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours. These should be available to the school community online or on request. Reading them before you contact the school can help you understand what to expect and how to advocate for your child.

The National Framework¹ for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools states that schools are expected to make reasonable efforts to begin responding to reports of bullying within two school days¹ of becoming aware of the issue. Further time may be required to fully address the situation. Knowing this can help you follow up if you are concerned about delays or a lack of progress. Ask the school the following questions:

- What is the response process, and what timeframes can I expect?
- What support is available for my child through this process?
- How will I be kept informed?

Always stay solution-focused and respectful when talking to school staff. Follow your child's school's communication or behaviour policies. For more information about working with schools, see the connected resources listed at the end of this guide.

6b

What if my child does not want this reported yet?

This is a common and important situation. Your child's sense of control over what happens next matters.

If your child does not want this reported yet, respect their lead while keeping their safety central. If you are concerned about their immediate safety, that takes priority over their preference not to report.

Things to consider:

- Keep the conversation open and return to it gently over time.
- Let them know you will follow their lead and that the option to report remains open whenever they are ready.

Adolescents often worry that reporting could make things worse. They might think it will damage friendships or attract more attention to them. Acknowledge those fears. Try: 'I hear that you do not want me to tell the school yet. I am going to respect that. Can we agree to chat about it again in a few days?'

Go to step 8

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Ongoing actions

There is no single endpoint here. These steps continue for as long as they are needed.

- Keep having regular, low-pressure conversations with your child about how things are going. Let them lead.
- Stay in contact with the school and ask for updates at agreed times.
- Monitor your child's wellbeing. Watch for changes in mood, sleep, appetite, school engagement or friendship patterns.
- Make sure you have support – it may be someone you trust, such as your partner or a trusted friend. Consider if you may also need professional support for your wellbeing during this time.

Tip

Parents and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, First Nations communities, or those with disabilities may face extra challenges in engaging with schools. These may include language barriers, negative past experiences, or communication accessibility needs. Community liaison roles, translated materials and advocacy support may be available.

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What has the school's response been?

- The school has responded, and things are improving. Keep talking with your child regularly.
- The school has responded, but things do not seem to be improving.
- The school has not responded within two school days¹. Follow up with the school in writing and request communication to support the initial response.
- I am not satisfied with the school's response.

You can raise the issue, discuss options or make a complaint with your state or territory education department, the relevant Catholic education authority or your state and national independent school body.

If you feel frustrated or unheard by the school's response, try to stay focused on finding a solution when you communicate with the school. Working together with the school tends to get better results for your child.

Go to step 8

¹ State, territory and non-government education sectors will reflect the expectations of the National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian schools in their policies and procedures by Term 1 2027. This includes making reasonable efforts to initiate a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issue. By Term 1 2027, all schools will also publish or link to policies and procedures that align with the National Framework (or equivalent contemporary jurisdiction specific Frameworks) and their local policies and school context.

First response guide: Things worth remembering

You have worked through the flowchart, and you are taking the situation with your child or young person seriously. This reflection tool is not a set of steps to follow. It is a chance to pause and think about how you are feeling and what is in front of you. There are no right or wrong ways to feel. Read through at your own pace and come back to any part of it as often as you need.

Before you read on, take a moment. What you are doing is hard, and it matters. You do not have to have all the answers yet.

The line between being harmed and causing harm is not always clear

Your child may be experiencing bullying or other harmful behaviour, while also having engaged in harmful behaviour at some point themselves. Both can be true at the same time, and one does not cancel out the other. Understanding the fuller picture will help you respond more effectively to both. For more information, see the connected resources listed at the end of this reflection tool.

Bullying says more about the person engaging in it than the person experiencing it

Your child may believe they are being targeted because of something about who they are. For example, how they look or what they care about. Help them see that bullying and other harmful behaviour often stem from complex reasons. These reasons say more about the person causing harm than about them. The person being harmed is not the problem.

'Most of the time, bullying isn't just a single person's fault. It's the fault of the society and culture that allows it to be so prevalent'.

– YOUNG PERSON, 16, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

Keep your child's independence central

Support your child and keep them safe. Where possible, involve them in decisions about what happens next.

Be open about what you are doing and why, and give them a real say, where it is safe to do so. Be clear with them when their safety has to come before their preference.

Use language that does not define your child by what has happened

Avoid the words 'victim' or 'survivor' in how you speak about or to your child, unless they choose those words themselves. How we name an experience can shape how we carry it. Instead, you might say 'the person experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviour' or simply use your child's name.

Look at what can be strengthened in your child's environment

Bullying and other harmful behaviours do not happen in isolation. For more information about how to improve your child's environment – like friendships, school ties and family communication – see the connected resources at the end of this reflection tool. These can help build resilience and confidence over time.

Let your child guide the repair process

If the school proposes a process to repair harm, follow your child's lead on whether and when they feel ready to take part. For more information, see 'What comes next? Navigating the period after you've reported'.

Other trusted adults can be part of this

You do not have to manage this situation alone and neither does your child. Where appropriate, invite other trusted adults into the conversation, such as a family member, a coach or school counsellor. A broader circle of support can help you and your child feel less alone.

Keep communicating

Recovery from bullying is rarely straightforward. Keep having conversations with your child. These can be short check-ins during quiet moments or activities you do together. Your child needs to know they can come back to talking about this whenever they need to.

Connected resources

- ◉ Strategies to connect with your child or young person
- ◉ Protective and risk factors for children and young people
- ◉ Working with schools early on
- ◉ Something does not seem right: Early signs of harm
- ◉ What comes next? Navigating the period after you've reported

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

For children and young people

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 or kidshelpline.com.au. Free, confidential counselling for bullying and other harmful behaviours, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7.

headspace/ehedspace: 1800 650 890 or headspace.org.au. Mental health, wellbeing and early intervention support, available 9 am–1 am daily.

For parents and carers

Parenting support lines

ACT: 02 6287 3833

New South Wales: 1300 1300 52

Queensland and Northern Territory: 1300 30 1300 or parentline.com.au

South Australia: 1300 364 100

Tasmania: 1300 808 178

Victoria: 13 22 89

Western Australia: 08 9368 9368

For all ages

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au. Mental health support for stress, anxiety and overwhelm, available 24/7.

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line: 13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Free, confidential bullying support for children, young people, young adults, parents and carers, available 24/7.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au. Crisis support and counselling if things feel overwhelming, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers.

QLife (LGBTIQA+ young people): 1800 184 527 or qlife.org.au. Free, anonymous peer support and referral service, available 3 pm–9 pm daily.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Available for free 24/7 to support people impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence.

eSafety Commissioner: esafety.gov.au. Report cyberbullying, get advice, and request content removal support.

Australian Human Rights Commission: humanrights.gov.au. Support for cases involving discriminatory harm. Reports can be made via the website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

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