

**From Review to Action**  
**PREPARING SCHOOLS FOR NATIONAL BULLYING STANDARDS**  
**JOHN BURNS PHD**  
 1 APRIL 2026 ILLUME LEARNING

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### Bullying and mental health



**Consequences of bullying victimization in childhood and adolescence: A systematic review and meta-analysis**  
 Daphne O'Neil, Suzanne E. Hammer, Sheryl S. Swanson, et al.

“Strong evidence exists for a causal relationship between bullying victimization, mental health problems and substance use. . . . The strong evidence that bullying victimization is causative of mental illness highlights the need for schools to implement effective interventions to address bullying behaviours”

Moore et al, Uni of Queensland, *World Journal of Psychiatry*, p. 61.

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### Bullying and educational outcomes



**The effect of peer bullying on academic achievement: A meta-analytic study related to results of TIMSS and PIRLS**  
 Ozaydin and Karadağ 2023

**The relationship between violence in childhood and educational outcomes: A global systematic review and meta-analysis**  
 Debnath, Prasad, et al.

The findings of the study revealed that peer bullying had a significant effect on academic achievement. . . .

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### Lifetime effects of bullying



**The adult consequences of being bullied in childhood**  
 David C. Reardon and Alex Bryson

- Data from the National Child Development Study
  - Prospectively followed a sample of 17,415 babies born in one week in the UK in 1958
  - Measured bullying aged 7 and 11 years.
  - Reviewed 12 sweeps of data up to age 62
- FINDINGS:** Bullying . . .
- Negatively impacts wellbeing
  - Raises probability of mortality before age 55
  - Lowers the probability of having a job in adulthood

\*\* These effects are independent of other adverse childhood experiences

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### The economic cost of bullying

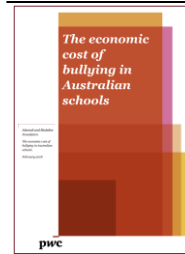


"Annual costs in Australian dollars (AUD) in 2016 on health and non-health outcomes attributable to child and adolescent bullying victimization were estimated at AUD \$763 million: AUD \$750 million for health system costs with AUD \$147 million for anxiety disorders, AUD \$322 million for depressive disorders, AUD \$57 million for intentional self-harm, and AUD \$224 million for tobacco use; AUD \$7.5 million for productivity losses of victims' caregivers; and AUD \$6 million for educational services".  
Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2021) p367

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### The economic cost of bullying



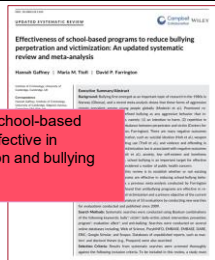
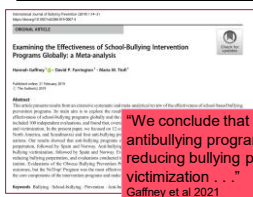
- Costs associated with bullying = \$2.4 billion for each individual school year group, made up of:
  - \$525 million in costs to victims, perpetrators, families, schools and the community over 13 years of the cohort
  - \$1.9 billion in the 20 years that follow school completion due to impacts to productivity, chronic health issues, impacts on family and other members from family violence

PWC 2018

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### Anti bullying programs work



**"We conclude that overall, school-based antibullying programs are effective in reducing bullying perpetration and bullying victimization . . ."**  
Gafney et al 2021

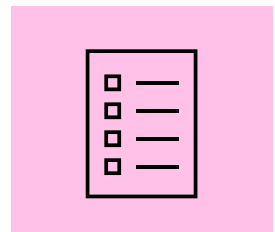
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### Our plan for today:



1. Unpack the Rapid Review: what was it about and what did it find?
2. Review the outcome of the Rapid Review for our schools: what is the government doing; what do schools need to do?



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## JUST TO BE CLEAR

### I AM NOT AN INSIDER

- I don't work for the state or federal government
- I don't work for an education sector
- I have been in communication with the authors of the Rapid Review and the Federal Education Department Wellbeing and Equity Branch, but
- I don't speak on behalf of anyone in any official capacity

## Content warning



## The purpose of the Review



Released October 2025

"The Review was established in recognition of the increasing incidence of bullying and cyberbullying affecting school students and the significant detrimental impacts this has on all involved. It was also in recognition of the tragic consequences bullying can have, including young Australians taking their lives after experiencing bullying." (p. 28)

## The purpose of the Review



"The review will look at what is working and what needs strengthening . . . with options for the development of an approach to a consistent National Standard for responding to bullying and its underlying causes in schools. If agreed, a standard could inform policies across jurisdictions, in both the government and non-government school sectors, to provide children and parents confidence that no matter where a child goes to school, if they're experiencing bullying, it will be managed in an appropriate way." (p. 93)

## The Authors



Dr Charlotte Keating  
Clinical Psychologist

Prof Jo Robinson  
Head of Suicide Prevention  
at Orygen, Centre for Youth  
Mental Health

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## How the Review was conducted



- 1. Invited public submissions:** 1706 received (5 weeks)
- 2. Online consultations:** with 77 targeted stakeholders
- 3. Jurisdictional visits:** at major cities, regional communities, supported by education departments
- 4. Reference group:** Membership from parent groups, principals, unions, government agencies, academics and peak bodies. A "sounding board" for co-chairs.
- 5. Commissioned research:** an evidence review + an analysis of public documents from education stakeholders

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## How the Review was conducted



Explicit assumption of the Review:

Bullying exists on a continuum with  
"other harmful behaviours"

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## And what did the Review 'hear'?



### The prevalence of bullying

- > 1 in 4 students in Years 4-9 report being bullied every few weeks
- 70% of 12-13 year olds report experiencing bullying-like behaviour in past year
- 53% of young people report being cyberbullied
- From 2019 – 2024, reports of cyberbullying complaints to the eSafety commissioner increased by 455%
- In 2024 the Kids HelpLine reported 3,500 calls/online contacts about bullying
- Most likely groups: First Nation, disability, LGBTQI

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## And what did the Review 'hear'?



### The prevalence of bullying

*"the impact of bullying and other harmful behaviours on Australian children and young people has reached devastating proportions"*  
(p. 32)

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## And what did the Review 'hear'?



### The impacts of bullying

1. 3-6 times more likely to experience mental health issues than those not bullied
2. Worse academic outcomes
3. School refusal, changing schools, homeschooling or leaving education
4. Lifelong impacts: reduced community participation, poorer socio-economic outcomes, poorer mental & physical health.
5. Witnessing bullying > moral distress and social anxiety
6. Economic and productivity costs for the nation

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## And what did the Review 'hear'?



### Risks and protective factors

1. Those with MH concerns more likely to be bullied or engage in bullying
2. Social emotional skills (e.g. emotion regulation, problem solving, relational skills) affect bullying behaviour
3. Challenging home environment = risk factor
4. Positive school environment (inclusion, connectedness) = protective factor
5. Cultural factors (misogamy, online content) contribute to bullying behaviours

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## And what did the Review 'hear'?



### From students

1. Feeling unsupported: *"students conveyed a sense of feeling ignored and dismissed by the systems and supports they thought were going to help them"*
2. There needs to be stronger guidance and messaging: *"more consistent and clear messaging around what bullying and other harmful behaviours are and what to do when they happen"*
3. Mixed experiences on how adults responded: Some responses helped, some didn't.
4. Empowering student voice would enable better school culture and policies
5. Teachers need to model respect better

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And what did the Review 'hear'?



From parents & families

1. There is no 'one size fits all'. Parents especially dissatisfied when schools failed to stop bullying
2. Less positive about restorative responses, instead wanting to see consequences/punishments.
3. Need to involve the whole school in anti-bullying measures; more training for educators
4. Parents want more communication and accessible information about policies

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And what did the Review 'hear'?



From educators and schools

1. Want whole-of community engagement, a shared understanding of bullying and clear practices
2. Whole-of-society issues require combined efforts to combat, not schools singlehandedly
3. Schools want more resources to prevent and address bullying (pre-service training, PD, practical info and resources, time allocation, counsellors)
4. Need for evidence-based policies and practices; relying on punitive measures (detention, suspension) alone is ineffective
5. Caring for teacher safety and wellbeing

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And what did the Review 'hear'?



"The Review repeatedly heard of the disproportionate rates of bullying, discrimination and other harmful behaviours experienced by diverse groups of students, including First Nations students, students with disability, students who identify as LGBTIQA+"

p.42

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What did the Rapid Review offer?



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But probably those of us in schools already knew all that!

So, what did the review think needs to happen?

They identified **FIVE** key national priority areas to inform a set of **NATIONAL STANDARDS**.

## FIVE PRIORITY AREAS

- **PRIORITY AREA 1:** The whole school community working together
- **PRIORITY AREA 2:** Creating clarity and confidence in school responses
- **PRIORITY AREA 3:** Intervening early and appropriately
- **PRIORITY AREA 4:** Supporting the school workforce
- **PRIORITY AREA 5:** Reducing the bullying risks and fostering safe, inclusive and respectful communities

“A National Standard on Bullying in Australian Schools provides the framework for all school systems and schools to establish **shared national expectations and actions** and provide confidence that no matter where a student goes to school, bullying behaviours, including harmful antecedent behaviours (referred to as bullying and other harmful behaviours) will be appropriately addressed and the school workforce supported to take appropriate action”.

p. 99 Anti-bullying Rapid Review

## What is a Standard?

“Standards are voluntary documents that set out specifications, procedures and guidelines that aim to ensure products, services, and systems are safe, consistent, and reliable”.

### Standards Australia

<https://www.standards.org.au/standards-development/what-is-standard>

**STANDARD 1****CONSISTENT ANTI-BULLYING REQUIREMENTS**

“School systems implement explicit and dedicated action to build positive and respectful school community cultures, to ensure bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted, appropriate and timely action is taken, and students’ right to education and a safe learning environment is upheld”.  
(p.88)

- Implementing and adhering to all the interconnected elements of the National Standard in a way that is appropriate for the unique local school context

*For the record, that’s all there is on this Standard*

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**STANDARD 2****WHOLE OF SCHOOL AND LOCALLY TAILORED APPROACHES**

“Schools implement a whole-of-school approach to preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours, involving the whole school community – students, parents and carers, the school workforce and wider school community – working together against bullying and other harmful behaviours, upholding shared expectations and creating a positive and safe learning environment.”

- Developing whole of school policies and processes
- Preventive and responsive
- Partnership between school, parents, students and wider community
- School leaders create safe and positive learning environments
- Considering the unique needs of the local school as well as needs of diverse students

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**STANDARD 3****CREATE CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE IN SCHOOL ANTI-BULLYING ACTION**

“All school systems and schools have visible and transparent anti-bullying policies and processes in place and are accountable for timely and appropriate action”

- Details on how to report incidents, how school will respond, what supports are available and what escalation steps are available
- Initiate a response within two school days of becoming aware of bullying behaviour, e.g., safety and support planning, action to prevent further harm
- Communicating what actions have been taken to those involved, without compromising privacy
- Keeping records of actions taken
- Routinely reviewing anti-bullying policies and processes

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**STANDARD 4****INTERVENING EARLY AND APPROPRIATELY**

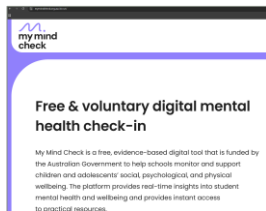
“All school systems and schools implement an evidence-based continuum of prevention, early proactive intervention and response action on bullying and other harmful behaviours”

- Prioritising prevention and proactive action
- Ensure responses are trauma-informed, relationship focussed, and tailored to each unique circumstance
- Ensuring support for all involved/affected – students and staff behaviour
- Help students (who bully) understand cause and impact of their own behaviour
- Clear pathways to escalate where interventions are not resolved
- School systems to ensure schools have access to information

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## STANDARD 5

### SUPPORT THE SCHOOL WORKFORCE

“School systems and schools ensure school leaders, educators and non-teaching staff are empowered and equipped to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours and to support a positive and safe learning and working environment.”

- Provision of trauma informed PD on bullying, risk and protective factors and prevention and response action.
- Ensuring school staff are given time needed to undertake PD on bullying and contribute to prevention and response activities
- Ensuring all staff understand the school's policies; the processes to follow; access to resources/guidance to help them be accountable and take appropriate action
- Ensure support for staff impacted by – or by responding to – bullying and other harmful behaviours

## STANDARD 6

### REDUCING RISKS AND FOSTERING SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND RESPECTFUL COMMUNITIES

“School systems and schools take action to:

(yes, that's it...that's all there is)

- Address the broader risk and protective factors influencing bullying, through:
  - education on respectful relationships, social emotional skills, digital safety and citizenship
  - Explicit teaching on bullying and other harmful behaviours
- Ensure continual improvement, including through data collection and analysis, evaluation and research to ensure action achieve change.

## Recommendations – JB truncated

1. Education Ministers commit to actions and reforms to make schools safe, respectful and inclusive
2. Education Ministers 'consider' implementing the Standards across all school systems
3. The Australian Government lead the transformative national action
4. Education Ministers, school systems and school leaders support implementing clear, transparent and trauma informed anti-bullying policies and procedures
5. Education Ministers commit to empowering and equipping school communities to prevent and address bullying and building safe, positive environments
6. Education Ministers and school systems support local school action
7. Education ministers commit to continual improvement in addressing bullying
8. Education Ministers engage with other relevant portfolio Ministers (health, community, communication) to support a whole-of-society approach to bullying and address broader risk factors

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Media Release 18 October 2025

### Albanese Government to back Anti-Bullying Review recommendations with \$10 million to get work started

The Hon. Jason Clark MP  
Minister for Education

Education Ministers have agreed to a new national plan to address bullying in Australian Schools as recommended by the [Anti-Bullying Review](#).

The Federal Government will back the plan agreed by Education Ministers on Friday with up to \$10 million investment to get the work we have to do started.

The investment supports two of the main recommendations of the Review:

- Putting \$5 million behind a national awareness campaign, and
- another \$5 million behind new resources for teachers, students and parents. This will include resources for students on how to be 'upstanders' against bullying with evidence showing peer-based approaches can be powerful.



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### National Quality Framework in Early Childhood Education

Aim: a national approach to improve the quality of early childhood education

Legislated via national and state law

Priority areas are assessed and rated by regulatory authorities

Public ratings given and available for the community to see

Penalties: fines, infringement notices, suspension or cancellation of service, ban individuals from the sector

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## The language of National Standard got dropped



WE NOW HAVE A "NATIONAL FRAMEWORK" CONSISTING OF SIX "PRINCIPLES"



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Jumping  
forward  
to  
20 February 2026

## The Implementation Plan



- o All Education Ministers accepted the Rapid Review of October 2025 and have been working on the Implementation Plan
- o Released 20 February 2026
- o The Plan sets out Minister's expectations for the roll out, including some ideas on timeline.
- o **The language of a "Standard" has been dropped in favour of a Priority Action Areas**

## PRIORITY AREA 1

### CONSISTENT ANTI-BULLYING REQUIREMENTS

- Education Ministers agree to implement the National Framework across all school systems nationally
- Governments and non-government sectors will promote awareness and understanding of actions that prevent and address bullying
- **By Term 1 2027**, all state, territory and non-gov't sectors will:
  - Embed and reflect the National Framework in policies and procedures
  - Deliver communications to all schools to raise awareness of the National Framework, incl. expectations of the two school-day timeframe
- **By Term 1 2027**, all schools will publish or link to new or updated policies and procedures that align with the National Framework

## PRIORITY AREA 2

### WHOLE-OF-SCHOOL AND LOCALLY TAILORED APPROACHES

- The Federal government will support the education sector to embed a whole-of-school & locally tailored approach to prevent and address bullying.
- **From July 2026** they will:
  - Develop and rollout resources for students, parents/carers and school staff to support implementation of the Framework, including attention to priority equity groups, and make them available to relevant platforms
  - Deliver a national public awareness campaign (research, public relations activities to promote awareness of bullying and its impacts)

## PRIORITY AREA 3

CLARITY AND CONFIDENCE IN SCHOOL ANTI-BULLYING ACTION



- Education Ministers will support schools to implement clear, transparent and effective anti-bullying policies. Schools to initiate safety and support planning and communicate with relevant parties within 2 school days of becoming aware of bullying "recognising further time might be needed to fully address the issue". Schools to embed the two-day response time into policies and procedures.
- **By end of June 2026**, jurisdictions will advise Ministers whether their school registration requirements reflect the National Framework, and if not, to provide a timeline to adopt them.
- National activities will align with and complement actions already underway across education sector.

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## My interpretation of action in the 48 hours



### What CAN schools do in the first 48 hours

- ✓ Comprehensively "hear" the allegation from the bullying target
- ✓ Initial investigation of other students who may be at risk
- ✓ Initial assessment of the student's wellbeing
- ✓ Develop and enact a safety plan for targeted student(s), including informing relevant staff
- ✓ Call parent(s) with initial information and response plan
- ✓ Document initial interview and response

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### What CANT schools do in the first 48 hours

- "Fix" ruptured peer relationships
- Hold face-to-face parent meeting
- Comprehensively investigate all the extended machinations of a complex bullying complaint
- Change school culture or systematic problems

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## PRIORITY AREA 4



INTERVENING EARLY AND APPROPRIATELY

- Federal government will support education sector and schools to prevent bullying and other harmful behaviours including through targeted resources and continued investment and work to support culturally responsive, age appropriate and evidence-based consent and respectful relationships education
- **By July 2026**, Federal, state and territory governments will develop "an approach for consideration" to an anti-bullying resource hub. The hub provides schools with evidence-based, quality assured anti-bullying information with a focus on prevention and early intervention.
- The above activities will be complemented by education sector actions to support schools to intervene early, incl. through policies, procedures an access to resources.

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**PRIORITY AREA 5**

SUPPORT THE SCHOOL WORKFORCE



- By Term 1 2027, prevention and response to bullying policies and procedures will be reflected and embedded into school practices, such as through induction and training of the workforce.
- In 2026, Australian Government will begin work to get anti-bullying, consent, and respectful relationships education into Initial Teacher Education core content
- National activities will be complemented by education sector activities, including increasing access to PD for school leaders, teachers and school staff

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**PRIORITY AREA 6**

REDUCING RISKS AND FOSTERING SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND RESPECTFUL COMMUNITIES



- In the next Australian Curriculum cycle, the governments will explore opportunities to review relevant content and resources in the Curriculum to ensure a focus on preventing and addressing bullying and other harmful behaviours.
- eSafety Commissioner will continue to safeguard Australians at risk of online harm; Australian government will continue to support Social Media Minimum Age restrictions for those under 16 years.
- Federal and state governments will engage with other relevant government portfolios for collaborative action
- State/Territory and non-gov't sectors to continue to support schools in delivery of consent and respectful relationships education, and where appropriate, SEL and online safety education.
- By end of December 2026, Australian government will provide progress report to Education Ministers

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WHAT CAN SCHOOLS BE DOING **NOW** TO GET READY FOR THE STANDARDS/PRIORITY AREAS?



Some of us will be way ahead of the game . . .  
Some of us will have some catching up to do



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**Getting ready for the Standards/Priority Areas**



WHAT CAN WE BE DOING NOW?

Get out some paper/a device and write the numbers 1-6.

I'm going to give you six ideas and I'd like you to rate how 'ready' you think your school is for this idea.

0 = we don't do this at all  
10 = we're hitting this out of the park



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**JBs suggestions for updating practices**



1. CREATE A CLEAR AND CONSISTENT END-TO-END PROCESS

A clear, shared description/diagram that elucidates



- How is bullying defined?
- How is bullying is reported?
- How is bullying is triaged – by whom?
- What happens in the first 24-48 hours?
- How are parents informed?
- Who does what within our school system?

Can we show that we have a clear and consistent process?

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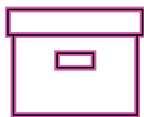
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**JBs suggestions for updating practices**



2. DEVELOP A CENTRAL DOCUMENTATION SYSTEM



- All incidents are recorded/logged/filed by a standardised 'form'
- Standardised information is collected
  - Type of bullying (physical, verbal, online, racial/religious, etc.)
  - Location
  - Students involved
  - Response actions
  - Time to response
- Centrally stored
- Amendable to quantification

Can we readily show that we have a clear, consistent and comprehensive documentation?

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**JBs suggestions for updating practices**



3. DEVELOP REGULAR MEASURE OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE



- Create mechanisms to hear student voice
- Implement simple, repeatable student experience surveys
  - School climate
  - School belonging
  - Experience of staff behaviour
  - Confidence in staff response
  - Location of bullying
  - Bystander competence
  - Experience of minority groups

Do we have mechanisms to capture how are student body experiences relationships within our school?

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**JBs suggestions for updating practices**



4. BUILD STAFF CAPACITY



**All staff need to know**

- Your shared definition of bullying
- How to recognise bullying, esp. more subtle forms
- How to recognise intergroup conflict (e.g. race or religious tension)
- How to intervene in the moment – being assertive, having difficult conversations
- The processes, expectations and responsibilities of your bullying process
- Ongoing PD – not just ‘one and done’

Can we demonstrate staff competence and growth in managing bullying and other harmful behaviours?

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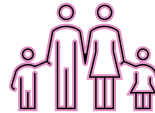
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**JBs suggestions for updating practices**



5. DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE PARENT COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS



**Be crystal clear and consistent about:**

- When parents are contacted
- Who contacts parents
- What information is communication (? scripts and templates)
- How/where/what parent communication is documented
- What follow-up is needed . . .
- . . . and make sure it happens, and is documented?

Can we readily show that we have a clear and consistent documentation?

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**JBs suggestions for updating practices**



6. DEVELOP SYSTEMS TO AUDIT THE QUALITY OF YOUR BULLYING RESPONSE



**Many schools track bullying incidents.**

**Not many review the effect of their responses**

- Do student who report bullying feel ‘heard’?
- Have peer tensions been resolved?
- Do staff feel competent in their anti-bullying roles?
- Do parents believe the school has responded adequately?
- Are we using our documentation system well?
- Are we adequately following up after a bullying incident?
- Have school climate/belonging interventions made a difference?

Do we collect systematic data to investigate the degree to which the actions we take actually make a difference for the members of our school community?

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**JBs suggestions for updating practices**



	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>/10</b>
1	A clear and consistent end to end process	
2	Centralised documentation	
3	Quantification of student experience	
4	Building and demonstrating staff competence	
5	Comprehensive parent communication systems	
6	Auditing the effects of our actions and interventions	

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**SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS**



1. Bullying and other harmful behaviours are genuinely harmful. It is right that we do something about it.
2. An effort to have a national approach to managing bullying and other harmful behaviours is to be applauded.
3. The solution lies not in one individual person, school, sector. It is all of us working together. Do your part in bringing about change.
4. There are helpful ideas contained in the National Standard/Framework. We should all get on board with it.
5. The proof will be in the pudding:
  1. Will Gov't put adequate resources to it?
  2. Will schools conscientiously make changes in the busyness of school life?
  3. In the absence of regulation, legislation or audit, will it be a priority?

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**Investigate further**



WHAT	WHERE
Final Report from the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review	<a href="https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/resources/final-report-antibullying-rapid-review">https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/resources/final-report-antibullying-rapid-review</a>
National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools	<a href="https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/resources/national-framework-addressing-bullying-australian-schools">https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/resources/national-framework-addressing-bullying-australian-schools</a>
Implementation Plan for the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review	<a href="https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/announcements/implementation-plan-antibullying-rapid-review">https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/announcements/implementation-plan-antibullying-rapid-review</a>

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**Navigating the Rocky Road of Dual Relationships in School Counselling**

**WEBINAR - 10am AEST 6th May 2026**

Presented by **Dr John Burns**

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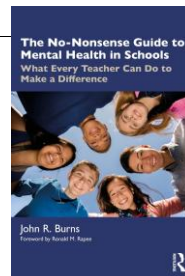
Join Dr John Burns for this webinar as he unpacks the ethical complexities of dual and multiple relationships for school counsellors, sharing practical guidance to help counsellors and leaders navigate blurred boundaries with confidence.

School counsellors encounter more dual and multiple relationship dilemmas than counsellors in almost any other setting. In schools, a counsellor may also be a teacher, coach, camp leader, playground supervisor or mentor — sometimes to several members of the same family. These blurred roles can create ethical tension, risk to students, and uncertainty for counsellors.

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