Six Australians share their bullying stories: 'I lost faith'

Two in five people are bullied at some point in their life and the majority of these victims will never tell anyone what they’ve been put through. Source: Supplied

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THEY come from all walks of life. They are somebody's brother, sister, son or daughter. They have vastly different jobs and lives. But they all share one thing in common.

They were bullied.

Research commissioned by the Federal Government shows one student in every four in Australian schools is affected by bullying.

These children are three times more likely to show depressive symptoms and are nine times more likely to have suicidal thoughts, according to studies and the Centre for Adolescent Health.

And those experiences don’t go away when the children grow into adults.

News.com.au asked six Australians to share their experiences of being bullied, from the trauma and the tragedy to how they overcame adversity and self-doubt.

These are their stories.

Stuart McGregor @geekystu_au

41, Townsville, QLD
I went to a suburban high school in Newcastle, NSW. Throughout school I was always a geeky kid. A late bloomer. A nerd if you will. The kind of kid bullies love. Except I had one feature that stood out. I was a coppertop. A red dog. A ranga. A redhead. With freckles.

That feature made me a target for bullies. On a daily basis I would be beaten. I was afraid to go to the toilet at school for fear of my head being flushed. "Let's get that red out of your hair, ranga", the bullies would say as they tipped me upside down.

Blue Loo tastes as awful as it looks and smells.

Then there was the trip home. I had to get off the school bus early a few times after my belongings were thrown out the window.

The teachers were no help. My parents were called to the school because I was seen as a "troublemaker". The school had no policies to deal with this type of thing. Their solution was classes by myself, more or less in protective custody.

I started to have physical illnesses in reaction to all of this. Nasty things like irritable bowel syndrome, chest pains (at 13 years of age), all stress related.

I have recently been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I'm 41 now. I still have flashbacks. It makes it hard to hold a job down or a relationship together. My marriage broke down in part because I couldn't cope with an overbearing father-in-law. All because of the anxiety caused by bullying.

Recently I was contacted on Facebook by one of my bullies, who apologised. His past actions had obviously been playing on his mind. I thank him for being brave enough to do that, because it was a great step forward in my recovery.

Kylie Lang @Gumbygirl85

28, Sydney, NSW
I was considered to be 'gifted', and I have a mild physical disability called Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome which is a Connective Tissue Disorder that among other things, causes me to have frequent and recurrent joint dislocations, fractures and ligament/muscle tears. These injuries happen to me on a daily basis and often in my sleep. Because of this, I almost always wore (and still wear) some sort of bandage, splint, brace or plaster. In short, I think I was targeted simply because I was 'different' and largely unable to defend myself.

I was bullied quite early on in my school years, being shoved and called names, however it was in high school when I was ganged up on by six Year 10 girls, badly beaten and knocked to the ground unconscious. From witness reports, once I was knocked out, the girls continued to kick at my head, neck and torso and this has caused permanent damage to my neck and upper spine.

I walked away with a fractured eye socket, fractured cheekbone, badly bruised kidneys and spleen, soft tissue damage to my neck and upper spine and a severe concussion that lasted days.

The repercussions from the school were to put all parties involved in a good behaviour book, including myself. No detention or loss of privileges, no counselling or support.

These girls continued to beat me on a weekly basis, but they started doing it in the toilets so there were no witnesses. I was literally going to school to get beat up, recover and repeat.

I lost all faith in the school and their so called 'award winning anti-bullying program' and at just 13 years old and just seven months into my high school education, I left and never returned.

Aaqib Abdul Alaa @AAA_Squibby

21, Cairns, Queensland
In August of 2001 my father and I went to America to visit his sister. While we were there we stood on top of the Twin Towers. We left America a few days before September 11, 2001.

When I arrived back in Australia I had the photos developed and took them to school to show my friends and class teacher. One of my friends said, "you are Muslim, you and your people did this, you should have stayed there and you should have died over there."

It got worse. In 2002 when the Bali bombings occurred, bullies were saying to me, "you terrorist, you stupid Muslim, your people did this".

I remained at the school until the end of 2003, I was not going to let the bullies run me out. I wish my primary school had done more to stop the bullying, then maybe I would not have changed schools.

Gillian Green

23, Melbourne, VIC

I don’t know what went wrong in my childhood; I have two loving parents, a stable home and was not abused or exposed to harm but somehow I always had very poor self-esteem. I thought I was never quite good enough - for my mum and dad, for my older brothers and most of all, never quite good enough to belong to any group of friends at school.

All through primary school I lived through a nightmare cycle of being determined to...
make friends and impress people, only to find myself disliked, mocked, and rejected. And every time I got an emotional knock, I acted out. I had hoped high school would provide a new chance, but teenagers are brutal and the rejections became nastier.

In Year 8, it was the in thing to walk down the stairs behind me and say things like, "Go on, Gillian. Do the world a favour. Throw yourself down the stairs". And worse.

That year came to a sickening end when I decided to do just that ... I swallowed several packets of antidepressants and tried to cut my wrists with a knife. Several new schools and numerous serious attempts at self-harm followed for years afterwards; I was regularly bashed, and had vile rumours spread about me. My peers even pressed razor blades on to me and ordered me to use them ... I did.

After years of long hospital stays, I went to an alternative learning environment for kids who didn't fit in at mainstream schools. It was still a bumpy road, but it is safe to say this school and the support of my parents saved my life. I now work as a youth development worker and am passionate about supporting those often facing the same challenges.

Bullying nearly cost me my life, but it undoubtedly shaped the happy life I now lead.

Jacob Thomas @JacobThomas101
23, Melbourne, VIC

Bullying began when I was 10; I was a prime target for verbal and physical abuse in the playground. The questioning of my sexuality was a hot topic for those who chose to go on the attack (yeah, I liked singing Spice Girls in front of my primary school), plus I was a fat child.

"Faggot" led to being spat on, which led to being beaten. It became so horrific that it led to depression. Along with it came hefty consideration into taking my own life. My first attempt (a knife to my heart) was thankfully dismissed with my mum arriving home earlier than expected. Several more attempts arose over the years (overdose, cutting, and even starvation) as I was stuck with the same bullies when I moved onto high school. Life improved when I sought help. I had to get the words in my head, through my mouth and into the heads of those who cared enough to step in. They helped me help myself.

I'm still depressed and anxious, and every day comes with suffering. The scars are there, though faint, and suicidal thoughts can present themselves when I let my guard down. In saying that, each day presents new opportunities and I am proud to be the young, successful, queer-identifying man I have become, studying at university and working with It Gets Better Australia.

It can get better. I promise.
Cameron Pollock @CamlPollock
28, Melbourne, Vic

I attended an exclusive private boys school in Melbourne for 13 years. At first we were bullied because we were identical twins and over time we became targets of bullies from other year groups. By then, many of them did not have any reason to target us other than "everyone does".

Apart from countless incidents of verbal, emotional and physical abuse, I was knocked unconscious twice during attacks by bullies (once in an unsupervised classroom). The school’s response was to treat me as if I had somehow provoked or caused the bully to attack. Unfortunately, the school did not provide support. They had an anti-bullying policy, but a policy alone does not protect you from being punched in the face or throttled by a mob of your peers.

Having supportive parents and a brother who was also going through what I was meant I did not suffer the same sort of lasting emotional trauma that other victims of bullying have. It also helped that I never began believing anything the bullies said to me or about me.

Even so, it still took a couple of years after I finished school and started university before I felt that I could safely venture out of the protective emotional and mental shell I had used to survive school.

If you or someone you know may be at risk of suicide or self harm, please contact Lifeline (13 11 14) or BeyondBlue (1300 22 46 36).

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