



What can I do? Guide to upstander action

Wanting to help when you see bullying or other harmful behaviours is a good start. But knowing what to do in the moment makes the real difference.

This resource gives you practical steps for when you see bullying and other harmful behaviours.

For more information about understanding what an upstander means, see 'What kind of upstander am I?'

Note

The term 'upstander' in this resource is in line with the findings of the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review Report. An upstander is someone who chooses to act positively and safely to support a person being bullied or harmed. They are someone who upholds values of kindness and empathy.



Responding safely

There are many things you can do to be an upstander. You do not need to do all of them. Only do what you feel comfortable with and only when it feels safe.

Note

You should always respond in a way that feels right and safe for you in the situation.



'Taking responsibility goes beyond acknowledging your own actions, but actively calling out similar behaviour. It requires humility, empathy, but above all, courage.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

Upstander action: steps to safely respond

It can be upsetting to see someone being harmed or excluded. But it is important to keep yourself and others safe when responding to these situations. Use the steps in this guide to safely respond when you see bullying or other harmful behaviours.

Step 1: Check what is happening before you act

The first step is to quickly check what is happening. Think about what feels safe for you to do right now.

Ask yourself:

- ⦿ Is anyone in danger right now?
- ⦿ Does it feel safe for me to do something right now?
- ⦿ Do I need to get an adult involved?

Note

If someone is in danger, get an adult straight away. This is always the right first step.



Step 2: Think about how you could respond

Stop to think about how you can respond before acting. This gives you a moment to consider your options. It can also help you feel more confident and in control if you decide to respond.

Step 3: Decide how you want to respond

Your response could be:

- ⦿ speaking up in the moment
- ⦿ shifting the attention to something else
- ⦿ asking a trusted adult for help
- ⦿ checking in later with the person who was harmed.

Note

It is okay if it does not feel safe to speak up or shift people's attention in the moment. You should respond in a way that feels right for you and the situation. Small acts of support and kindness, in the moment or later, can make a big difference.



Step 4: Reflect

You have been an upstander. Take a moment to reflect. This comes after you've responded, whatever that looked like for you. Maybe you spoke up. Maybe you got an adult involved. Or maybe you checked in with someone later.

Ask yourself:

- ⦿ Do I feel safe and okay?
- ⦿ Is there anything I need to do now?

What to say and do in different situations

Here are some ideas of things you could say or do if someone might be experiencing bullying or other harmful behaviours. Use these as a starting point, and change the responses to suit you and your situation. It's important to act in a way that feels safe and right for you.

Scenario 1: A friend is being left out of their friendship group

Your response might be different if the person is a close friend, a new friend or a friend from another group.

'Friendship groups mould your sense of what's normal and acceptable. Sometimes you don't realise you've accepted something unhealthy until you take a step back.'

– YOUNG PERSON, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

Scenario 2: Something harmful is happening in a group chat or online space

How you respond may change, depending on the chat. It could be a small friend group chat, a larger year-level chat or a public online space. You could take a screenshot to show a trusted adult.

You can report harmful behaviour online to **eSafety** at esafety.gov.au/report.



What you could say to your friends:

- ◉ 'They could come sit with us; there's heaps of room.'
- ◉ 'We should include them on the weekend.'

What you could say to the person being harmed:

- ◉ 'Hey, I noticed you were sitting by yourself earlier. You can sit with me anytime you like.'
- ◉ 'Would you like help talking to a teacher?'

What you could say to a trusted adult:

- ◉ 'Someone is being excluded. Can you help?'

What you could say to the group:

- ◉ 'I don't think that's funny. This is not nice.'
- ◉ Changing the topic by saying something like 'Does anyone know what day we have sport this week?'

What you could say to the person being harmed:

- ◉ 'Are you okay? I saw what happened in the chat.'

What you could say to a trusted adult:

- ◉ 'Hey Mum, can I show you something that's happening in our group chat?'
- ◉ 'I think I need to take a screenshot and show my teacher tomorrow.'

Scenario 3: Someone unkind is targeting a person in a group

You might feel comfortable calling out the behaviour in the moment. Or you might find it easier to follow up with the harmed person later. You could also change the subject. Respond in a way that feels right and safe for you.

What you could say to the group:

- ◉ 'Hey, that's not okay.'
- ◉ 'Can we change the subject?'
- ◉ 'I'm getting a teacher. This needs to stop.'
(This may be said to yourself, in your head.
You may not like to publicly announce this.)

What you could say to the person being harmed:

- ◉ 'Hey, are you okay? I saw what happened earlier.'

What you could say to a trusted adult:

- ◉ 'I saw someone being hurt today. What should I do?'
- ◉ 'Someone is being bullied. Can you help?'

When to get an adult involved

Sometimes you need to get an adult involved. This includes times when bullying or other harmful behaviours are happening, and someone seems very upset or unsafe. It could also be when the harm targets someone's identity, when it has gone on for a while, when earlier attempts to fix it have not worked or when image-based or online harm is involved.

What if it does not go to plan?

Being an upstander is not always easy, and things do not always go the way you hoped. But trying matters. Any action, however small, can help change things or make a difference.

Note

Go to the 'Connected resources' section for more support if you're finding it hard to think of someone to talk to. You can also talk to someone at the support organisations listed in the 'Where to get more help' section at the end of this resource.

If the first person doesn't help, tell someone else. Keep trying.



Connected resources

- ◉ What kind of upstander am I?
- ◉ Who's in my corner?

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.