



Australian Government



Years 8 and above

Signs and symptoms: Noticing stress

It can be difficult to know if what you're seeing is a big deal. This is especially true when you're right in the middle of a stressful situation or watching a friend have a hard time. You might wonder if you are overthinking things or if it is just a normal phase.

This resource is not a test or a complete list. It's not about finding a label or a 'right' answer. It is a space to pause and notice the small, everyday changes that happen when you or a friend are dealing with stress caused by bullying or other harmful behaviours. It's important to take wellbeing seriously. Always reach out for support when needed.

'The most damaging part of group dynamics isn't always being left out, it's being included but slowly shaped into someone you're not.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16,
PROJECT ROCKIT NATIONAL
YOUTH COLLECTIVE

Noticing shifts in myself

Take a slow, deep breath. This is a time to tune into your own mind and body. Think about how you have been feeling over the last few weeks. These examples may feel relevant to any bullying or harmful behaviour happening around you.

- ☐ I have noticed that I'm not enjoying my usual hobbies, sports or games as much as I used to.
- ☐ I have been feeling more anxious, jumpy or on edge than usual, especially around certain people or places.
- ☐ I have been avoiding school, specific social situations or areas where I used to feel perfectly okay.
- ☐ I have been sleeping much more or much less than usual, or I am finding it hard to switch my brain off at night.
- ☐ I have noticed I am more irritable, snappy or emotional than feels normal for me.
- ☐ I have been spending a lot more time alone.
- ☐ I have noticed being pushed out of my social groups.
- ☐ I have noticed I am replaying specific situations, comments or conversations in my head over and over again.
- ☐ I have felt like I don't want to talk to anyone, including the friends or family members I usually trust the most.
- ☐ I have noticed changes in my appetite or overall energy levels that feel connected to how I'm feeling.
- ☐ Something has been happening to me that I haven't told anyone about, mostly because I wasn't sure it was worth mentioning.
- ☐ I have noticed a deep sense of dread or anxiety in situations where my identity, cultural background, appearance, or who I am becomes the focus of attention.

Noticing shifts in a friend

Sometimes, we notice changes in the people we care about before they notice them themselves. Think about your friend's behaviour recently. Consider if any of these examples feel familiar.

- ☐ I have noticed my friend seems much more withdrawn, quiet or distant than usual.
- ☐ My friend has suddenly stopped participating in or talking about things they used to love doing.
- ☐ My friend seems visibly anxious, nervous or on edge, especially in certain classes or around specific groups of people.
- ☐ I have noticed my friend is missing more school or other activities than usual or constantly making excuses to stay home.
- ☐ My friend has seemed much more emotional, easily annoyed or unusually flat and low on energy lately.
- ☐ I have noticed my friend is spending more time by themselves at recess, lunch or after school.
- ☐ My friend has dropped hints or said things that suggest they are questioning their own worth or wondering if things will ever get better.
- ☐ I have noticed my friend flinching when their phone vibrates, looking stressed while scrolling or avoiding going online.
- ☐ Something just feels 'off' when we hang out; I can't quite put my finger on it, but my friend just doesn't seem like themselves.
- ☐ I have noticed my friend seems particularly quiet, uncomfortable or anxious after interactions that relate directly to their identity, background or who they are.

Next steps

Noticing these shifts, whether in yourself or in someone you care about, is a really important step. It means you are paying attention and that you care. You do not have to deal with these observations on your own. You do not need to have a solution figured out before you reach out for support.

If you are noticing these signs in yourself:

If several of the examples feel familiar, it's a sign that your mind and body are dealing with stress. This may have been triggered by bullying, but it could also be caused by other things. Seek support from a trusted friend or adult or other support services listed at the end of this resource.

If you want to understand more about how bullying and harmful behaviour can affect you, see 'Am I just sensitive, or is it bullying?' For more information about how to build support, see 'Support systems'.

If you are noticing these signs in a friend:

You are being a great friend by paying attention. You do not have to fix the problem for them. You do not have to handle your worries alone. For practical tips on how to start a conversation or support them safely, see 'Supporting my friend post-harm'.

Talking it through can help ease pressure and worry, especially with a trusted adult. Or, for further support, see the organisations listed at the end of this resource.

Connected resources

- ◉ Am I just sensitive, or is it bullying?
- ◉ Supporting my friend post-harm

Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

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.

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

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

Dolly's Dream Bullying Support Line: 13 36 55 (13 DOLLY) or dollysdream.org.au. Counselling and guidance for children and young people experiencing bullying and other harmful behaviour, 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.

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au. Sexual assault, family and domestic violence counselling line for anyone who has experienced, or is at risk of, family and domestic violence and/or sexual assault, available 24/7.

13YARN: 13 92 76 or 13yarn.org.au. Culturally safe 24/7 support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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

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 their website or by emailing infoservice@humanrights.gov.au.

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.