



Australian Government



Parents and carers

My child/a child I know has been harmed

This guide is for when you have confirmation that your child has been harmed. It focuses on how you can respond and how to support your child's recovery.

Finding out your child has been harmed is one of the hardest things a parent or carer can face. It is normal to feel angry, helpless or to want to fix things straight away.

This resource does not ask you to push those feelings aside. It guides you in supporting your child and takes you through the immediate steps for responding to them after harm.

It also includes a short section for parents and carers who have become aware that another child has been harmed.

What you will need

- ◉ A private space and time to be with your child without interruption.
- ◉ A way to keep notes, such as a notebook or notes app, to record what your child tells you and when.
- ◉ Access to the school's contact details.
- ◉ Support for yourself: someone you trust who you can speak to if needed.

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

Note:

If you are concerned that your child or young person is experiencing harm, go to 'First response guide' for guidance on working out whether harm has occurred, what type of harm and whether it has been reported.



Note

Some of the guidance applies to all age groups. Where guidance is specific to primary or secondary school, it is labelled accordingly.



Step 1: Prioritise immediate safety and wellbeing

If your child is not in immediate danger but is clearly upset, being calm and present is the most important thing you can do right now.

Sit with them and let them know you are there for them.

The first step is to make sure your child is safe right now. If they or any other child are in immediate physical danger, call **Triple Zero (000)**.



Tip

Try not to rush into problem-solving straight away. Your child needs to feel safe before you do anything else.

'Support doesn't always start with solutions. Sometimes it starts with believing someone when they finally speak.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16,
PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL
YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Step 2: Listen before you act

Your child needs to feel heard before you do anything else.

Listen to your child first and let them lead the conversation at their own pace.

Try not to ask too many questions at once, correct their description of events or jump to conclusions.

Right now, your job is to listen carefully to what they share. You can make sense of the details later.

If your child is in primary school:

You might say: 'Can you tell me what happened? I'm listening, and I'm not going anywhere.' Younger children may find it easier to talk while doing something such as a walk or a drawing, or during a car trip.

If your young person is in secondary school:

Give your young person more control over the conversation. You might say: 'You don't have to tell me everything right now. I just want you to know I am here and on your side.'



Tip

This is rarely a single conversation. Your child may share more later once they see how you respond.

If your child is not ready to talk, do not push them. Let them know you are there to listen when they are ready, and gently return to the conversation at a later stage. Forcing a conversation before your child feels safe can make it harder for them to open up later.

Step 3: Believe them

Tell your child directly that you believe what they are telling you and that what has happened is not their fault.

Do not assume they already know this. This is one of the most protective things a parent or carer can do.

Not being believed is one of the most harmful things a child can experience after sharing that they have been hurt.

It can affect whether they ask for help again in the future.

Step 4: Write down what your child tells you

Write down what your child told you as soon as you can.

Note what, where and when it happened.

Record who was involved and whether the harm occurred in person, online or both.

If there is any supporting evidence, such as screenshots or messages, keep copies somewhere safe. Do this after the conversation, not during it. They have been hurt. It can affect whether they ask for help again in the future.

Step 5: Report serious harm outside the school

If the harm involves threats, physical violence, identity-based targeting or other potentially unlawful conduct, you may need to report this outside the school.

Tip

Even if parts of what your child shares are unclear, believe them first. If your child feels doubted in this moment they may hold back or stop talking. The details can be clarified later.



Tip

Do not ask your child to repeat their description of events many times so you can record it accurately. Having one clear record taken after the conversation is enough to start with.



For serious threats or unlawful conduct: Contact the **police** on **Triple Zero (000)** in an emergency or 131 444 for non-urgent police assistance

For advice on harm involving discrimination, including identity-based targeting, contact the **Australian Human Rights Commission** at humanrights.gov.au.



Step 6: Report online harm and image-based abuse promptly (if relevant)

Schools and principals can also play a critical role and are often required to report and manage these types of incidents through official student protection protocols. Requirements may differ between schools and jurisdictions. Contact your school to confirm what applies in your situation.



Report illegal and harmful online content or online abuse to the platform or service first, then report it to **eSafety** at esafety.gov.au/report.

Step 7: Contact the school

Once your child feels heard and supported, contact the school. See *Working with schools early on*¹ for guidance on who to contact, what to say and how to follow up.

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 Framework 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. Follow up if you are concerned about delays or a lack of progress.

Tip



Use the email template in 'Working with schools early on' to follow up any verbal contact in writing. This creates a record and signals to the school that you are engaged and informed.

If your child is in primary school:

The classroom teacher is usually the best person to contact first. They know your child and have the most oversight of what happens in and around the classroom.

If your young person is in secondary school:

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

Note



If you are not satisfied with the school's response, keep trying to resolve it with them. You can escalate your concerns to the school's principal or other school leadership if you need to. If you remain unsatisfied, you can raise concerns, discuss options or make a complaint to the state or territory education department, the relevant Catholic education authority or your state and national independent schools body.

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.

Step 8: Support your child's ongoing recovery

Recovery can take time and does not always move forward in a straight line.

- ◉ Keep talking with your child regularly and pay attention to how they are doing over time.
- ◉ Monitor your child's mental health and wellbeing for signs that things are improving, staying the same or getting worse.
- ◉ If your child is struggling to recover or you notice ongoing changes in their mood, sleep, appetite or willingness to go to school, it may be time to get more support.
- ◉ Talk to your family doctor or a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or counsellor, about mental health support that may be appropriate for your child.
- ◉ The school counsellor or wellbeing team can also support your child during the school day.
- ◉ For further support, see the organisations listed at the end of this resource.

'Recovery isn't just about what happened in the moment. It's about whether the world around you feels safer the next day.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16,
PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL
YOUTH COLLECTIVE

If your child is in primary school:

Younger children may need clear, simple reassurance and shorter, more regular conversations. To help them feel safe at school again, work closely with their teacher.

If your young person is in secondary school:

Older young people may need more space and independence as they recover. Follow their lead and let them know you are there when they need you.



Note

A specific note for parents and carers of LGBTIQA+ young people: If your child or young person has been harmed because of their identity, there are additional considerations.

They may not have come out to all family members or their school community, and disclosure may carry its own risks.

Ensure that any support you access is LGBTIQA+ affirming.

For further support, see the organisations listed at the end of this resource.



Step 9: Look after yourself

Supporting your child through this is not easy, and your own wellbeing matters too. Talk honestly with people you trust, such as a close friend, another parent, or your child's teacher or school leader. They can offer practical help and a wider view of what is going on for your child.

If you feel you need more support, speak with a professional such as a counsellor or psychologist. There are also organisations listed at the end of this resource. You do not have to go through this alone.

Tip

Looking after yourself is not separate from looking after your child. When you are struggling, it is harder to give your child the support they need.

What if things do not go to plan?

Not every step will necessarily go smoothly, and that is normal. Your child may not be ready to talk when you are.

The school may be slow to respond. The harm may be more complex than you first understood. None of this means you have failed.

Stay connected to your child, keep records of communication with the school or other organisations, and ask for support when you need it.

Another child has been harmed

This section is for parents and carers who have become aware that another child in their community has been harmed. You may have found out through your own child, a direct disclosure from the child who has been harmed or another source.

When you learn a child has been harmed, you may have questions about your role and responsibilities. The guidance below is intended to help you in responding.

Your role is to offer support and help ensure the child's safety and wellbeing.

In most situations, your role is not to investigate, mediate between families or confront the person responsible.

Your role is to support the child and help to ensure that the concern reaches an adult or service that can act. If the child has disclosed to you directly:

- ◉ Respond with care.
- ◉ Listen without judgement.
- ◉ Thank them for telling you.
- ◉ Do not promise confidentiality.

Tell them that you may need to share the information with someone else who can help keep them safe. You might say: 'I'm really glad you told me. I want to help you, and that might mean I need to talk to someone else who can make sure you're safe. I won't do anything without talking to you first, unless I am worried about someone's safety.'

Encourage and support the child to tell a trusted adult in their own life, such as a parent, carer, teacher or counsellor. If they are not able or willing to do that, you may need to take further action.

Remind yourself that you cannot control what has happened, but you can control how you support the child in front of you right now. That is enough.



Report illegal and harmful online content or online abuse to the platform or service first, then report it to **eSafety** at esafety.gov.au/report.



Note

Remind yourself that you cannot control what has happened, but you can control how you support the child in front of you right now. That is enough.

If your child tells you another child is being harmed

Take what your child says seriously and thank them for speaking up.

Ask questions to understand what they have seen, heard or experienced, without pressuring them for details. Encourage your child to support the other child by being kind, including them where appropriate, and helping them seek support from a trusted adult.

Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to encourage your child to report the concern to a teacher or another trusted staff member, or to raise the concern with the school yourself. You can discuss this with your child first and explain that the aim is to help keep the other child safe.

If you have serious concerns about a child's safety that are not being addressed

If a child is in immediate danger, call emergency services on **Triple Zero (000)**.

If you believe a child is at serious risk of harm or you have significant safety concerns, do not assume someone else will act. Follow the reporting pathways in your state or territory and contact the relevant child protection, police or emergency services where required.

Be mindful of your own child's role

If your child is connected to the situation either as a witness, a friend of the child harmed or in another way, speak with them about how they are feeling and what they know.

Do not share personal or confidential information with your child. Be careful not to put them in a position where they feel responsible for the other child's safety.

Connected resources

- ◉ First response guide
- ◉ Working with schools early on
- ◉ Strategies for connecting with your child or young person
- ◉ 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/ehespace: 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.