

Supporting the mental health of children who engage in bullying behaviour

Nicole Rollbusch ([00:00:01](#)):

Hello everyone and welcome. Thanks for joining us for this evening's webinar. And hello to those of you who might be watching this as a recording later. My name is Nicole Rollbusch and I'm a Practise Development Officer with Emerging Minds and I'll be facilitating tonight's webinar where we'll be talking about supporting the mental health of children who engage in bullying behaviour. Joining me on our panel tonight are Felicity Kime, Jessica Staniland, and Lesley-Anne Ey, who I'll introduce to you shortly. Next slide please. So I'd just like to acknowledge the land, which I'm on today, which is the lands of the Kurna people here in Adelaide. And I'd like to extend that acknowledgement to all of the different lands that you're all coming to us from tonight as well. I'd like to pay my respects to the elders, those past, present and emerging and acknowledge the deep connection that the Kurna people have to their land, the skies, the waterways, kin and community, and the importance of all of these things for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. And I'd invite you to share in the chat the land in which you are coming to us from today.

([00:01:20](#)):

So we've got a few topics coming up in September. So this is the final webinar of the sixth webinar series on Infant and Child mental health that MHPN and Emerging Minds have been collaborating on. So in September, Series Seven begins and we've got some really interesting topics coming up as well on trauma, out-of-home care disasters, suicidal ideation, school refusal and play with infants and toddlers. So if you'd like to keep up to date with those and you don't already, please subscribe to the Emerging Minds Newsletter or sign up for an MHPN account as well. Slide please. So just a little bit of information for those of you who might be unfamiliar with the platform that we're on tonight. So to interact with the platform and to access resources, you can click the three dots on the lower right of your screen to access information. So there you'll find the slides, you'll find a list of resources that we've put together for tonight as well.

([00:02:25](#)):

And there is a survey there for you to complete to provide your feedback on tonight's webinar, which we love. We love to hear what you think of how we are doing and how you're enjoying these webinars. And so to chat tonight, you'll see that there's a speech bubble to the top right. So that's just for you guys to chat amongst yourselves and comment on things that you are hearing throughout the webinar. And if you'd like to ask a question for the q and a section, there's a speech bubble in the right of your screen so you can submit a question and I'll be monitoring that throughout the webinar and taking note of those and asking our panel in the q and a section that we'll have later. And if you do have any trouble with tech, please click the live webcast support under the info tab. And as always, if the webinar cast does stop at any time, just try refreshing your browser to come back to us. And if you do miss anything, this is being recorded as well. So you'll have access to the recording shortly. So our aim for tonight's webinar is to increase confidence and skills in responding to children who've engaged in bullying behaviour. So you'll see our learning

outcomes there, but you will have sort of read through those already when you signed up. So I won't go into them in great detail in the moment. Next slide.

[\(00:03:58\)](#):

So it's now my pleasure to introduce our panel for this evening so you can read about each of them in a bit more detail in the materials disseminated in the webinar invitation. We have bios for everybody. So as I mentioned before, our three panel members for today are Flick Kime, a peer worker and child and family partner from New South Wales, Jessica Staniland, clinical psychologist also in New South Wales, and Associate Professor Lesley-Ann Ey who is a researcher who's joining me in South Australia. So Flick, I wanted to ask you first, why was it important for you to be a part of this webinar today?

Felicity Kime [\(00:04:42\)](#):

Yeah, look, I guess most importantly it's important to me to have families, voices in the room. Everything I do, it's really important and to personally have my own children and go through these types of experiences. So I'm really actually grateful to be a part of this.

Nicole Rollbusch [\(00:05:03\)](#):

Great, that's great to have you here. And Jess, I wanted to jump to you next. I wonder what some of the key challenges in addressing bullying behaviour at an all boys school might be?

Jessica Staniland [\(00:05:17\)](#):

Yeah, look, there's a number of challenges. I think one of the biggest ones is that bullying's under reported, there's lots of concerns around dobbing. So even when the boys do report their concerns, they're often really adamant that they want to keep quiet the names of the students who are engaging in the negative behaviour. And unfortunately that makes it a lot harder to investigate and obviously to support those students. I think more recently there's been a real shift towards cyber bullying and online behaviours. And that of course is a lot harder to try and trace and to manage. And I think finally in our school there's the additional overlay of students who are neurodiverse and have diagnoses of autism. There's a higher percentage of children with autism who are boys and there's those challenges that kind of come with navigating responses towards neurodiversity, but also teaching skills for those who do have neurodiversity. So there's a range of challenges.

Nicole Rollbusch [\(00:06:23\)](#):

Yes, certainly. Thank you for being here tonight with us tonight.

[\(00:06:29\)](#):

And Lesley, what is it in particular that interests you about research into bullying?

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey [\(00:06:36\)](#):

I think bullying is becoming, it is a global phenomenon. It's becoming more prevalent I think in schools and workplaces as well. So I think it's really important to research around bullying in relation to what influences the development of bullying behaviours to be able to support the child who is displaying those bullying behaviours as well as children who are being impacted by that. So I think we need that research around what is happening, what is influencing their development of those behaviours and what we can do to support kids, including how we can help teachers and other professionals in knowing how to respond appropriately.

Nicole Rollbusch [\(00:07:23\)](#):

Yeah, great. Really important and as you mentioned, it is really important for us to be talking about the children who do engage in the behaviour as well and their wellbeing. There can be lots of conversations about talking about children who experience bullying. So really pleased to have all three of you here tonight to talk about that. And just for our audience, what will happen now is each our panellists in turn will make a short presentation which will be followed by our q and a session. So I'll invite Flick to present first to you.

Felicity Kime ([00:08:02](#)):

Yeah, thanks Nicole. So before I jump right into it, I just want to give you guys a bit of a background. I will be talking on two of my children. So I'm a mother of four children, so I'll be speaking around my son that is nine years old with autism in a global development delay. And my daughter that is now 18 years old, my daughter that's 18 years old had been in child protection for five years and returned into my care. So I guess with my son that has autism, what I found was right in daycare, so around the age of five and his development stage was around three years old at that time, even though he was five. And we found he was biting other children and lashing out at other children. And the daycare had gave me quite a few warnings that if this behaviour didn't stop that he would be asked to leave and not return to the daycare centre. And not once did anybody sit down with me and acknowledge that he has autism and he has a delay and his behaviours was actually matching age appropriate behaviours.

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There was no solution on how would we look at this and work with my son around this and what was going on for him. All it kept was consequence after consequence, we can't do this and putting more stress onto my household as well. At the same time, my son was in daycare while I worked and part of him being in daycare was a social skill side of it that he really needed to interact with other children. And what I found was when I started looking into this more of what was actually going on, he was getting frustrated with other children in his space and he was nonverbal at the time as well, so he wasn't able to actually say, can you please not do this? I don't like this or any of that kind of stuff. So what I started noticing was he was lashing out because his needs wasn't getting met and he wasn't able to express himself and he was quite uncomfortable, but no one could see this.

([00:10:29](#)):

So it was just again, a consequence reaction and not investigating what was going on for him, which was very sad because we were looking at a placement where it was very beneficial in the beginning and it was about to be taken away. Lucky I was able to sit with the service and advocate for my son and we started therapy at the service and now they actually many years later have continued that service on for other children and it really supported him in that placement before he actually started kindergarten primary school. On the other hand, my now 18-year-old daughter when she was a teenager, she was returned home. She was in out of home care for five years, over 13 different placements, a lot of trauma, a lot of disconnect. Never felt a sense of belonging within any of her placements, let alone having to continuously move her friendships and her friend groups around.

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So she was never able to actually maintain friend connection. And what I had found when she come home, there was a lot of online bullying behaviour with her, with other children and some in the school yard as well. In high school. What I noticed a lot of this would come out when she didn't know how to actually end a friendship and she wanted to move away from that friend, there would be a lot of bullying behaviour and none of this stuff do I say was acceptable from my children. And there was a lot of me sitting down and explaining, especially to my daughter that this is not appropriate and it's not okay to bully other children. We need to look at how do you disconnect in a healthy way because she wasn't taught how to do that stuff. And what she found was if she'd done something

that people didn't like, people would remove her from that placement and she would go to a new placement.

[\(00:12:28\)](#):

So these learned ingrained behaviours come across as bullying to other people. And again, it was lots of conversations with other parents that this is not okay, your daughter's bullying my child or the school, lots of conversation. We can't have this behaviour at school. It's not acceptable. But not once did anybody actually ask any questions about where does this behaviour come from? Do I have a clue of what may be going on? No one actually spoke with my daughter asking her What's actually going on for you? How are you feeling? And for me, what I found is just asking her how she's feeling and reading her body language actually told me a lot that when she didn't want to voice what was going on for her, it took about six months and I was able to see this pattern of behaviour that I was able to keep a track of and notice that it was every time her self-esteem was low, she wanted to end connections and she didn't want to be at the school yard but didn't know how to express she didn't want to be at school.

[\(00:13:38\)](#):

What actually helped was actually my workspace. I work with parents in child protection and I'm very supported with social workers and peer workers and I was able, through this stuff going on, I was able to vent this stuff to my colleagues and supervisors and they actually helped me navigate this because I actually didn't have a clue of what I was meant to do. How do I navigate this? I'm not a therapist, I'm not a school teacher, I'm a mom learning for the very first time about these behaviours and a mom that was very distant for five years from my daughter. So I didn't actually know what was appropriate for a teenage girl's behaviour. So having a space that was created with trust that I could vent and talk about what was going on and not have that used against me and me feeling like there was guilt or shame that I was a bad parent, I wasn't capable.

[\(00:14:39\)](#):

And these people really acknowledged that I was actually quite aware of my children's behaviour in recognising things weren't okay and not acceptable, but there was more to the picture. So still today, I always, no matter what any human being says to me, I start thinking, okay, what more to this is there, what is the backstory to this? What I found is my children didn't just wake up and decide, okay, I'm going to start bullying and harassing and doing this and biting one day for the hell of it. There was something that happened for this to be happening, but no one actually stopped to ask my children or my family. So I'm really grateful to some social workers and some peer workers and the peer workers were other parents that could actually relate to what I was saying. So as soon as I'm talking about this stuff, they're like, oh yeah, my kid too. My kid did this and this is what was going on for my child. So I was able to feel very supported and then they were able to help support my children and help point us in directions of different services that helped us along this journey.

Nicole Rollbusch [\(00:15:54\)](#):

Yeah, that's fantastic Flick. And I think what you really highlighted is that curiosity about what's going on behind the behaviour and that punitive responses to children who engage in bullying behaviour are really common, but they don't necessarily get down to the bottom of why behaviour is happening. So really appreciated you sharing your story with us. Thank you for that.

Felicity Kime [\(00:16:23\)](#):

You're welcome.

Nicole Rollbusch [\(00:16:24\)](#):

I wanted to move on to Lesley now to share the research perspective. Lesley, over to you.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([00:16:33](#)):

Thank you Nicole. So first of all, one of the key things in relation to bullying is actually being able to define bullying properly from a researcher's perspective and then define the different types of bullying. So I'm just going to go through that first. So it's basically bullying is characterised by repeated aggressive behaviour intended to flick harm or distress upon another. He feels powerless to defend themselves due to a social or physical power imbalance. So this could be a child that's more popular, taller, bigger minority groups versus dominant groups, et cetera. And the types of bullying include physical bullying, which is inflicting physical harm on another or destroying their property. Then there's relational bullying, which is endeavouring to damage social relationships or a person's reputation or to socially exclude them or isolate them. Verbal bullying is attempting to harass, provoke, or verbally abuse or verbally instil fear into another. And then we've got cyber bullying, which is bullying behaviour that's carried out through the internet or mobile phone technologies and it's often combined with offline bullying. So it may include a combination of behaviours such as prank calls, insulting text messages, publishing someone's private information, creating hate sites or implementing social exclusion campaigns in social networking sites. Next slide please.

([00:18:08](#)):

So children engaging in bullying behaviour are a diverse group. So that is there's no identifying factor that separates children who engage in bullying behaviour from those who don't. So to try and identify characteristics of children who engage in bullying is stereotyping and it's like trying to identify characteristics of children who are considered naughty. And it also risks labelling children. So labelling children rather than labelling the behaviour. Bullying is not innate, it's a learned behaviour. And often children will experiment with bullying behaviours but will respond to redirection or educated responses about choices, accountability of their own behaviour, empathy for the other person or disciplinary responses. And there's only a few children who continue to bully persistently. So traditionally it was thought that all children who engage in bullying had social and emotional problems, externalising disorders such as attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder, or that these children come from adversity. So while there have been associations drawn between childhood adversity and behavioural disorders and bullying behaviour, more and more children displaying bullying behaviour are being identified as middle class children who do not act out of economic necessity. So in many cases, these children have no problems with social skills and are popular students who know how to use manipulation techniques. So actually children who experience bullying victimisation are more likely to have experienced diversity rather than those who are engaging in bullying behaviour. Next slide please.

([00:19:54](#)):

So some researchers have found that children who engage in bullying behaviour may suffer with low self-belief, lower emotional competence, lower credibility and lower trust for others. For these children comes other risks such as suicidal ideation, development of mental illness, engaging in criminal activity, or other poor life outcomes. Next slide please. So some children who engage in bullying behaviour may also suffer bullying victimisation. So this child often suffers harassment but at the same time exerts it but not on his or her abuser. Rather, they exert this behaviour on other peers. Impacts on these children can include externalising and internalising disorders, relationship problems, low self-esteem, certain instability and tendency to depression and anxiety. So these children may also experience conduct disorders. However, conduct disorders are more likely to be seen in children with lower self-esteem and higher failure anticipation. Next slide please.

([00:21:05](#)):

So most health professionals outside of a school context will not see children who are engaging in bullying behaviour. Most schools use disciplinary responses as Felicity talked about, such as monitoring the child and engaging in bullying behaviour and limiting that child's play space during

recess and lunch. So not allowed on the oval or they've got timeout on the timeout bench or suspension or expulsion. So often schools take a protective role in supporting the child suffering, bullying, victimisation, but take a real disciplinary response to those children engaging in that behaviour. Additionally, schools did not get a lot of say in sending a child engaging in the bullying behaviour for counselling or other treatment. So some parents may not see anything wrong with their child's behaviour and may reject blame or deny that their child's engaging in bullying, which can be problematic for the child and the school.

[\(00:21:59\)](#):

So unlike Flick who worked with the school, recognise the behaviours worked with her children, not all parents are like that. Schools need to be able to work in collaboration with parents if they're able to help the child change their behaviour. So while counselling can help the child to understand and change their behaviour, counselling doesn't work if it's not voluntary. So it's essential to involve the parents in such responses. So this enables consistency in the responses across the child's ecosystems. So it enables the parents to uphold the same messages about bullying behaviour as the child is hearing with their clinician or school counsellor. So I am not a psychologist, so I actually had a conversation with Professor Marilyn Campbell from Queensland University of Technology. So she's a registered psychologist and has spent over 40 years researching bullying. So I initially recommended her to do this tonight, but she was unable to do it.

[\(00:23:03\)](#):

She has basically said if a child seeks help from a health professional, a functional behaviour analysis which identifies where when, and the likely reasons why behaviour of concern happens, it identifies a problem. Behaviour gathers information about the antecedents leading up to the behaviour, if any, and other influences on the behaviour. The information is then used to inform a behaviour support plan, which can be shared amongst the children's home and school environments that include strategies to address the reasons why this behaviour is occurring. She then recommends that the health professional engage in motivational interviewing with the child to help them to set goals, strengthen personal motivation and commitment towards those goals by prompting and exploring the child's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion. So many counsellors that will come across and need to respond to children who engage in bullying behaviours are school counsellors, but it doesn't mean that other counsellors or psychologists or other health professionals are not going to see this as well. So that's it from me. Thank you.

Nicole Rollbusch [\(00:24:12\)](#):

Great, thank you Lesley. Well, we're pleased to have had you here and I also wanted to flag to something that you mentioned about how we can end up labelling the child rather than the behaviour, which I think really kind of tied in well with what Flick was sort of saying around how we can focus on the child and what's wrong with them and punishing those behaviours or making consequences for those behaviours. But again, it comes down to that what is the behaviour and where is the behaviour coming from? So thank you for that. I'd like to pass over to Jess now to take us through her presentation. Thanks Jess

Jessica Staniland [\(00:25:01\)](#):

So much. Nicole. I'm going to try and look at bullying and bullying behaviour a little bit more from the practical perspective of a psychologist. And so I'm going to go through each of the individual outcomes of the webinar and try and address them as a clinical psychologist and a school counsellor who works in a school. So firstly, why is it important to understand why a child may engage in bullying? And I think the core reason for this is because bullying won't change even with consequences until we actually manage and support the root cause. And I think both Felicity and Lesley have talked about that. It's so important for us to understand what's underlying these behaviours. Preventative approaches are always going to be more effective than reactive

approaches. So early intervention is key. We need to understand what's going on in the minds of these little humans and try and support them to develop some more appropriate ways of getting their needs met.

[\(00:26:00\)](#):

Like Lesley talked about, there's no one profile for somebody who is engaging in bullying behaviour. There are a plethora of reasons as to why somebody might engage in bullying behaviour. They may be exposed to negative role models. They may be observing that behaviour in other people around them. They may have had exposure to trauma or exposure to some other unpleasant situation where particular behaviours have been witnessed. They might be having friendship struggles, they might be being bullied themselves like Felicity talked about. They may not have the language to be able to explain what their needs are or to be able to use language to say, stop. I don't like it. Although bullying is not necessarily identified specifically with one or more diagnoses, of course, we know that there are a range of diagnoses which can impact a child's ability to read social cues or can result in underdeveloped social skills.

[\(00:26:59\)](#):

So some of those diagnoses might be autism, ADHD, intellectual disability, depression, anxiety. These things all make it harder for an individual child to be able to read the social cues of those people around them. Sometimes children have really low self concepts and they think, well, I'm always in trouble. I may as well not try. I may as well give up and not engage in inappropriate behaviour. Nobody's going to recognise it anyway. A big one is the behaviour actually serves a purpose. Is it that they're engaging this behaviour because it draws attention to them even if it's negative attention? Any attention is attention. So what purpose is it actually serving? And then there is for some people or for some children, they're trying to experiment with new identities. And we see this a lot online. Children can become different people when they're online. And unfortunately sometimes they do find it easier to come across aggressively.

[\(00:27:59\)](#):

Perhaps they can't do that, but they do do it online. So there's almost a thought that they're protected behind the screen. I am going to reflect back a little bit on the case study that was sent out before the webinar. So with the case of sam, I think for him he's been exposed to poor role modelling from his older brother. There's been a really big shift in family dynamics and a really big shift in the attention within the family. I think he's trying to explore this new role then and identity within the family system and within the school. And I think those all have quite a big contribution to the presentation he's showing now. Next slide please. So how can we talk to children who've engaged in bullying behaviour in a non-shaming way? I recently read this book, good Insight by Becky Kennedy, and I found it really fantastic, not only just in my own practise, but as a parent as well in coming from a space where we should believe that all children are actually good inside.

[\(00:29:04\)](#):

Yeah, there's an intention behind all children to be good kids, but sometimes they have underdeveloped skills in certain areas. And so I think if we can look at bullying from this perspective, I think it's much easier to come across as non blaming. There are underdeveloped skills. It's not intentional. When we're working clinically with children, try and use explorative clarifying, inquisitive communication, non-gaming communication, non-directive communication. I find I always like to try and come from a strengths-based approach and try and use some positives to delve further. So I know there's some good inside this kid. So let me draw that out first. Johnny, I know that you're a kind friend and you're usually showing so much compassion for your peers. This behaviour seems really off for you. So what's going on and trying to help to understand what's the shift, what's happened there? Identifying key supports.

[\(00:29:57\)](#):

So some children are more likely to open up to certain people than others. They're going to have key support people, whether that be at school or home or peers. Let's identify who it's easier for them to talk to about what's going on. We want to try and provide the child agency in that process and help put themselves in the position of the other child who's being bullied. So how may it have felt for Henry when you engaged in this behaviour? We want to try and draw out that empathy in them. In the case of Sam, I think what's really important for him is that he develops this new relationship with the new counsellor where possible, it sounds like the family have reached out to the new counsellor, which is really great. Hopefully as Lesley said, he's on board and that he has agency in that decision and that he's happy to talk with that person. If there's somebody at school that's a key support person for him, it would be really good for them to reach out to him directly and have a discussion. But I think importantly, the parents need to acknowledge that there's been a really big shift in the family dynamics here and reflecting on the impact that that has actually potentially had on what's going on for Sam at the moment too. Next slide, please.

[\(00:31:10\)](#):

How can we identify a child's values and what they value in relationship with others? So I think the biggest thing here for me is actually that we just shouldn't assume that children just come along with really strong and ingrained value systems. That's not the case. We can't just expect children to have great values the day they're born. This needs to be actually explicitly taught. And there's a range of ways that this happens. Sometimes it does just happen naturally and we don't have to focus on it. But there are a number of ways that children develop values. So there are child developed values and that comes from interactions with peers, with other key role models that they might come into interaction with. There are parent supported values and these develop through parent modelling, through the parenting styles that parents are using through the family system and the attachment system that happens there.

[\(00:32:03\)](#):

And there are school supported values. So there's sometimes in schools or social skills programmes, there's direct teaching of key values like respect. Every school has a set of values and actions. They have frameworks that they work from, and often schools will have peer support programmes and that sort of thing. And these all help to develop a sense of values in kids. So we need to make sure that there's work done across all of these areas. First, the research shows that some of the key values known to protect against bullying behaviour are things like respect, inclusion, compassion, empathy, tolerance. So all of these things are values that we really want to instil in children and are protective against them from them becoming bullies, the case of sam. So again, we need to make sure that these values are instilled first, but we can ask Sam to identify who he looks up to, who are his role models? Why are these people role models for him? How do they align with who he wants to be and what values does this role model that he has uphold, how do they show values-based actions? So we can help him to draw those things out from some of his role models. Next slide, please.

[\(00:33:23\)](#):

Some of the strategies that we might use to work with a child to align their values and their behaviour in the future. So the biggest thing, again, as Lesley's pointed out, is that we've got to allow for self-agency. This has to come from the child. We can lead them to water, but we can't necessarily make them drink. I work in a school counselling service and we had a little boy brought up today and the counsellor who saw him said I was booed off stage essentially because the little boy had absolutely no interest in speaking to her. So we really do need to ensure that there is buy-in from these kids. We need to explore what does values-based behaviour look like for this particular child? What goals do they want? What goals do their parents want? What goals do the school want? What's their own view of whether they're actually engaging in values-based behaviour?

[\(00:34:16\)](#):

Do they think that they're engaging in behaviours that align with the values they'd like to show? Maybe they could consider telling us what percentage of their behaviours do they believe are values-based? Is it 20% or is it 80%? Do we want it to be 80%? Do we want it to be 90%? What are we working towards? And then I think most importantly, what support do they actually need to have in place to become more values focused? So who do they need in their corner and in their team? So with the case of Sam, how can his broader support network, so his counsellor, his family, his school, help him to reach his goals? How can we be rewarding some of those positive values aligned behaviours and how can we be trying to help address the underlying barriers, which might be the family complexities, the shift in his sense of identity, the shift in attention? And that's it from me I think.

Nicole Rollbusch ([00:35:14](#)):

Great. Thanks Jess. I really loved that. Good insight from Dr. Becky Kennedy as well. That's a nice sentiment to think back to in this work. So thank you sharing. So it brings us to our q and a session. So some questions have been coming through, which is excellent. So thank you for those. We won't be able to get to all of them unfortunately, but we'll endeavour to get through as many as we can tonight. And just as a reminder, if you do want to pop a question in for the panel, just click on the three dots and then ask a question in the lower right corner of your screen. So I wanted to start by, so Sue actually sent through a comment for you, Felicity, just saying about how she was sorry to hear that those early conversations didn't happen in the kindy with your son, which kind of got me thinking about prevention and early intervention and perhaps some of the strategies or some of the ways that we can, I suppose, start to address bullying in the early stages of it occurring. So I just wanted to throw that out to the panel and please jump in if you like to answer,

Jessica Staniland ([00:36:41](#)):

I can jump in. I mean it depends on how early, I think even in preschool and daycare, there's plenty of things that can be done. There's various programmes that teach young children about healthy relationships and start to teach young children about emotions, identifying emotions, developing their emotional literacy. And with that obviously comes the development of a sense of empathy and understanding respect towards others. They may not be able to necessarily use that language at a really early age, but starting to talk openly about emotions and healthy relationships is really, really important. And I don't think that we can underestimate the positive impact that that can have on developing those really positive values.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([00:37:33](#)):

I'd like to add to that, Jess, I did some research with some early childhood teachers and helping them to develop anti-bullying programmes, prevention programmes, and also research with some children relative to their understanding of bullying. And what we found is explicit, teaching them the terms, teaching them what that means, teaching them what bullying actually is and what it's not. These kids, we did a pre and post-test relative to free the programme that was developed and post the programme after they'd completed it. And they had actually significantly better understanding of what bullying was and how to prevent bullying with defender, bystander, all of those terms. So it is about teaching them explicitly as well sometimes are too scared to introduce what we consider unsavoury topics to children. But I think it's really important that we do speak about this with kids from a really early age. These kids that we worked with were only in reception. They were junior primary reception to grade two. And the kids that we also had a control group. So the kids that got the education had a significantly improved understanding. Those who didn't get the education did not.

Felicity Kime ([00:39:06](#)):

So I wonder in hearing this, and I'm all about children learning this stuff, but how does educators teach children this stuff if they're not educated themselves around this? So again, I think it comes back to educators as in school, health, parents, whoever is there educating the children need to have a skill set as well. And I guess too, it comes down to beliefs too, and people's values themselves, what they consider appropriate, not appropriate, et cetera as well. So when I was thinking about this stuff the other day, I find a lot that parents need to step up to the plate. They need to understand their children's behaviour, and they definitely need to understand that the behaviour itself is not acceptable to other children either. But what I find is when a child's in trouble for bullying behaviour, it is what we are calling a mom.

[\(00:40:04\)](#):

We're calling your dad. So we're going to start off with shame straight away on a child. So a child's going to feel uncomfortable. So how that is appropriate, I don't understand. And it's not starting these conversations off very well and a child's not going to want to engage. And then we're going to have the parent come in the room feeling guilt and shame as a parent because their child's in trouble for bullying. So we are not going to get a good result either. And then it's the one-on-one parent and child and whoever's having the conversation school or whoever I question would've been beneficial with my daughter. If we had both children in the room and both sets of parents for either child and someone facilitating that conversation of what does that look like? And sometimes actually it might've been that my daughter was embarrassed to have her mother in the room.

[\(00:40:58\)](#):

Maybe it was somebody else that could have supported my daughter in them conversations and not necessarily me. There was a big time when my daughter didn't want to let her mom down. She wanted to impress her mom. So if I had to go to the school because she was in trouble for these behaviours, she felt like she was letting me down. So not only does she feel uncomfortable at school, then she comes home and she feels uncomfortable even more. So we're seeing these behaviours more and more acting out and more very dangerous behaviours appearing. So I wonder if people with the right skillsets were able to facilitate this stuff and have these conversations with my children, other people's, children's families, et cetera, would outcomes look different as well? Because I don't believe children can start doing this stuff and just learn this stuff if it's not being taught appropriately.

Jessica Staniland [\(00:41:51\)](#):

Very true. I think, yeah, explicit teaching is really important, and you're right, it needs to come from the educators themselves. I think that's where Lesley and I were coming from. I guess that there are some really good programmes around that do give the language now to the educators to help facilitate those discussions and that teaching. But you're right, I think it needs to come from them as well.

Nicole Rollbusch [\(00:42:18\)](#):

Yeah, definitely. Definitely. And some of your comments as well, lead me to another question that came through from Lisa around when we are sort considering talking to parents about their child engaging in bullying behaviour, how can we do that in a way that doesn't evoke those feelings of guilt and shame and those sorts of things. Kind of how you mentioned Flick, I'd love to hear your thoughts on it. And then also Jess and Lesley, if you have any thoughts on that as well.

Felicity Kime [\(00:42:55\)](#):

Yeah, I think for me, when I'm working with other people and parents, I try and think about what is their background, where is this person coming from, where have there been? How have we previously communicated in the past or haven't? A lot of not communication with schools is a sign as

well. So I try to start off that level, playing ground of I can't speak and treat everybody exactly the same because that's not going to work. So try to put that foot in the door. And I really believe it's about having these honest up straight conversations, being quite direct in a respectful, empathetic way that this stuff is not okay, but not just going in with saying it's not okay, let's come up with solutions, asking families, do you have any ideas what we can do to help support your child here? Not just saying, we are going to do this, we are going to do that and put more and more stress onto families.

(00:44:04):

Recognising though too is me as a mother, I was emotionally detached from many, many years and a lot of that was survival and then it become a normal behaviour. So unfortunately for my children, they learn that behaviour as well. So understanding that some parents don't have certain skills either. Some parents don't know how to communicate. So thinking about how do we do that stuff again, not just using one style and not just having the one conversation and stopping there and going, that's the end. It should be dealt with giving families and children a chance. They might take one step forward and a couple of steps backwards. I know with my son, with his school, when he has certain behaviours, their expectation is, oh, remove his iPad when he comes home. And I won't do that. I won't cause more stress in my home for another 12 hours in my home.

(00:45:04):

But I will sit down and I will talk to him and I will speak to him about this is isn't okay and that's not okay and why and how do you feel and what were you feeling? So I think again, also stepping out of our own comfort zone when we're speaking with other people and remembering that we are talking to every day human beings and everybody is emotionally, especially the parents and children are emotionally involved in this. So giving them time, space, if it is a letter or a quick phone call suggesting what you need to have a chat about, not just bringing it on and saying, let's have a meeting and everyone rocking up, feeling uncomfortable, nervous, anxious, and full of shame and guilt.

Nicole Rollbusch (00:45:52):

Really important. Thanks Flick. Jess wanted to

Jessica Staniland (00:45:55):

Jump in. Yeah, I absolutely agree with Flick there around preparation and giving a bit of warning around those conversations. I know what it's like as a parent rocking up to a daycare pickup and something gets thrown at you and you're not expecting it. It's a really unpleasant feeling. So I think you're right. Setting expectations really clear around wanting to have a discussion. Just linking into what you said as well, flick, I think we have to come from a place of understanding a family's family system, but also cultural background too. What works within their family, what other stresses are happening in their life. And I think we have to be able to work as a team with the family. It can't be, it's on you to fix this. It's got to be how can we help this child together as a team? And yeah, as you said, rightly so, we can't put expectations on families to go home and take away the iPad or give a consequence because that might not fit within the family system. And actually it might be that creates more stress and more strain and could actually increase some other type of behaviour within the home. So I absolutely agree. I think we've got to work collaboratively and that's the biggest selling point here.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey (00:47:17):

Yeah, I'll support that as well, Jess, where it's important to work collaboratively with parents. Parents know their children and know what's going to work with their children also, teachers often know their kids well, so they know what works with one child isn't going to work with another. And

children have different relationships with different teachers. So if you've got kids, a kid in primary school might have a better relationship with their peer teacher than they do with their home class teacher. So it is about connecting them with those teachers who are going to support them or teachers that have good rapport with parents. So if you were contacted by a school counsellor for example, rather than the deputy principal, it's a very different contact and there's a different skillset between those two professions. So it is about working gently and supportively with families to be able to connect and work together rather than accuse and use punitive responses.

Nicole Rollbusch ([00:48:29](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. Thank you all. I wanted to just quickly ask you, Lesley, we had a question come in from Catherine about whether your work with the early childhood educators is published and whether that's available online. I thought I'd just ask you before I forget.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([00:48:50](#)):

It is published, the report is published online. It was funded by OMEP and that's a French name for an early childhood organisation that I can't pronounce. I'm not going to try it, but if you just Google OMEP, you'll be able to find them. So it's published on the South Australian OMEP site and I've also published articles and chapters on that as well. So I guess if you went to my homepage, you'll probably find it easier than trying to surf the net for it, right?

Nicole Rollbusch ([00:49:22](#)):

Yeah. Yes. And I did have someone else, Debbie also asked if there's research that they can deep dive into as well. So that's great. Thank you. Yeah, so I just really wanted to flag that it's really a team effort, isn't it? It's not the parents, it's not all on the parents, as you say, sometimes parents might not understand the behaviour themselves, so therefore there's some work that needs to be done there to support parents to understand what's happening. And equally for teachers to be involved as well. And as you said, Lesley, not all children have the same relationship with all teachers as well. So finding those people that are around the child, building their team, as you said Jess. So all really important things. And I wanted to continue on that a little bit because we did have a few conversations come through when people registered about the best way to work with the school. So when you don't work in a school and you're a practitioner outside of a school environment, I suppose, is there anything that the panels want to say around how they can best engage with the school when there is bullying behaviour going on to be able to build that team and support that team development? I suppose

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([00:50:48](#)):

As an educator, teachers would love counsellors and psychologists to reach out. They want to support kids, they want to know what to do. They want to know how to respond, how to support, how to try and reshape that behaviour. So I think that that would be very welcomed by schools and I think literally it's probably just a matter of a phone call or an email to the school and they'll connect you with the right people.

Jessica Staniland ([00:51:19](#)):

Absolutely. That's exactly what I was going to say. Teachers are jumping up and down to get access to external psychologists or external professionals because they don't know unless they're told if there's any underlying issues and they can't respond by ensuring that there's those sort of top up doses, I guess if you want to call it that, of values-based programmes and teaching to try and support those who are engaging in bullying behaviour. I think from my experience, teachers actually struggle so much when we don't know that there's bullying going on behind the scenes. And then we get to the point where a student might hit back and then it comes out that actually they've been

experiencing bullying for a really long period of time, but we haven't had the opportunity to intervene. So I think it's so important. If you've got additional information, teachers would love to hear it, and you're right, just an email or a call is the simplest way of doing it.

Nicole Rollbusch ([00:52:26](#)):

Great. And I wanted to jump back a little bit now and talk a little bit about, I suppose the work with children directly as well. And one of the things I think has been mentioned a bit that often there are consequences or the initial response is to impose consequences and things on behaviour. But as you just mentioned, Jess, a lot of children who do engage in bullying behaviour have experienced bullying behaviour as well, which you mentioned in your conversation as well, your presentation, Lesley, and I think it's a very small percentage of children who only engage in bullying behaviour. It's like three or 4% I think. I'm not sure, maybe Lesley, you probably know the stats more than I do, but it is a small amount. So when we're managing things, because we know children have obviously engaged in behaviours that are not okay and they have hurt others, but also we have to keep in mind that they're probably hurting as well. So how would you manage or how do you manage those consequences for behaviour? Does anyone have any insights on that?

Jessica Staniland ([00:53:43](#)):

It's a tight rope to manage. I think particularly in the school scenario where there are behaviour systems that are in place around some of these behaviours. Look, I think consequences do remain important to some degree. I think it gives children the sense that there are clear boundaries and often for kids who are particularly anxious, boundaries are helpful. I think the issues arise where there are consequences, but there is no additional support put in place to actually help children to build the necessary skills for problem solving to build the values that we've been talking about, to engage in reparative processes, to help teach them that there can be ruptures in relationships, but they can also be repair consequences in and of themselves are not likely to be beneficial unless we are supporting the underlying root cause.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([00:54:41](#)):

It's about to say something very similar, Jess, where we need to find the underlying cause what's causing that behaviour, and that's where we need to target the interventions. And sometimes the cause of that behaviour is a lack of understanding. Sometimes the cause of that is living adversity. Sometimes the cause of that is experimenting or trying to defend themselves or protect themselves in some way because they've been hurt previously. There's lots of different reasons why kids engage in bullying behaviour. So it's really important that we actually find out why they're engaging in that behaviour.

Felicity Kime ([00:55:19](#)):

Yeah, look, and I was just saying this the other day, I think to Nicole, when my daughter was displaying some behaviours, I remember a tool that I used to work out what was going on for myself, and it was this one page awareness I would write out about a behaviour and where did that come from? And I remember my daughter would keep apologising when she displayed these behaviours and said, oh, I'm sorry, mom won't do it again. I won't do it again. And I'm like, what won't you do? And she couldn't explain this stuff to me. So I asked her, I use the same tool. And I said, oh, well here's a piece of paper and I'd like you to write me a page about what is it that you actually done and why is it not acceptable and where did it come from? And at first it was really hard and she didn't really like it.

([00:56:13](#)):

And then in no time there was not this sorry mum, it was always here, this is what it was. And she would identify once she started writing, and she was a bit older than my, but once she started

writing, she really identified what the issue was and where it was coming from. And she found it a lot easier to say what was going on for her because it was written and it didn't have to be spoken. So it was about finding a way that actually worked for her. And I think the other part to this too is my children know no matter what behaviour they display to self or to others, I'm going to love them. It's not going to change. So I think it's very important that educators make it very clear to children, especially in school yards, that children find that the teacher's upset about their behaviour, their bullying behaviour, and they think that's how they're going to feel for the rest of the time in school.

(00:57:11):

So about how do we let children know that this is a moment in time conversation, this isn't going to be tomorrow and the next day and the next day, and I'm not going to be angry at you because I think that's where children come from too. And this attention stuff that was spoken before, I know my son displays a lot of behaviours just for attention and it's about saying, well buddy, you don't actually need to do that to get this. But I noticed with he's in a special education unit and I have faith in these teachers, and I say to them all the time, you do what you believe you need to do. You are educated in these. I'm actually not educated in the way you are, and I can actually learn from you. So please let me know what you're doing. And I can say right now, this education unit at school, them school teachers has taught my son more than anybody has in five years.

(00:58:12):

And this little boy's had lots and lots of therapies that have worked, don't get me wrong by professionals, but the most learning he has got are from these teachers in the special education unit. And it's because they build connection with that little boy. Now, without that connection, they won't get anywhere. And when I go to parent teacher days and barbecue days, there is some teachers that I cannot have a conversation with, no connection. So if I can't have conversations with some of these teachers, no connection, surely my son's not going to. So important as human beings, we connect with each other no matter what. That's our first point of call.

Nicole Rollbusch (00:58:53):

Great. Thank you. Thank you all. And I wanted to jump to a question that came through from Dert and it was in response to something I think maybe I'm sorry, it was Lesley or Jess was mentioning in their presentation, but if a child has underdeveloped skills and they can't understand why they're bullying others and flick, you kind of mentioned this as well about your daughter and working through that and getting her to understand where they were coming from. But are there any more comments on supporting children to recognise those behaviours and support them to express their emotions in perhaps healthier ways?

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey (00:59:47):

I think it's about, again, sometimes you have to use explicit teaching. So like Flick was saying that when her daughter wanted to get out of a relationship or a friendship that she would engage in those behaviours. So it's about, I guess recognising that once that's recognised, to be able to actually teach them more appropriate ways to get out of that relationship. And each child's different. Each child's going to engage in behaviour for different reasons, but it's about upskilling their social and emotional intelligence as well as their social and emotional competence to be able to recognise the impact that they're having and also recognise different ways to be able to manage particular situations.

Jessica Staniland (01:00:35):

And I think just adding to that, it takes a village, and I think it's looping in with parents, it's looping in with schools or educators to help develop those skills too. If social emotional skills are lacking or if emotional intelligence is lacking, start with the parents emotion coaching. There's some really, really

good work out there on parents building the emotional language within their children through emotion coaching. So explicit teaching is great, but if you do have a child that's younger that's not quite at that level yet work with the parents, there is so much value that they can provide as well.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([01:01:17](#)):

But do it in a way that is not condescending.

Jessica Staniland ([01:01:20](#)):

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

Nicole Rollbusch ([01:01:25](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. Really important. And I wanted to go back to something, Lesley, you spoke about, sorry I'm jumping around a little bit, but question from Janet came through and she asked about you mentioning that bullying is a learned behaviour and she was wondering where or how is the behaviour learned? So I was really kind of interested in that topic and I think the three of you probably have something to comment on that as well.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([01:01:59](#)):

Well, it's not innate bullying's, not innate. Children are not born to be aggressive and repeatedly aggressive with the intent to harm others and to draw on their power differentials. And they're not born evil, so to speak. So they are learning behaviours, and yet their learning might be through, they might have aggressive household, they might be watching aggressive media, they might be watching aggressive peers, and it might be vicarious learning if they see another child who's engaging in bullying behaviour. And that's resulting in sort of like a reward or positive reinforcement from other students or positive getting what they're wanting because of that behaviour, they learned that they're doing it and that's working well for them. So I'm going to do that too. That's where I see it as more of a learned behaviour. It's not innate. And it might also be that if they do engage in that behaviour and it's worked for them, they'll keep engaging in that behaviour as well. It's also the responses of the child that they're trying to bully or pick on. If they withdraw, don't fight back and allow that power to be created, then that's, it's a learned behaviour. They've learned that if they do this, they've got the power over the other child and they're going to get away with it.

Jessica Staniland ([01:03:39](#)):

Couldn't have said it better myself, I think absolutely hit the nail on the head that it's learned through modelling or exposure, but also the nature of reinforcement means that unfortunately bullying behaviours are reinforced sometimes unintentionally, and that's the nature of bullying. It can get worse and worse.

Felicity Kime ([01:04:02](#)):

And I just wanted to add, we know children are like sponges, so people, places things, they're getting it everywhere, and they're even getting it from school teachers as well that aren't the most appropriate at times either. It can be from therapists that are actually not displaying the best behaviour either as well. So I like to say people, places and things. So that includes every single person a child seeing and hearing, because it's not just about seeing right? Children here so much and they pick up on body language tone, the whole works, and they add all this up and they know if I speak in this way and if that is verbally abusing somebody else, it gets their needs met in a certain way. And they could have heard that anywhere. They could have heard it in an argument in a principal's office between the principal and the parent.

([01:04:51](#)):

It could have been in the doctor surgery or anywhere. So I think it's not just saying it's that hearing and it can be from anybody and everybody and it could be at the local supermarket with something chaotic going on or a hospital or anywhere. So I don't think it's just one particular type of one person or a couple people. I think it's about everybody a child can come into with, they learn in good ways, negative ways, et cetera. And then they'll build on that what works for them and again, what attention can they get out of it, what can they, this, that, and the other.

Nicole Rollbusch ([01:05:31](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Jessica Staniland ([01:05:32](#)):

The one thing, oh sorry. The one thing just to add to that was just the unfortunate nature of social media and the internet as well. I think we just have to acknowledge that it has gotten a lot worse with the increase in social media use the age, there's so much research that's out there now around the age of social media accounts being something like 12 when you're not actually even technically allowed to have a social media account until 14. And the exposure that kids are having to various influences that are not necessarily positive influences, I think that can have a really impact on some of these behaviours as well.

Nicole Rollbusch ([01:06:13](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And I just wanted to jump into one final question before we wrap up and just going back to what we were talking about before around writing and how that worked for your daughter Flick. And Kieran just sent a question through about some ideas for other tools that might be useful if a child isn't good at writing. So I just wanted to finish with that, if there's any ideas of how you might be able to engage with the child if writing isn't their forte.

Jessica Staniland ([01:06:47](#)):

Drawing. Drawing is fantastic and I think for those creative kids it is a fantastic outlet for expressing themselves. I often use a technique called comic strip conversations and essentially it's a strategy where just like comic strips, we get kids to draw their own little comic strips and we might talk about a social situation that perhaps didn't go to plan and that might be a bullying situation. It might be a situation where they blew up accidentally. It might be a situation where they felt threatened and rewriting the situation as a comic strip and what could we do differently next time? How could we have responded next time? And drawing little speech bubbles and that sort of thing I find is a really good way of engaging those kids, particularly who are interested in comics and manga and all of those sorts of things can be a really nice way of doing it. The other thing is just there's a whole heap of really creative therapy tools out there, creating bottles with a whole heap of different coloured glitter that might represent the people that aren't so nice at school or in a home environment or potentially using colours that might represent how you'd like the school setting to be or how you'd like the home setting to be. There's a lot of really fantastic ways of helping kids to be able to process what's going on for them.

Felicity Kime ([01:08:16](#)):

Yeah, I just wanted to add to that, like I say, music, dance, arts, craft, that type of therapy too, but also online stuff as well. So there is based Minecraft thing going on with young children at the moment with therapists and that role playing of characters online of role playing the behaviour and then getting the child to express what their thoughts are. So as much as I really don't like online stuff because a lot of behaviours come from there with my son, it can be quite beneficial too for children that really pay attention to that online world, gaming different things as well.

Jessica Staniland ([01:09:05](#)):

And Lego clots that are Lego, what's it called? Lego therapy. So there's a whole heap of different things that you can use to engage kids in these discussions and help them to explain what's going on for them.

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([01:09:19](#)):

There's also puppets and things, kimochis? what are they called? Are they called kimochis? What are they called? I'm not trying to plug in particular products, but that's the only one that I'm aware of that talks about feelings and helps children work through their feelings and it has all these different types of feelings. So it really is quite beneficial for their social emotional intelligence as well as helping them to communicate what they're feeling and why.

Felicity Kime ([01:09:52](#)):

And I think the basic feelings, emotion chart, putting that in front of children because I know I am older and it was only even up to last year, I couldn't really name what's on an emotion wheel myself. So how are we expecting children to be able to name and identify and this kind of stuff if we don't actually give them the basic tools? So getting these wheels out of motion and behaviour charts and wheels and whatever you want to use, but starting with the very basics. And I love the ideas of puppets. Puppets have been around forever, so why aren't we using stuff that we know that works as well? So don't forget about the stuff that we already know that really works.

Nicole Rollbusch ([01:10:35](#)):

Yeah, fantastic. Thank you. Thank you all. In the interest of time, I'd love to keep this conversation going, but we do have to wrap up. So thank you to the three of you for joining us and for sharing your insights with us. I just wanted to ask you to, if you could just reflect each one of you in turn by sharing with the audience what your takeaway messages for them tonight. So I might jump to you flick one message you'd like the audience to take away from tonight.

Felicity Kime ([01:11:10](#)):

Yeah, look, I think not just for children, but for family, for educators, just remembering very clearly we're human beings. Life's not perfect. We all make mistakes, but we all actually need support to be able to do differently and to do better. So without that support, and it was said tonight to raise a child, it takes a village and I think we can quickly forget that and we can just put it on mom, dad, one person or another. But remembering if we all play a little part, it's much easier on everybody and it needs better outcomes for the child no matter what. And the more people, the more support, the more safer children are.

Nicole Rollbusch ([01:11:55](#)):

Great. Thanks Flick. And what about for you Lesley? What's your takeaway message?

Assoc Prof Lesley-Anne Ey ([01:12:01](#)):

I think looking for the root cause, what is causing that behaviour? We need to address that label, the behaviour, not the child. Children will live up to labels if they are labelled, that's how they'll see themselves and they'll live up to that label. So that's my key messages.

Nicole Rollbusch ([01:12:20](#)):

Thanks Lesley. And what about for you, Jess?

Jessica Staniland ([01:12:22](#)):

Yeah, I think along the same lines, preventative approaches are far better than reactive approaches. So I think it's really important for us to be working early on to build the values that protect against bullying behaviours through holistic processes, with peers, with parents, with schools. The earlier we can start developing some of these values, the better. Great.

Nicole Rollbusch ([01:12:46](#)):

Thank you. Thank you again to the three of you. And thank you as well to our audience for participating in the chat and submitting your questions. I'm sorry we couldn't get to them all. There was a lot coming through and I just wanted to mention that feedback survey. Again, please complete it. We do love to hear from you. You can click the banner above or scan the QR code or go to the SurveyMonkey address at the end of the webinar. So your statement of attendance will be emailed to you within a week and you'll receive a link, the recording and all the associated resources as well that we mentioned. Were in the resources panel tonight and our next webinars are supporting the mental health of Neurodivergent person on the 26th of June and a webinar on BPD as well on the 23rd of July. So those are the next MHPN webinars. And we've also got a second BPD on Monday, the night of September as well. Keep an eye out for those. And just a reminder that MHPN supports over 350 networks across the country where mental health practitioners meet either in person or online. So you can visit the MHPN website to join or register your interest in starting a network in your area.

([01:14:16](#)):

And this was co-produced by MHPN and Emerging Minds, the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health Project. And we are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health. So again, please share your valuable feedback. It's been a pleasure to have you with us tonight. And thank you again to Flick Lesley and Jess for joining us. Have a good night everybody.