RESOURCE

A Guide for Parents and Guardians to Combat Bullying

By **Justice for Sisters** & **Monsters Among Us**

Justice for Sisters

Monsters Among Us
Youth Advocates

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This resource “A Guide for Parents to Combat Bullying” was written by Fir Redzuan, edited by thilaga and Nemo, and designed by Jun Kit with support from Astrid van Dort and Vee Izhar.

Introduction

As parents and guardians, it is, of course, nerve-wracking to think about our own child—or any child—being affected by bullying, whether as the one committing it or as the victim. Bullying is not just a horror story we hear in the news. It is more rampant than we realise. PS The Children found through their consultations with young people that bullying is a term that is not foreign to their vocabulary.

84% of children in Malaysia have been bullied. (Malaysia Crime Prevention Foundation) Whether the bullying happens online or face-to-face, it severely impacts the young people in our lives. It has long-term impacts that will haunt them until adulthood. Poor mental health, impacted academic performance, and developing low self esteem are some effects of bullying on a person. One that must not be taken lightly is how bullying can impair their sense of self and self worth.

Children and young people have the right to live happy, healthy and safe lives. They are entitled to a life where they love and celebrate their bodies, mind and soul. Let’s take this as a call for action for adults to come together and ensure that young people are confident and have the bravery to step into their agency.

Join us in this journey as we navigate bullying and **how parents and guardians can contribute to creating happier and braver childhoods.**

Bullying can happen both in person or online. (UNICEF) It is a repetitive act of intentionally hurting a person or group by another person or group.

This relationship involves an imbalance of power between the committor (the person who commits the acts of bullying) and the victim(s) (the person or people who receive the acts of bullying).

What is bullying?

Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. (Anti-Bullying Alliance) Though bullying often starts in school compounds, it lingers in the lives of young people and follows them back home and into their digital lives.

Bullying often stems from a power imbalance between the person(s) committing it and the victim(s). This means that children from marginalised and minority groups are more vulnerable to becoming victims. All children, including those from refugee, stateless, undocumented, Indigenous, and disabled communities have the right to be protected against discrimination, violence, and other harms.

As parents and guardians, have honest conversations with our children and young people to unpack **privilege***, **power imbalance*** and **discrimination*** in our society. It is our duty as adults ourselves to challenge discrimination so that the young people in our lives can model respectful, kind and empathetic behaviours.

• *GLOSSARY*

Privilege
Rights or benefits given to certain people based on characteristics like gender, race, wealth, or sexuality

Discrimination
Any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, [skin] colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.

Power Imbalance
When one party is able to dominate decision- making or otherwise asserts power in ways.

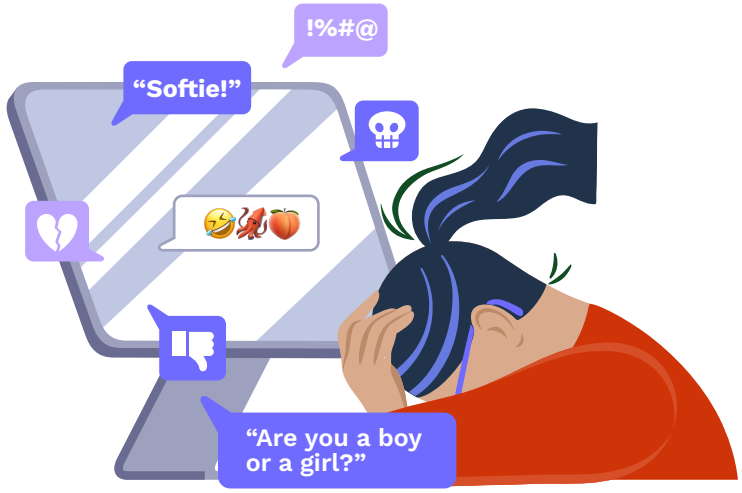
What does it look like?

Bullying takes many forms; however it always involves **intent, repetition** of actions and assertion of **power** by the bully.

Bullying should be distinguished from interpersonal conflict which are often isolated or one-off. Studies have also highlighted that bullying normally happens in a group setting.

Young people have shared that the common bullying experiences amongst peers are:

- gender-based,
- appearance-based and
- isolation as a common form of bullying or sanction. (Monsters Among Us)



As a community, we believe that children and young people are not inherently bad. However, they learn or pick up harmful words and actions from the adults in their lives, the media they consume, and other things in their lives, to an extent, through gaming platforms.

The reality is, we can never come up with an exhaustive list of actions and words that can hurt someone. However, as long as the action or words did in fact harm or hurt another, that should be enough to warrant us as adults to respond appropriately.

• POP QUIZ

1

How do you differentiate between banter and bullying?

2

When does banter become bullying?

(SEE ANSWER IN THE EXPLANATION BOX BELOW!)

• EXPLANATION

Banter is "the playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks". It can be a positive form of interaction amongst children but oftentimes, bullying is guised as banter to justify harmful behaviour. Remember! If the action is **repetitive**, done with the **intent** to hurt, and involves a **power imbalance** in the relationship, it constitutes bullying.

What to look out for?

Victims of violence, including bullying may not always express their problems to you directly. They carry a lot of shame, guilt, confusion, and some even internalise the harm that has been inflicted on them. As adults, we have to **pay attention to the changes** in a young person be it physical, emotional or psychological.

Some signs to look out for include

- physical marks such as unexplained bruises, scratches, broken bones and healing wounds,
- fear of going to school or joining school events, being anxious, nervous or very vigilant,
- losing friends suddenly or avoiding social situations,
- personal belongings being lost or damaged,
- not sleeping well and may be having nightmares,
- regularly distressed after spending time on their phone (without a reasonable explanation) and
- being aggressive or having angry outbursts.[1]

1 UNICEF, Bullying: What is it and how to stop it https://www.unicef.org/parenting/child-care/bullying

Adults tend to minimise bullying to ‘child’s play’ for various reasons. However bullying behaviours such as name calling, physically harming or isolating someone can cause severe harm to the victim to the extent where they change as a person.

As parents and guardians, we know our children best. **How are they doing?**

Be present in their lives and take interest in their day-to-day activities. A young person will more likely open up to an adult who shows consistent care. Let that adult be us.

PRO TIP!

As adults, we must take initiatives to have consistent, open and affirming conversations with our children.

It may not be natural for some of us, but we can practise this at home daily.

Young people pay great attention to our body gestures and non-verbal cues. If we seemingly respond in a way that may invalidate their feelings, make light of a situation they raised or even judge a question they have, they will take that as BIG NO to open up to us the next time a real problem arises.

What if my child is bullying others?

Children are not inherently bad. **If they are bullying others, it might be a call for help.** In some cases, children who bully are themselves victims or witnesses to violence at home or in their community. (UNICEF)

What can we do and how do we help them overcome this?

1. Have an open conversation with them

A common misconception that adults project onto children and young people is that they are too young to participate in big and heavy conversations. We must challenge that by giving them a chance to **speak for themselves**. Understand why they are acting out; is someone making them feel unsafe in school? Is life at home okay for them?

If they appear to be resisting a conversation with you, it is okay. Ask them if they would like to speak to an adult they trust or a professional. Sometimes, an impartial third party could reduce the barrier of opening up. As the parent and guardian, though it might be saddening that they do not feel comfortable sharing their feelings with you, remember that you are there to support and learn together with them.

2. Learn, introduce, and practice healthy coping skills together

Even as adults, we may not practice the healthiest ways to cope with difficult emotions such as anger and frustration. It could manifest as lashing out after a long day at work, giving our partners the silent treatment or even raising our voices in a heated argument. This is an opportunity for us as adults to reflect on the culture of violence that we might reinforce in our homes as well.

Remind your children or young people around you that they are not bad people for having difficult emotions. Practicing useful techniques such as breathing and grounding[2] exercises can help regulate our emotions and ourselves when we start feeling big emotions coming in. **There are no good or bad emotions, all emotions are valid.**

Model alternative communication styles to get their message across. Encourage them to think of non-violent ways when conversing with someone. Oftentimes, emotions do get too much and we lack the tools to express them healthily. Reassure them that this is a lifelong journey and they are not alone in the process.

3. Create opportunities to learn about accountability together

Young people must know that harming others is not acceptable. They must also learn that while making mistakes is part of growing up, it must go hand in hand with admitting fault and figuring out ways to make amends. Ask them what being responsible for their fault could look like. Encourage them to apologise and seek the opinion of those harmed by them on what reconciliation could look like.

As adults, we must nurture spaces for young people to learn that making mistakes and being accountable are the norm. Include the responsible teachers and parents of the victims in the conversation, but always centre the voices of the young people. **This is their process, not ours as adults.**

2 10 Grounding Exercises for Kids to Manage Anxiety and Worries
https://mentalhealthcenterkids.com/blogs/articles/grounding-exercises-for-kids

Preventing and standing up against bullying together

If your child is being bullied, it is understandable for you as the parent or guardian to feel a myriad of emotions. You could feel angry, sad, worried and upset by the whole situation. That is okay.

1. Listen and be present

It is a green flag that your child is coming to you directly to speak of this. **Honour this opportunity**. Though it makes sense to be on fight mode, listen to what they have to say first. When they are ready for questions, ask open-ended questions like “How do you feel about it? or “What support do you need?”. Acknowledge the emotions both of you might be feeling and sit with them together. You and your young person are a team.

2. Practise asserting boundaries

Even as adults, it is challenging to know what our boundaries are. Empower your child or the young person to not disregard their bodily signals whenever they are in a sticky situation. If they feel butterflies in their tummy, the back of their neck gets hot or their shoulders freeze, these might be signals that they are feeling unsafe.

If it is safe for them, encourage them to establish boundaries with those who are bullying them. It could help to practise or role play ways on how your young person could assert boundaries with their peers. This should be done more commonly so that they do not feel bad or guilty for having boundaries.

3. Help them identify a support system

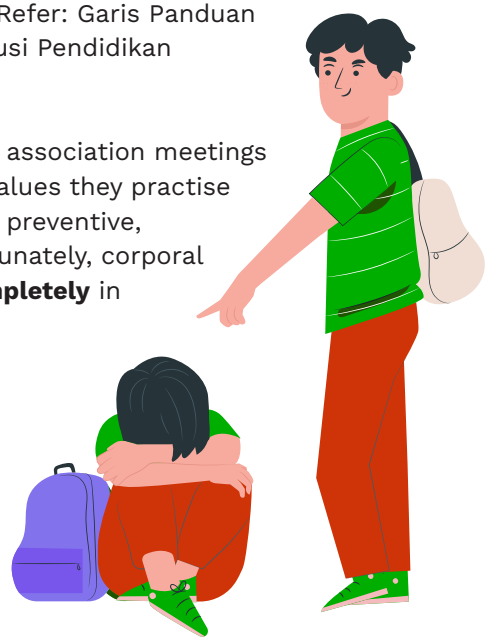
Your child or the young person affected by bullying should not be alone in this situation. If it is unsafe to directly assert their boundaries, encourage them to think about people they trust for help. It could be a trusted teacher or even a counselling teacher at school. Empower them to convey this to the teacher while you provide the support that is meaningful to them. Step up if they need someone to talk on behalf of them about their experience at school/online.

How do I step up as a parent or guardian to prevent bullying culture in schools?

1. Learn about the school's policy and procedures on anti-bullying culture

First of all, make sure the school does have a policy addressing anti-bullying culture! Such policies or mechanisms are essential to ensure that bullying is not only prevented, but handled in a nurturing and non-violent way. Schools under the Malaysian Ministry of Education have the obligation to comply with the ministry's procedure on addressing bullying. (Refer: Garis Panduan Pengurusan Salahlaku Buli di Institusi Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia)[3]

Question through parents-teachers association meetings regarding the procedures and the values they practise as an institution to ensure they are preventive, rehabilitative and educative. Unfortunately, corporal punishment is still not banned **completely** in schools in Malaysia.



As a parent and guardian, it is your duty to ensure that your child has the right to learn in safety. Ask about children's right to privacy and confidentiality when managing a bullying complaint.

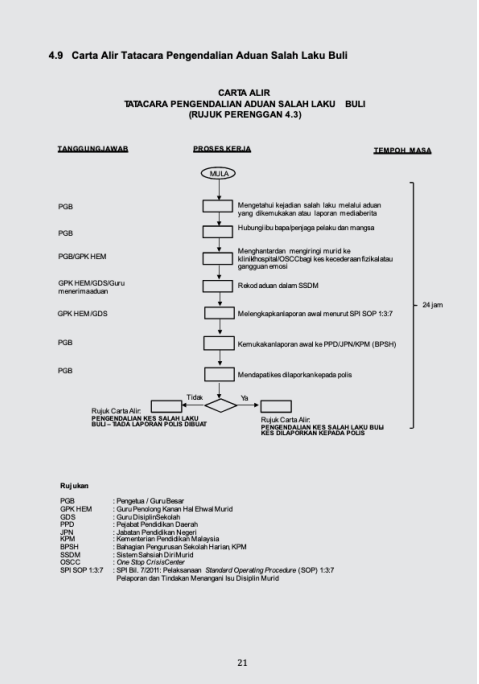
3 Garis Panduan Pengurusan Salahlaku Buli di **Institusi Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia: http://bit.ly/4fYFLNc**

• FYI: SOP TO ADDRESS BULLYING IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

1. Principal/Headmaster is informed of a complaint
2. School is to call parents or guardians of children involved
3. Bring the child/children to a clinic/hospital/One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC)
4. School is to record the complaint in their official information management system called SSDM
5. School is to record the report according to SPI SOP 1:3:7
6. School is to provide the report to the district education department or state education department or the Ministry of Education
7. Whether to report the complaint to the police, there are specific SOPs (Not all cases are reported to the police)[3]

• REFERENCE

For more information refer to the Ministry of Education's **Garis Panduan Pengurusan Salah Laku Buli Di Institusi Pendidikan**



4.9 Carta Alir Tatacara Pengendalian Aduan Salah Laku Buli

CARTA ALIR
TATACARA PENGENDALIAN ADUAN SALAH LAKU BULI
(RUJUK PERENGGAN 4.3)

TANGGUNGJAWAB | PROSES KERJA | TEMPOH MASA

MULA

PGB — Mengetahui kejadian salah laku melalui aduan yang dikemukakan atau laporan mediaberita

PGB — Hubungi ibu bapa/penjaga pelaku dan mangsa

PGB/GPK HEM — Menghantardan mengiringi murid ke klinikhospital/OSCCbagi kes kecederaan fizikalatau gangguan emosi

GPK HEM/GDS/Guru menerimaaduan — Rekod aduan dalam SSDM

GPK HEM/GDS — Melengkapkanlaporan awal menurut SPI SOP 1:3:7 — 24 jam

PGB — Kemukakanlaporan awal ke PPD/JPN/KPM (BPSH)

PGB — Mendapatkes dilaporkankepada polis

Tidak → Rujuk Carta Alir PENGENDALIAN KES SALAH LAKU BULI – TIADA LAPORAN POLIS DIBUAT

Ya → Rujuk Carta Alir PENGENDALIAN KES SALAH LAKU BULI KES DILAPORKAN KEPADA POLIS

Rujukan

PGB	: Pengetua / Guru Besar
GPK HEM	: Guru Penolong Kanan Hal Ehwal Murid
GDS	: Guru Disiplin/Sekolah
PPD	: Pejabat Pendidikan Daerah
JPN	: Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri
KPM	: Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia
BPSH	: Bahagian Pengurusan Sekolah Harian, KPM
SSDM	: Sistem Sahsiah Diri Murid
OSCC	: *One Stop Crisis Center*
SPI SOP 1:3:7	: SPI Bil. 7/2011: Pelaksanaan *Standard Operating Procedure* (SOP) 1:3:7 Pelaporan dan Tindakan Menangani Isu Disiplin Murid

21

3. Refer page 21: http://bit.ly/4fYFLNc

2. Participate in processes involving students safety and wellbeing

Almost 7 out of 10 children in **Malaysia** worry a lot about **bullying**. (UNICEF) Therefore, **we should encourage schools to always include the voices of students as decision makers themselves.**

In addition, there are many avenues for parents and guardians to participate meaningfully in processes that impact your child in their school. Unfortunately, this access is denied to children and young people themselves as we live in an **adultist*** society. Be their advocate and push for sound and empowering procedures and programmes that benefit them positively. Parent-Teacher Association (or Persatuan Ibubapa dan Guru (PIBG)) is the most common yet effective way to influence decision making in the school.

• GLOSSARY

Adultism
Refers to behaviours and attitudes that discriminate against young people. It is based on the assumption that adults are better than young people and are entitled to act upon young people without their agreement. This mistreatment is reinforced by social institutions, laws, customs, and attitudes.

• FYI: SOP TO ADDRESS BULLYING IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS — JAWATANKUASA PERMUAFAKATAN

Under this SOP, schools are empowered to establish a committee called Jawatan Permuafakatan involving both teachers and parents to address a bullying complaint. It serves as a platform to resolve conflicts and discrepancies harmoniously. Find out how you and your child can participate in this process to advocate for the voices of young people in the school.

3. Find out who your local assistant child protector is

Each district has a group of child protectors[5, 6] gazetted by the Social Welfare Department.[7] Their role is to expedite the rescue of children who are in danger and neglected in their respective local communities. Get to know them and explore opportunities for them to contribute to your child's schools to prevent bullying through community-led solutions.

4. Learning our laws: The Double Edge Sword

The current laws responding to bullying and cyberbullying are the Penal Code, Minor Offences Act 1955 (Revised 1987), Communications and Multimedia Act (1998) and the newly passed Online Safety Bill 2024.

However, it is crucial to note that these laws do not separate between an adult offender and a child offender. This would subject children (those below the age of 18) to liabilities, repercussions and enforcement measures that are meant for adults and are punitive in nature. We should advocate for preventive and restorative approaches when dealing with peer-to-peer bullying.

Uniquely in Malaysia, we have a Child Commissioner under the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM). The Office of the Children's Commissioner focuses on the promotion and protection of children's rights, as prescribed by the United Nations Child Rights Convention. The Commissioner advocates for better laws for children, promotes education and most importantly, receives child rights violation complaints and conducts monitoring of such cases.

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5 Tambahan pegawai pelindung kanak-kanak perlu disegerakan https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2022/09/1001729/tambahan-pegawai-pelindung-kanak-kanak-perlu-disegerakan

6 Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat KPWKM https://www.facebook.com/kpwkm/posts/peranan-pelindung-adalah-memastikan-setiap-kanak-kanak-mendapat-perlindungan-dar/885677093605648/

7 Peranan Pelindung Kanak-Kanak, Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat https://www.instagram.com/jkmhq/p/C8Y_ITeBfoS/

Resource Toolkit

Buddy Bear Childline
A phone line for children and teens to share their stress and worries
CALL: 1800 18 2327
TEXT THEM at Facebook Messenger at Buddy Bear Childline

Talian Kasih
A helpline for services to address emergencies and welfare and community related issues
CALL: 15999

Gender Empowered Generation (GEG)
A legal response network to address sexual harassment involving adults and minors
IG: @genderempoweredgeneration

Befrienders
A helpline to provide emotional support to people who are suicidal
CALL: 03-76272929

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)
A hotline for domestic violence
CALL: WAO hotline at +603 3000 8858
TEXT: WhatsApp/SMS TINA at 018 988 8058

Telenisa
A phone line provide legal advice for shariah family matters
CALL: 012-8123424

RRAAM Hotline
A hotline for safe abortion and unintended pregnancies
TEXT: WhatsApp at +60183687950

Monsters Among Us
An organisation that provides comprehensive sexuality education and developing child rights advocates
EMAIL: mybodymyrules@laporpredator.org

WCC Penang (Penang based)
An organisation that support women and children impacted by violence
TEL: 04-228 0342
COUNSELLING HOTLINE: 011-3108 4001