



What if I think my child is bullying?

This guide is for when you are concerned and not yet sure whether your child or young person is engaging in bullying and other harmful behaviours.

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

This resource will help you make sense of your concern, work out what may be happening and have the first conversations with your child. Looking for guidance takes courage, and that matters.

Note

If it has been confirmed that your child or young person has bullied or harmed someone, for example, the school has contacted you or your child has told you directly, go to the 'My child has caused harm' resource.



This is a behaviour, not an identity

Your child is still growing and developing. Harmful behaviour can be part of how children learn to navigate the world. It does not define who your child is or who they will become.

This does not mean excusing what may have happened. It does mean staying connected to your child and supporting them to reflect and make genuine, positive changes.

The line between causing harm and experiencing harm is not always clear

Your child may be engaging in harmful behaviour while also experiencing difficulty, exclusion or bullying and other harmful behaviours. Both can be true at the same time. Understanding the fuller picture can make your response more effective.

Talking with your child is the best place to start

If you are concerned about your child's behaviour, approaching the conversation with curiosity rather than anger is more likely to get you the information you need. Harsh responses often cause children to shut down, get defensive or pull away.

When your child feels heard rather than blamed, they are more likely to open up and reflect on how their behaviour may have affected others.

'If a young person hurts someone, the goal should never just be punishment. That teaches the lesson of "don't get caught". What we need is to shift the narrative to "how do your actions affect the people around you?" Choosing kindness is a skill that once learned, can never be forgotten.'

– YOUNG PERSON, 16, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
COLLECTIVE

Every family is different. Adapt this approach to suit your family's background, values and what feels workable for you.

Many things shape how children behave

There is rarely one reason why a child may behave in a harmful way. Peer pressure, the people around them, their age and stage of development and the situations they face every day can all contribute. Refocus your energy on the needs of your child and the children involved by taking a calm, open and supportive approach.

You do not have to navigate your concern alone

You are not the first parent or carer to face a concern that your child is engaging in harmful behaviours. Talking honestly with people you trust, such as a close friend, another parent, or your child's teacher or school leader, can provide practical help and a wider view of what is going on in your child's world. If you feel you need more support, speak with a professional, such as a counsellor or psychologist, who can guide you through this process too.

Concern that your child is causing harm does not make them a bad person, and it does not make you a bad parent or carer

Your child is navigating a complex social world while they are still learning and developing, and you are a guardian who is choosing to take that seriously.

The choice to stay engaged is one of the most important things you can do for them right now, particularly when a situation has affected others.

'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.'

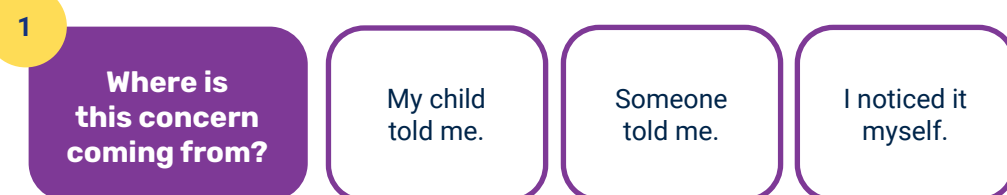
– YOUNG PERSON, 16, PROJECT
ROCKIT NATIONAL YOUTH
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Using the flowchart

The flowchart on the next page can help you work out what is happening and what to do next. Move through each question in order and follow the path that fits your situation. Some of the guidance applies to all age groups.

Where guidance is specific to primary or secondary school, this is labelled.

Parents and carers



Go to step 2

Go to step 2

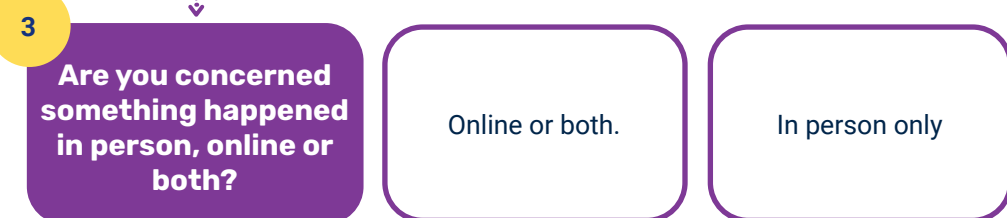
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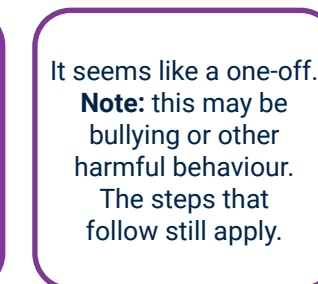
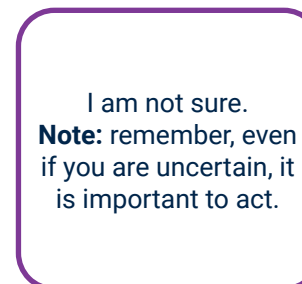
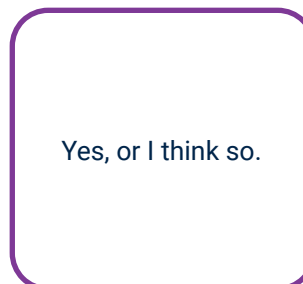
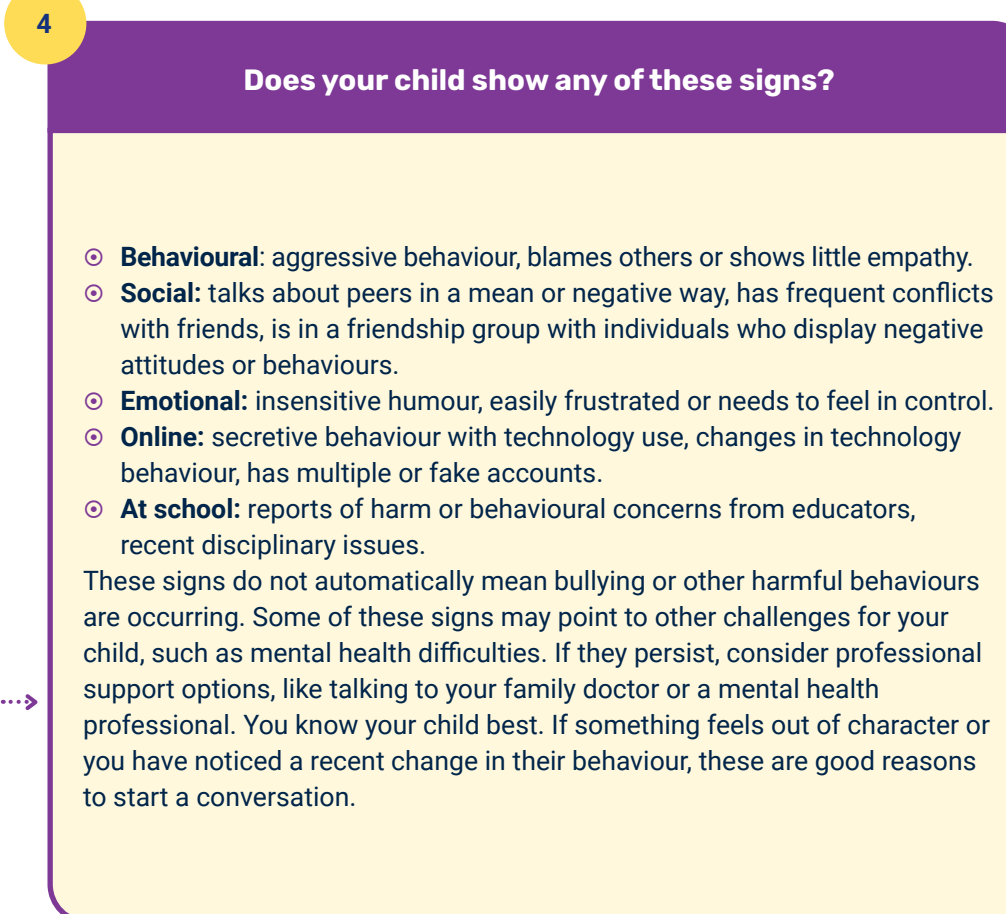
Before going further, it helps to describe what you have seen or heard. These situations are not always straightforward, and uncertainty is normal.

- ◉ Bullying is one type of harmful behaviour, but it's not the only one. Harmful behaviour is anything that hurts a child physically or emotionally. This includes things that happen in person or online.
- ◉ Any behaviour that affects how safe, confident or included a child feels is worth taking seriously.
- ◉ Harmful behaviour may occur once or repeatedly and can include:
 - ◉ exclusion, gossip or social isolation
 - ◉ name-calling or intimidation
 - ◉ online harassment, image-based abuse or group chats targeting someone
 - ◉ discrimination and harassment, including racism, sexism, ableism and homophobia
 - ◉ physical aggression or threats
 - ◉ emotional abuse, conflict or hurtful relationships and interactions.

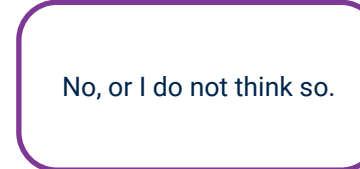
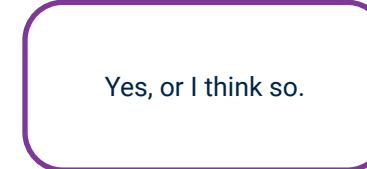
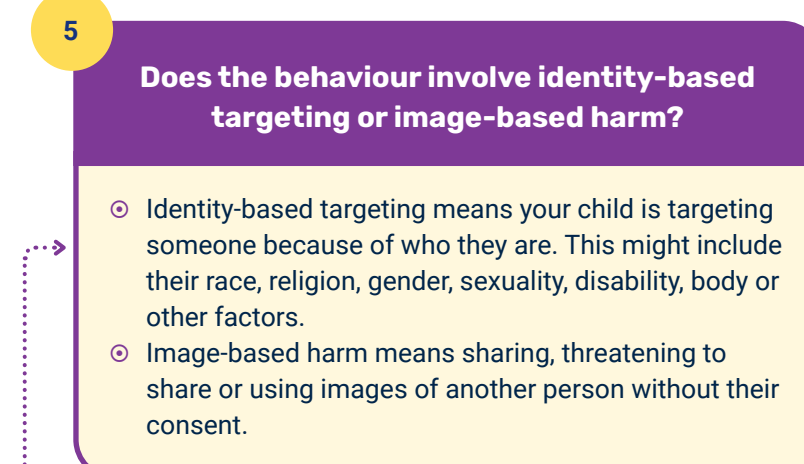
Disagreements and arguments are a normal part of relationships. But conflict becomes harmful when it causes emotional distress, makes someone feel unsafe or impacts their wellbeing or learning. Not sure how to describe it? That is normal. Keep going.



Go to step 4



Go to step 5



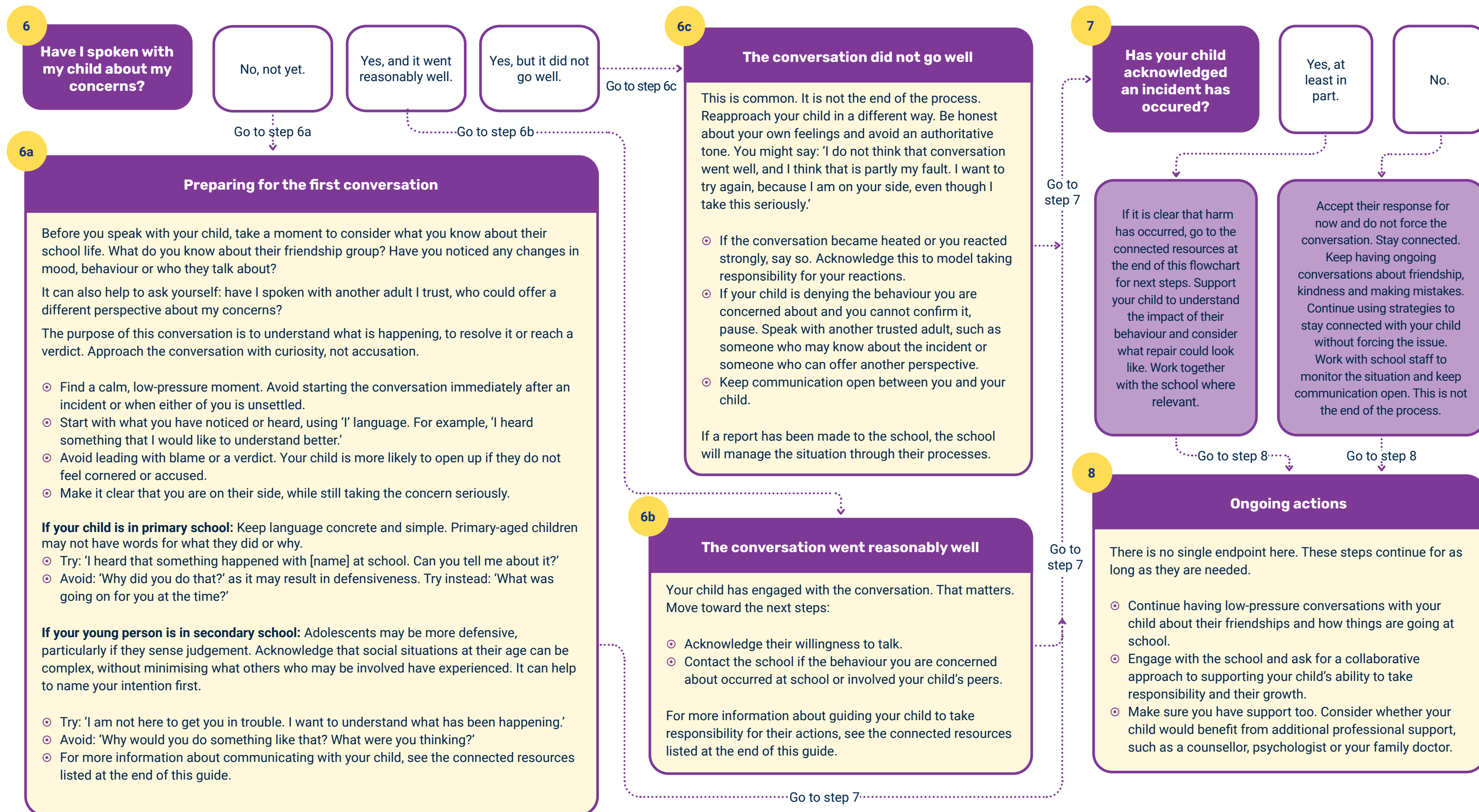
Report illegal and harmful online content or online abuse to the platform or service first, then report it to **eSafety** at esafety.gov.au/report.

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.

Go to step 6

Go to Step 6

Parents and carers



Where to get more help

If you need further support, help is available:

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 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 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 info@humanrights.gov.au.

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

¹State, 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.