

## How Do I Help My Child? – Friendship Issues and Bullying

Friendship issues are common. In fact, most students will struggle socially or experience friendship issues in their schooling years. I would also go as far as to say that not only are these experiences normal, but they can also be healthy and vital for personal growth and social learning. Some exposure to conflict and friendship issues can build resilience, create self-awareness, teach students how to communicate and learn compromise.

As a college, we want our students to receive support, guidance and help in how to resolve and manage any of the difficult circumstances or social interactions that they face.

Some examples of some of the friendship issues we might encounter from our students on a daily basis might include the following:

- Rough play
- Teasing, swearing and name-calling
- Choosing not to include someone in a game
- Not allowing someone to sit with them
- Ignoring or avoiding someone
- Not sharing
- Giving someone a bad or mean look
- Disagreeing in a game
- Speaking unkindly about someone to others

Whilst these behaviours are not acceptable or encouraged at Parklands, we understand that as imperfect humans and children (professional mistake makers), they will occur. When they occur, we want to make sure we are able to support and provide education to the involved students.

Discussions that we might facilitate include things like learning empathy (ie. How would you feel if someone did that to you? How do you think that behaviour made that person feel?), assertiveness (ie. How to say “no” or stand up for oneself in a healthy way) and forgiveness and releasing of those who have hurt them.

Sometimes as adults, we can be too quick to jump in, become too involved and try to resolve these issues for children. And for good reason too! We don't like to see children hurting or upset or issues occurring longer than they need to. We do this with the best intentions and from a place of protectiveness. But something that this job has taught me is that children are clever and with support and healthy and positive advice, are more than capable of resolving things themselves (with our help in the background).

Our role as adults is to model healthy relationships and conflict resolution to the children in our lives. This means we should be teaching them to be responsible for themselves and their own behaviour, regardless of what others choose to. We should be teaching them that it is healthy to apologise when mistakes are made, even if it was an accident or unintentional. And we should be releasing them to go and try these things with their peers and friends and then asking how they went implementing those strategies.

But the answer isn't to ignore the problem altogether. When friendship issues are ongoing and unresolved, it can be damaging to those involved. Furthermore, we would even suggest that when these friendship issues are left unattended to and unresolved, there becomes a chance that these will become issues of bullying.

Bullying is a separate issue altogether to that of friendship issues. Sometimes we can be quick to label a friendship issue or conflict as an issue of bullying. It is really important to distinguish between when an incident is a “friendship issue” and when it is “bullying” as the impact and then resolution of these issues are very different.

As defined in our College policy, bullying is described as, “an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or group misusing their power over one or more persons.”

It is important to note that a single incident, conflict or fight between two students of the same age does not constitute as bullying. These things are to be expected. To be deemed as bullying, it needs to be an ongoing, repeated thing by an individual or group of people who have power. So for example, an older student in a higher grade consistently teasing and intimidating a younger student would be an example of power imbalance and bullying. Another example could be where a taller and stronger student pushes another smaller student around. The power imbalance in their size and strength as well as the consistent behaviour would deem this as bullying.

Our college is dedicated to the wellbeing of its students. Our policies outline that “the college will act to keep students safe” and this includes in instances of bullying.

The College will also aim to prevent bullying from occurring by constructing and delivering educational programs and initiatives in the primary, middle and secondary school to educate students. Some examples of this would be the Shine, Strength and Mentoring programs.

When this kind of bullying or behaviour is occurring, it is vital that the college be informed through the Student Care and Wellbeing team and Heads of School as soon as possible. If the college is not informed of this, it is impossible to help resolve issues. We promote the importance of reporting any incidences on the day that they occur so that we are able to investigate and help resolve these concerns. It means that we can provide support to those who are being affected and also put in place some protective measures to reduce and prevent this kind of behaviour from re-occurring.

Furthermore, students and parents and who wish to report concerns or observations of bullying, are able to do so by making an appointment to talk in person, via email and over the phone to the Student Care and Wellbeing too. Where some might not be comfortable with this, there is also a specific email address that families and individuals are able to send bullying concerns through to. The email address is [safety@parklands.qld.edu.au](mailto:safety@parklands.qld.edu.au).

Once investigated and the details of the incident are made clear, our team or the Heads of School will follow this up with the involved students. This may mean that the students will meet to discuss what occurred and give or receive an apology and in most circumstances, parents will be informed.

For further information around our Bullying Policy, please refer to this on our Parklands website at <https://parklands.qld.edu.au/policies/>

For additional information around bullying and how to respond to it, please visit <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/NationalDay>

We appreciate the efforts of all parents, students and staff members in keeping Parklands safe for all. Thank you for doing your part and for your support 😊