

Bullying Prevention: Steps to Address Bullying in Schools

Getting Started

Bullying can threaten students' physical and emotional safety at school and can negatively impact their ability to learn. The best way to address bullying is to stop it before it starts. There are a number of things school staff can do to make schools safer and prevent bullying.

Assess Bullying in Your School

Conduct assessments in your school to determine how often bullying occurs, where it happens, how students and adults intervene, and whether your prevention efforts are working.

School Level: What Can Schools Do?

- **Assess bullying in your school.** Determine where and when bullying occurs.
- **Increase adult supervision in bullying "hot spots."** Work with support staff, such as cafeteria staff, bus stop and playground monitors and bus drivers, who may observe bullying incidents that unfold outside the classroom.
- **Involve students, parents, teachers, and staff in bullying prevention.** Establish a school safety committee and task force with a coordinator whose job it is to plan, implement and evaluate your school's bullying prevention program.
- **Encourage teachers and staff to file incident reports of bullying.** Keep track of critical incidents, and assess and evaluate your bullying prevention program.
- **Create policies and rules.** Create a mission statement, code of conduct, and school-wide rules that establishes a climate in which bullying is not acceptable. Disseminate and communicate widely.
- **Integrate bullying prevention material into curriculum and school activities.** Implement curriculum-based, class-level discussions and activities about bullying (e.g., role-playing activities) at each grade level.
- **Promote extracurricular activities.** Reinforce positive social interactions in an inclusive environment.
- **Raise awareness about your bullying prevention initiative.** Launch an awareness campaign to make the objectives known to the school, parents, and community members.
- **Establish a school culture of acceptance, tolerance and respect.** Take advantage of staff meetings, assemblies, class and parent meetings, newsletters to families, the school website, and the student handbook.

District Level: What can the District do?

- *Stop Bullying! Interventions for Safe Schools* curriculum in all schools – each school has a notebook or it can be found at http://www2.wcpss.net/departments/cass/counseling/prof_resources/bully_prevention.htm
- *Positive Behavior Intervention and Support* / <http://www.wcpss.net/positive-behavior/pbis-main.html>
- *Steps to Respect* and *Second Step* curriculum
- Be Cool
- *Owning Up* curriculum
- Individual counseling available
- Group counseling on anger management and/or peer relationships available
- Peer mediation programs in some middle and high schools
- Character Education lessons and recognition
- Prevention information in *WCPSS Employee Handbook*
- Prevention information in *WCPSS Student/Parent Handbook*
- *6th Grade Bullying Prevention Unit* / <http://www2.wcpss.net/departments/cass/counseling/bullying/6grade-bullying.htm>

Parents: What can Schools do for Parents?

- Educate parents on bullying
- WCPSS Bullying Prevention Power Point
- Provide Tips-resources- http://www.stopbullying.gov/community/tip_sheets/

Parents: What Can Parents Do?

- Contact a school administrator, counselor, social worker or psychologist for help.
- Provide positive feedback for children demonstrating appropriate behavior.
- Use alternatives to physical punishment to stop bullying behavior, such as the removal of privileges.
- Stop bullying behavior as it is happening and begin working on appropriate social skills early.

Know the Risk Factors Before Bullying Begins

There is no one single cause of bullying. Rather, individual, family, peer, school, and community factors can place someone at risk for being bullied or for bullying others. Even if a child has one or more of the risk factors, it does not mean that they will bully or will become bullied.

Who is At Risk for Being Bullied?

Generally, children, teens and young adults who are bullied:

- Do not get along well with others
- Are less popular than others
- Have few to no friends
- Do not conform to gender norms
- Have low self esteem
- Are depressed or anxious

Who is At Risk for Bullying Others?

Some people who at risk for bullying others are well-connected to their peers, have social power, and at least one of the following:

- Are overly concerned about their popularity
- Like to dominate or be in charge of others

Others at risk for bullying others are more isolated from their peers and may have any of the following:

- Are depressed or anxious
- Have low self esteem
- Are less involved in school
- Are easily pressured by peers
- Do not identify with the emotions or feelings of others

Other risk factors for bullying others include the following:

- Being aggressive
- Have less parent involvement
- Think badly of others
- Are impulsive
- Are hot-headed and easily frustrated
- Have difficulty following rules
- View violence in a positive way

What Does Not Increase Risk?

- **Location.** There are no differences in rates of bullying for urban, suburban, or rural communities. Bullying happens everywhere.
- **School Size.** The overall percentage of students being bullied does not vary based on school size, although bullying does happen more often in larger schools.
- **Gender.** Boys and girls are just as likely to be involved in bullying. Forms of bullying may vary by gender; for instance, some research has found that girls are more likely to bully others socially.

Recognizing the Warning Signs

There are many warning signs that could indicate that someone is involved in bullying, either by bullying others or by being bullied. However, these warning signs may indicate other issues or problems, as well. If you are a parent or educator, learn more about talking to someone about bullying.

Being Bullied

- Comes home with damaged or missing clothing or other belongings
- Reports losing items such as books, electronics, clothing, or jewelry
- Has unexplained injuries
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or feeling sick
- Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams
- Has changes in eating habits
- Hurts themselves
- Are very hungry after school from not eating their lunch
- Runs away from home
- Loses interest in visiting or talking with friends
- Is afraid of going to school or other activities with peers
- Loses interest in school work or begins to do poorly in school
- Appears sad, moody, angry, anxious or depressed when they come home
- Talks about suicide
- Feels helpless
- Often feels like they are not good enough
- Blames themselves for their problems
- Suddenly has fewer friends
- Avoids certain places
- Acts differently than usual

Bullying Others

- Becomes violent with others
- Gets into physical or verbal fights with others
- Gets sent to the principal's office or detention a lot
- Has extra money or new belongings that cannot be explained
- Is quick to blame others
- Will not accept responsibility for their actions
- Has friends who bully others
- Needs to win or be best at everything

Are You Being Bullied?

Nobody likes to be picked on. What can you do?

- **Speak up against bullying.** Say something like, "stop it."
- **Walk away.** Act like you do not care, even if you really do.
- **Tell an adult you trust.** They may have ideas about what you can do.
- **Stick together.** Staying with a group might help.

Things to remember...

- You are not alone.
- It is not your fault. Nobody should be bullied!
- Talk to someone you trust.
- Do not hurt yourself.
- Do not bully back. Do not bully anyone else.
- Do not let the bully win. Keep doing what you love to do.

Has Someone Called You a Bully?

Think about what you are doing.

- If someone did the same thing to you, would you be hurt?
- Remember that making others feel bad is wrong.
- Know that everyone is different, but different does not mean better or worse.
- Try getting to know others who are not like you. You may find out, you are more alike than you think.
- Talk to an adult you trust. They may have good ideas about what you can do to stop the bullying.

Have You Seen Bullying?

You can help stop the bullying. Next time you see someone being bullied, try one (or more) of these ideas:

- **If it is safe, speak up.** Say something like, "Stop it!"
- **Tell an adult.** Kids who are being bullied are sometimes scared to tell an adult. That is where you come in--tell an adult who you trust, like your teacher or coach. You can tell them in person or leave them a note.
- **Be a friend to the person who is being bullied.** You can still help the kid who is being bullied:
 - Talk with them.
 - Sit with them at lunch.
 - Play with them at recess.
- **Set a good example.** Do not bully others.

When You Confirm that Bullying has Happened

Once an incident of bullying has occurred, communication with the following individuals or groups should be part of your intervention or follow-up strategy:

For the Student Who Was Bullied

- Check in regularly with the student who was bullied
- Determine whether the bullying still continues
- Provide a supportive environment
- Review the school rules and policies with the student to ensure they are aware of their rights and protection
- Consider referring them for professional or other services as appropriate

For the Student Who Bullied Others

- Identify the behavior
- Review the school rules and policies with the student
- Ask for positive change in future behavior
- Consider referring them for professional or other services as appropriate
- Consider appropriate graduated consequences
- Encourage the student to channel their influence and behavior into positive leadership roles
- Monitor and check in frequently

For Bystanders

- Encourage them to talk with you
- Review the school rules and policies with the students
- Discuss with bystanders how they might intervene and/ or get help next time
- Acknowledge students who took action to stop the bullying

For the Parents of the Students Involved

- Describe the incident
- Review the school rules and policies with the parents
- Describe the intervention measures taken as appropriate
- Develop a plan to follow up

Effects of Bullying

Bullying has serious and lasting effects. While these effects may also be caused by other factors, research has found bullying has significant effects for those who are bullied, those who bully others, and those who witness bullying.

People Who are Bullied:

- Have higher risk of depression and anxiety, including the following symptoms, that may persist into adulthood:
 - Increased feelings of sadness and loneliness
 - Changes in sleep and eating patterns
 - Loss of interest in activities
- Have increased thoughts about suicide that may persist into adulthood. In one study, adults who recalled being bullied in youth were 3 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts or inclinations.

- Are more likely to have health complaints. In one study, being bullied was associated with physical health status 3 years later.
- Have decreased academic achievement (GPA and standardized test scores) and school participation.
- Are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.
- Are more likely to retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied.

People Who Bully Others:

- Have a higher risk of abusing alcohol and other drugs in adolescence and as adults.
- Are more likely to get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school.
- Are more likely to engage in early sexual activity.
- Are more likely to have criminal convictions and traffic citations as adults. In one study, 60% of boys who bullied others in middle school had a criminal conviction by age 24.
- Are more likely to be abusive toward their romantic partners, spouses or children as adults.

People Who Witness Bullying:

- Have increased use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.
- Have increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.
- Are more likely to miss or skip school.

Test Your Bullying Knowledge

How much do you really know? Check out these facts and myths about bullying.

FACT: People who bully have power over those they bully.

People who bully others usually pick on those who have less social power (peer status), psychological power (know how to harm others), or physical power (size, strength). However, some people who bully also have been bullied by others. People who both bully and are bullied by others are at the highest risk for problems (such as depression and anxiety) and are more likely to become involved in risky or delinquent behavior.

FACT: Spreading rumors is a form of bullying.

Spreading rumors, name-calling, excluding others, and embarrassing them are all forms of social bullying that can cause serious and lasting harm.

MYTH: Only boys bully.

People think that physical bullying by boys is the most common form of bullying. However, verbal, social, and physical bullying happens among both boys and girls, especially as they grow older.

MYTH: People who bully are insecure and have low self-esteem.

Many people who bully are popular and have average or better-than-average self-esteem. They often take pride in their aggressive behavior and control over the people they bully. People who bully may be part of a group that thinks bullying is okay. Some people who bully may also have poor social skills and experience anxiety or depression. For them, bullying can be a way to gain social status.

MYTH: Bullying usually occurs when there are no other students around.

Students see about four out of every five bullying incidents at school. In fact, when they witness bullying, they give the student who is bullying positive attention or even join in about three-quarters of the time. Although 9 out of 10 students say there is bullying in their schools, adults rarely see bullying, even if they are looking for it.

MYTH: Bullying often resolves itself when you ignore it.

Bullying reflects an imbalance of power that happens again and again. Ignoring the bullying teaches students who bully that they can bully others without consequences. Adults and other students need to stand up for children who are bullied, and to ensure they are protected and safe.

MYTH: All children will outgrow bullying.

For some, bullying continues as they become older. Unless someone intervenes, the bullying will likely continue and, in some cases, grow into violence and other serious problems. Children who consistently bully others often continue their aggressive behavior through adolescence and into adulthood.

MYTH: Reporting bullying will make the situation worse.

Research shows that children who report bullying to an adult are less likely to experience bullying in the future. Adults should encourage children to help keep their school safe and to tell an adult when they see bullying.

MYTH: Teachers often intervene to stop bullying.

Adults often do not witness bullying despite their good intentions. Teachers intervene in only 14 percent of classroom bullying episodes and in 4 percent of bullying incidents that happen outside the classroom.

MYTH: Nothing can be done at schools to reduce bullying.

School initiatives to prevent and stop bullying have reduced bullying by 15 to 50 percent. The most successful initiatives involve the entire school community of teachers, staff, parents, students, and community members.

MYTH: Parents are usually aware that their children are bullying others.

Parents play a critical role in bullying prevention, but they often do not know if their children bully or are bullied by others. To help prevent bullying, parents need to talk with their children about what is happening at school and in the community.



Monitor & Report

Bullying in schools is a frequent and serious problem. It is important to monitor and report student behavior consistently.

Monitoring

Administrators, teachers, and staff should be on the lookout for bullying not only in the classroom, but also in the hallways, cafeteria, bathrooms, gymnasium, on sports fields, other areas of the school, and on the school bus. To do so, you need to know the [warning signs of bullying](#).

If you see bullying, you can [stop it](#).

Reporting

After each intervention, report the incident, so the school can track its responses to bullying incidents. You may want to consider implementing a reporting system to help further track bullying. The [state law](#) may specify that the school track and report bullying incidents.

Developing a logical and timely reporting system that informs school personnel and parents of suspected and confirmed bullying incidents may help the school progress in bullying prevention.

Teachers and all school staff (e.g., bus drivers, school nurses, cafeteria workers, and custodial staff) should know the school's reporting procedures and understand their possible obligation to report suspected or confirmed bullying.

Treat reports of bullying as you would any part of a student's record. Maintain confidentiality and privacy of such reports as [required in policy and law](#).

Follow-up Intervention

Intervening in bullying does not necessarily mean immediately turning to traditional forms of discipline. Discipline should be considered as one part of a holistic approach to addressing bullying. It should be used in conjunction with other educational and restorative strategies.

Each intervention should clearly label bullying as unacceptable, build awareness, and help students develop the skills, empathy, and insights they need to find alternatives to bullying. Interventions should also assist to restore positive relationships between the students involved in bullying and improve the school climate.

When choosing an intervention, you may want to consider the following questions:

- Did the bullying incident occur within the school's jurisdiction?
- What is the history of the students involved?
- What is the nature of the bullying behavior?
- How frequent and severe is the bullying?
- What intervention will promote a positive outcome for the students?
- Does the intervention fit within the school district's guidelines?

Avoid What Does Not Work

In recent years, increasing numbers of educators, health professionals, parents, and other adults who interact with students have come to understand the seriousness of bullying. Many proven and promising prevention and intervention strategies have been developed. Unfortunately, some misdirected intervention and prevention strategies also have emerged.

Research has shown that the following are **strategies that do not work or have unexpected negative consequences**.

- **Zero tolerance or “three strikes and you’re out” policies:** These policies have the potential to exclude large numbers of students from school, discourage reporting of bullying, and deprive students who bully from the good role models they so need.
- **Conflict resolution and peer mediation:** Bullying is not a conflict between two people of equal power with equal blame for the situation. Also, facing those who have bullied them may further upset students who have been bullied.
- **Group treatment for students who bully:** Group members tend to reinforce bullying behavior in each other.
- **Simple, short-term solutions:** Focusing on bullying in a piecemeal way (e.g., in-service training, school assembly, lessons taught by individual teachers) will do much less to prevent bullying than a school-wide initiative.

Is Police Involvement Necessary?

School Board Policy 6414-Reporting Harassing and Bullying Behavior

It is the priority of the Wake County Board of Education to provide every student and employee in the school system with a safe and orderly learning and working environment.

To this end, the Board specifically prohibits harassing or bullying behavior at all levels.

All complaints of harassing or bullying behavior made by students shall be promptly and thoroughly investigated by the principal or designee.

Violations of this policy shall be considered misconduct and will result in disciplinary action up to and including long-term suspension or expulsion in the case of students. Policy: <http://www.wcpss.net/policy-files/series/policies/print-friendly/6414-bp.html>

If a student in your school has committed a serious disciplinary infraction or an illegal act, police involvement may be necessary. If the answer to **any** of the questions below is “Yes,” you may need to contact the police:

- Was a weapon involved?
- Were there threats of serious physical injury or hate-motivated violence?
- Was there sexual assault?
- Was there physical bullying that caused serious bodily harm?
- Is there robbery, extortion, or vandalism causing extensive damage to property, or other illegal act?

Guidelines on involving police in disciplinary matters vary between school districts. You should always consult the rules that apply to your particular school when dealing with serious disciplinary matters.

What to Do When Bullying Continues or Gets Worse

If the bullying gets worse and you need additional help, consider the following if:

Someone is at immediate risk of harm because of bullying	Report to the SRO or call the police 911
Your child is feeling suicidal because of bullying	Contact the suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Your child's teacher is not keeping your child safe from being bullied	Contact local school administrator (principal or superintendent)
Your school is not keeping your child safe from being bullied	Contact the State School Department
Your child is sick, stressed, not sleeping, or is having other problems because of bullying	Contact your counselor or other health professional
Your child is bullied because of their race, ethnicity, or disability and local help is not working to solve the problem	Contact the U.S. Department of Education's Office on Civil Rights

Sources: WCPSS, StopBullying.gov

Additional Resources

- <http://cops.usdoj.gov/ric/resourcedetail.aspx?rid=231>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/>
- http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/bully/bully_intro_pg1.htm
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
http://www.extension.unl.edu/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=221677&name=dlfe-3202.pdf
- www.stopbullying.gov
- <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov>
- <http://www.Bullyinginfo.org>
- <http://www.antibullyingweek.org/dox/resources.html?gclid=CNWM1OaD2q4CFQ1U7AodiEo9bg>
- <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/?gclid=CKfOmfmD2q4CFY1R7AodPgsGdA>
- http://www.kzoo.edu/psych/stop_bullying/resources/websites.html