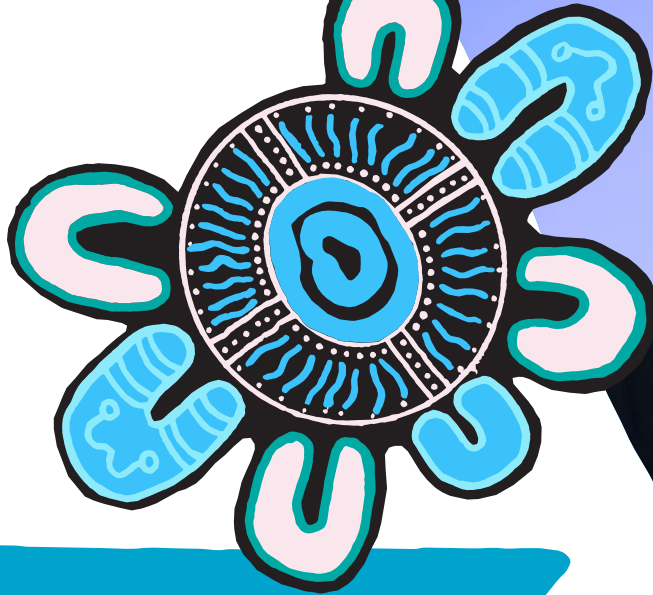


KNOW THE WAY

A yarning and discussion guide for
parents, carers and supporting adults
about tackling bullying.





The Signs



Artist and parent Luke with his son Jurrah.

When something is happening at school, kids do not always have the words for it straight away. They might come home quiet, get angry, avoid school or brush things off with “I’m fine”. This guide is here to help First Nations parents, carers and supporting adults start the yarn, listen and feel empowered to take the next step with the school.

Signs something may be wrong

Some harmful behaviours are easy to spot. Others are less obvious. Think about what is normal for your child and take notice if something has changed.

Signs might include, but are not limited to:

- becoming withdrawn or quieter than usual
- not wanting to talk about school or friends
- changes in sleep, appetite or mood
- anger or emotional outbursts
- not wanting to go to school or things they usually enjoy
- becoming secretive or anxious about their device
- changes in friendship groups.

You know your child best. If something feels off, it is worth starting the yarn.

What harmful behaviour and bullying can look like

Harmful behaviour can happen once, or more than once. It can happen in person, online, at school, at sport, on the way to school or through chats, games, and social media. What matters most is the impact on the child and young person, including whether they have been hurt, or made to feel unsafe.

This guide uses both harmful behaviour and bullying language, so families do not have to work out whether something technically “counts” before asking for help.

Harmful behaviour and bullying can look like:

- name-calling, teasing or threats
- pushing, hitting or damaging belongings
- spreading rumours or leaving someone out
- comments about culture, family, skin colour, language or identity
- hurtful messages, photos or posts online
- making a child feel unsafe, ashamed or like they do not belong.

Sometimes kids do not call it bullying or harmful behaviour. They might just know that something feels wrong.

They might say:

“They’re just joking.”

“No one likes me.”

“I don’t want to go today.”

“They keep saying stuff about me.”

“It’s all over the group chat.”

“The teacher won’t do anything.”

If your child says something like this, slow down and ask a few more questions.



Yarning

Start the yarn

Pick a time when your child feels safe and there is no pressure to answer straight away. This might be in the car, while cooking, or while doing something side by side.

You could start with:

"I've noticed you haven't seemed yourself after school. Want to yarn about what's been going on?"

"You don't have to tell me everything at once. I'm here and I want to listen."

"Has anything been happening at school that's making you feel embarrassed, worried or unsafe?"

"Where is this happening?"

"What do you need from me right now?"

Some kids will talk straight away. Some will need time. Keep the door open to continue the yarn when they're ready.

Listen first

When a child tells you that something harmful is happening, it can bring up anger, worry and old hurt. This is completely understandable. In that first moment, your role is to help them feel believed and heard.

Try to stay calm, even if what they tell you is upsetting.

You could say:

"I'm really glad you told me."

"You have done the right thing by speaking up."

"This is not your fault."

"You deserve to feel safe at school."

"We'll work out the next step together."

Let them tell the story in their own way before jumping in to fixing it.

Questions that can help

You do not need to ask too many questions to your child all at once. Start gently and keep it simple.

You might ask:

"What happened?"

"Has someone been hurt, affected or made to feel unsafe?"

"Who was involved?"

"Where did it happen?"

"When did it start?"

"Has this happened before or is this the first time?"

"Did anyone else see it?"

"Has it happened online too?"

"Are you worried it will happen again?"

"What would help you feel safer?"

If your child does not know every answer, that is okay. Write down what they can remember.

Keep a record

Keeping notes can help you to remember what your child has told you and can also help you speak clearly with the school and follow up if things do not change.

Write down:

- the date and time
- what happened
- where it happened
- who was involved
- who saw it
- any screenshots, messages or posts
- who you spoke to at the school
- what was agreed
- when the school said they would follow up.

Keep emails, notes from meetings, and copies of any written responses.

Contacting the school

Before you contact the school

If your child is unsafe, contact the school and police straight away. Any relevant online harms like AI generated or manipulated images should be reported to the [eSafety Commissioner](#).

If there is no immediate danger, take a moment to write down the main points. Keep the focus on what has happened, how it is affecting your child and what support is needed.

You can ask someone you trust to come with you or help you prepare. This might be a family member, Elder, community member, First Nations education worker, cultural support staff, support worker or another trusted adult.

The title of the right support person may be different depending on the school, state or territory you are in. You can also ask the school who is responsible for student wellbeing, cultural support, inclusion or complaints.

Talking to the school

You have the right to raise concerns about your child's safety and wellbeing. You can ask questions, ask for support and follow up on your concerns.

Every school may have a different process for reporting and responding to harmful behaviour. You do not need to know the system before you raise a concern. Ask the school who the right contact person is and what the next steps are.

The aim is to work in partnership with the school so that your child can be supported, and further harm can be prevented.

A good place to start is usually your child's teacher, year level coordinator, wellbeing staff, deputy principal, assistant principal or principal. Different schools use different titles, so ask who the best contact person is.

You could say:

"I'm contacting you because I'm concerned that my child is experiencing harmful behaviour or bullying and I want to work with the school to make sure that they are safe."

"My child has told me something that has happened that made them feel unsafe. I'd like to meet and talk through what support can be put in place."

"I'm here because my child does not feel safe and I would like to request a clear plan."

"I'd like to understand the next steps, who our contact person will be and when we will hear back."

If your child is in primary school: The classroom teacher is usually the best first point of contact. They know your child and have the most direct oversight of what happens in and around the classroom.

If your child is in secondary school: 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.

If culture, racism or identity is involved

If culture, racism or identity is part of what is happening, say that clearly. This can be a difficult conversation to raise, so consider taking a support person along with you.

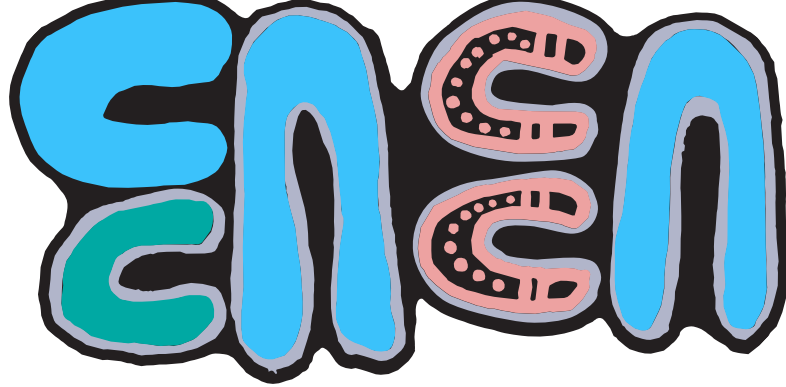
You could say:

"My child has told me there have been comments made about culture, family or identity. I want this to be treated seriously and handled in a culturally safe way."

"Who at the school can support my child as a First Nations student?"

"Who is responsible for responding to racism, discrimination or cultural safety concerns at this school?"

"I'd like this recorded as a concern involving racism or discrimination, not only as a general behaviour issue."



Racism is not okay. Your child should not have to put up with racist comments, jokes, exclusion, threats or online comments or posts.

If your child experiences racism at school, you or your child can report it to:

- a teacher
- school leadership
- wellbeing staff
- cultural support staff
- the staff member responsible for complaints, inclusion or student safety or
- any trusted staff member.

You can ask what steps will be taken and how your child will be supported.

If your child has experienced bullying for discriminatory reasons, such as on the basis of their race, you may be able to make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission by visiting humanrights.gov.au/complaints/complaints/complaints-under-racial-discrimination-act

What to ask for

When you speak with the school, you can ask:

"How will my child be kept safe at school?"

"Who will check in with them?"

"What support is available?"

"What steps will the school take if this happens again?"

"When will I receive an update?"

"Can I have the plan in writing?"

You can also ask for the school's anti-bullying policy, anti-racism policy, student wellbeing policy, behaviour policy or complaints process. These should explain how harmful behaviour and bullying can be reported, how the school will respond, and how concerns can be escalated.

The National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools expects schools to make reasonable efforts to start responding to reported or observed harmful behaviour, including bullying within two school days of becoming aware of the behaviour. This does not mean everything will be resolved in that time, but you can ask what initial safety and support steps will be put in place.

Ask for a safety and support plan

If your child is feeling unsafe, ask the school what will be put in place while the issue is being looked into. The first response should focus on safety, support, and the prevention of further harm.

This might include early safety planning, wellbeing support, contacting parents or carers, making reports to police or other authorities where needed, and taking appropriate steps in line with the school's process.

This might include:

- a safe person or persons your child can go to
- a quiet place they can access if they feel overwhelmed
- support during lunch, recess, sport or travel times
- a check-in with wellbeing or cultural support staff
- a plan for what your child can do if the behaviour happens again
- regular updates between the school and family.

Ask for the plan to be clear, practical, and written down.

After the meeting

After you speak with the school, you can send a short follow-up email, or request school staff to send one, so that everyone is clear about the concerns raised and the next steps.

You could write:

"Thank you for meeting with me today about what has been happening to my child.

My understanding is that the school will:

- *check in with my child*
- *put support in place during the times and places where the behaviour has been happening*
- *take appropriate steps in line with the school's process*
- *contact me with an update by [date].*

Please let me know if I have missed anything.

I appreciate your support in making sure my child feels safe at school and look forward to working together toward a solution."

Harmful behaviour

If harmful behaviour is happening online

- take screenshots before anything is deleted
- save usernames, links, dates and times
- report the content to the app, game or platform
- block, mute or restrict the person, if it is safe to do so
- contact the school if the behaviour involves students from the school.

If your child has received or appears in AI-generated or manipulated images or video without their consent, report to the eSafety Commissioner at esafety.gov.au/report. Other harmful online content or abuse can also be reported to eSafety after you've reported it to the platform.

If there are threats, stalking, intimidation, image-based abuse, or your child is in danger, seek urgent help.

If the harmful behaviour keeps happening

If nothing changes, or things get worse, contact the school again. Ask for the issue to be escalated to school leadership if they are not already involved.

You can say:

"I raised this concern on [date]. My child has told me the harmful behaviour is continuing. I'd like this escalated and I'd like to understand the safety and support steps that will be put in place."

If you are not satisfied with the school's response, ask for the school's complaints process.

The next step will depend on the type of school:

- for government schools, contact the education department in your state or territory
- for Catholic schools, contact the relevant Catholic education office, diocese or governing body
- for independent schools, ask the school for its complaints process and governing body.

You can also ask the school who the complaint should go to if the concern is about the principal or school leadership.

Know your rights

Your child has the right to learn in a safe environment.
You have the right to raise concerns about your child's safety and wellbeing.

You can ask the school what steps will be taken to support your child and help prevent further harm.

You can ask for a safety and support plan.

You can ask for updates in writing.

You can ask for cultural support.

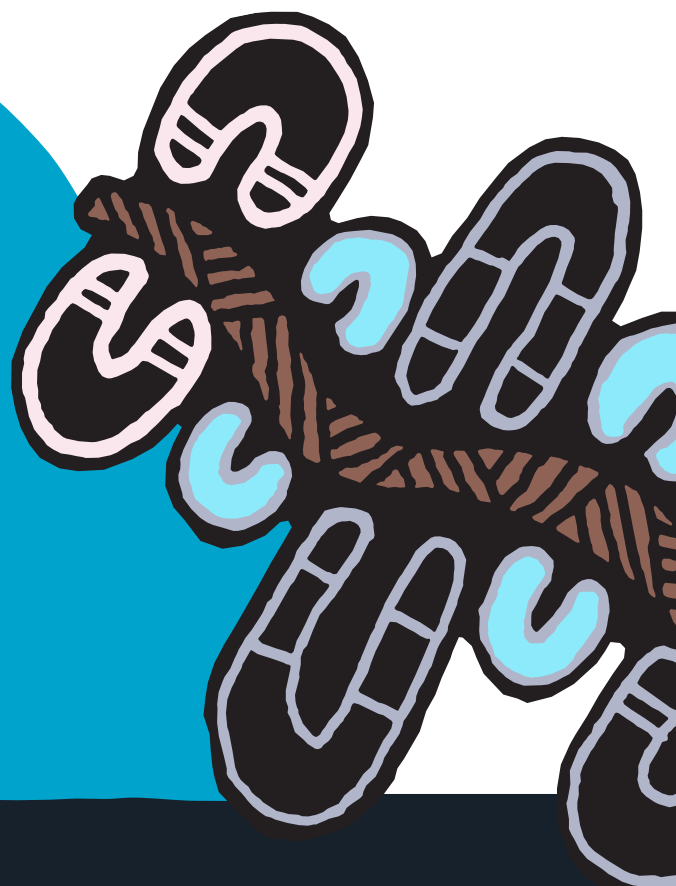
You can bring a support person to a meeting.

You can ask for the school's anti-bullying policy or complaints process.

You can ask how to escalate the concern if you do not feel it is being handled properly.

You can report racism or discrimination.

You can seek help outside the school if your child is unsafe or needs extra support.



More help

When to get urgent help

Get help straight away if your child:

- is in immediate danger
- has been assaulted or threatened
- is talking about hurting themselves
- is too scared to go to school
- is being targeted with threats, stalking or intimidation
- has had private or intimate images shared or threatened to be shared.

In an emergency, call 000.

For crisis support, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14 or use the online crisis chat.

You can also ask your school, local health service or community-controlled organisation about culturally safe support available in your area.

For children specifically

Kids Helpline (national): 1800 55 1800. Free, confidential counselling for bullying, school issues, online harm and wellbeing, available 24/7. kidshelpline.com.au

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 9am–1am daily.

For all ages

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

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

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

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

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

The Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467. Free, professional 24/7 online counselling support to people at risk of suicide, concerned about someone at risk, bereaved by suicide and people experiencing emotional or mental health issues.

Parenting support lines

ACT: 02 6287 3833

New South Wales: 1300 1300 52

Queensland and Northern Territory: 1300 30 1300

South Australia: 1300 364 100

Tasmania: 1300 808 178

Victoria: 13 22 89

Western Australia: 08 9368 9368



KNOW THE WAY

Visit the LetsStopBullying.gov.au website to find more resources for students, parents and carers and schools. These resources can help you recognise harmful behaviour, start conversations early, understand support options and know what steps to take if something is not right. You can also share the website with your child's school, family members or other trusted adults so they can support the yarn too.

Please note that by term 1 2027, all 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. This includes making reasonable efforts to begin a response to bullying and harmful behaviour within two school days, recognising that further more 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 and their local polices and school context.

“Know the way” artwork created by Luke Penrith

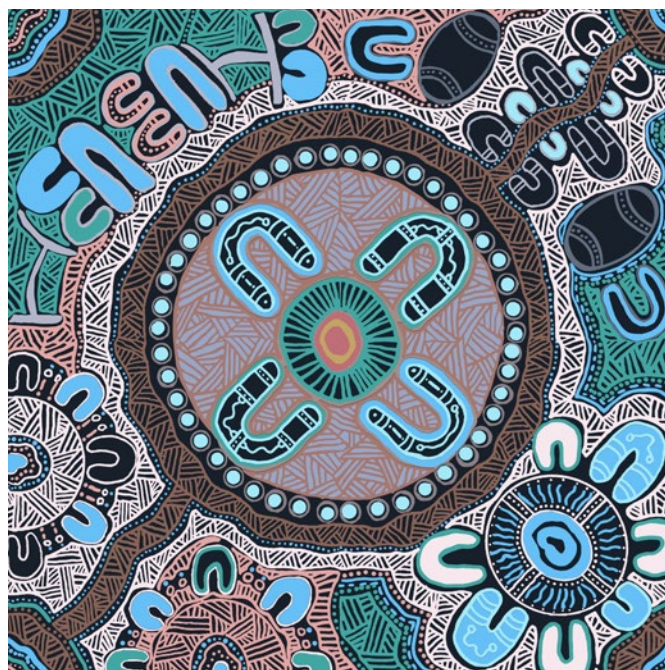
Luke Penrith is connected through the Wiradjuri, Wotjobaluk, Yuin and Gumbaynggirr nations. His art reflects what he sees, hears and can smell and touch; he is a modern contemporary Aboriginal Artist living in Brungle NSW.

Luke's artwork represents the importance of standing together against bullying through the values and strengths of Aboriginal culture. At the heart of the artwork is a Yarning Circle, symbolising a safe and respectful space where mob can come together to share stories, work through issues, and support one another without judgement. It represents listening with respect, speaking with honesty, and approaching each other with humility.

The artwork is built around five key themes:

Community. Culture. Family Support. Voice. Collective Strength and Journey.

Overall, this artwork celebrates the power of connection, culture, and community. It reminds us that through respect, compassion, and collective strength, we can create safe spaces where every person feels valued, heard and supported.



Learn how to spot it and help stop it

[Q LetsStopBullying.gov.au](https://LetsStopBullying.gov.au)



Australian Government