

# Online tool to combat schoolyard bullying

30 May 2016, by Hamish Hastie, Sciencenetwork Wa



Ms Nelson says the tool will aim to measure the intent to harm and the victim's feeling of hurt while being covertly bullied as well as whether it's physical and verbal or whether it's relational. Credit: iStock

Teachers may soon have a way to pinpoint and measure the seriousness of covert bullying incidents at school and how it affects primary school-aged kids.

Curtin University researchers are developing the [online tool](#) which they hope will one day improve bullying intervention and prevention strategies in WA schools.

Covert bullying happens when children purposely hide their bullying from adults, Curtin School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine PhD student Helen Nelson says.

She says covert bullying has only recently been identified in research.

"In this research we are referring to bullying that happens at school, for example when members of a group join together to lie to the teacher, thereby removing the hope of adult support from the [child](#) who has been bullied," she says.

The research will focus on when bullying peaks in childhood—generally at the end of primary school

and beginning of [high school](#).

"This research is with children aged 8 to 12, an age at which [social position](#) is increasingly important in the peer group," she says.

Ms Nelson says the [tool](#) will aim to measure the intent to harm and the victim's feeling of hurt while being covertly bullied as well as whether it's physical and verbal or whether it's relational.

"Then we'll look at whether the bullying is being repeated and measure that imbalance of power," she says.

She says ultimately the tool will help build strategies targeting covert bullying.

"Unless we understand what's behind children's behaviour we don't really know how we can put prevention things in place," she says.

"Part of this is to understand what's behind child behaviour and how we can design prevention and intervention strategies.

"It's also for us to be able to measure their effectiveness because there's no point in having [prevention strategies](#) in place without being able to measure them."

While the tool is still being developed there is strategies and methods parents can use to address bullying, she says.

"[Parents and teachers can take] the time to listen to and talk with the child," she says.

She suggests any parent or teacher who suspects [bullying](#) is happening to a child should visit the [Bullying. No Way](#) website.

The tool will be available for wider use after they submit their findings for peer review.

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[Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

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