California DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Bullying Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions based on the *Bullying at School* publication.

These frequently asked questions about bullying are extracted from key concepts presented in the California Department of Education's publication titled Bullying at School (PDF). They are easy to adapt and provide information for educators, students, families, and community safety partners who wish to educate themselves and others about effective measures to prevent bullying and respond to it.

Expand All | Collapse All

What is school bullying?

Bullying is exposing a person to abusive actions repeatedly over time.[1] Being aware of children's teasing and acknowledging injured feelings are always important. Bullying becomes a concern when hurtful or aggressive behavior toward an individual or group appears to be unprovoked, intentional, and (usually) repeated.

Bullying is a form of *violence*. It involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking those who are less powerful. Bullying may be *physical* (hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing), *verbal* (taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, threatening), *or emotional* (spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, extorting, or intimidating). Bullying can occur face-to-face or in the online world.

Bullying is also one or more acts by a pupil or group of pupils directed against another pupil that constitutes sexual harassment, hate violence, or severe or pervasive intentional harassment, threats, or intimidation that is disruptive, causes disorder, and invades the rights of others by creating an intimidating or hostile educational environment, and includes acts that are committed personally or by means of an electronic act, as defined.

An "electronic act" is defined as transmission of a communication, including, but not limited to, a message, text, sound, or image by means of an electronic devise, including but not limited to, a telephone, wireless telephone or other wireless communication device, computer, or pager.

What do bullies do?

Bullying actions may be direct or indirect.

Direct bullying or identifiable bullying actions may include:

- Hitting, tripping, shoving, pinching, and excessive tickling
- Verbal threats, name calling, racial slurs, and insults
- Demanding money, property, or some service to be performed
- Stabbing, choking, burning, and shooting

Indirect bullying may be more difficult to detect and may include:

- Rejecting, excluding, or isolating target(s)
- Humiliating target(s) in front of friends
- Manipulating friends and relationships
- Sending hurtful or threatening e-mail or writing notes
- Blackmailing, terrorizing, or posing dangerous dares
- Developing a Web site devoted to taunting, ranking, or degrading a target and inviting others to join in posting humiliating notes or messages.

Do both boys and girls bully?

Yes. Typically, boys are direct and more physical while girls bully in more indirect ways. Some bullies use both direct and indirect strategies. Ultimately, it is important to the bully to be able to choose methods that produce the most success.

Although bullying among youths involves both bullies and targets of bullying, some students can be both a target and a bully at the same time. School districts must recognize bullying and develop policies that discourage such behavior and establish the consequences for students who bully at school. Everyone at the school, including parents, must understand that bullying is harmful and must take responsibility to recognize and stop bullying when it happens.

What are the consequences of school bullying?

Bullying among children often leads to greater and prolonged violence. Not only does bullying harm the targets, it also negatively affects students' ability to learn and achieve in school.

Consequences for the target

Students who are the target of a bully experience negative emotions. Feelings of persecution prevail over feelings of safety and confidence. Fear, anger, frustration, and anxiety may lead to ongoing illness, mood swings, withdrawal from friends and family, an inability to concentrate, and loss of interest in school. If left unattended, the targeted student may develop attendance and/or discipline problems, fail at school altogether or, in the worst cases, they are suicidal or retaliatory and violent.

Consequences for the bully

Without support or intervention, students who bully will continue to bully and may engage in other types of antisocial behavior and crime. Although some students who bully are less likely to be trusted and may be seen as mean and manipulative, a bully who learns aggression toward others garners power and may find the behavior a difficult habit to break. Some acts of bullying result in suspension or expulsion of students and translate into child abuse and domestic violence in adulthood. Research shows that 60 percent of males who bully in grades six through nine are convicted of at least one crime as adults, compared with 23 percent of males who did not bully.[2]

Consequences for the bystander

Students who passively participate in bullying by watching may come to believe that the behavior is acceptable and that the adults at school either do not care enough or are powerless to stop it. Some students may join in with the bully; others who share common traits with the target may fear they will

become the next target. Research indicates that witnesses to bullying develop a loss of their sense of security which can reduce learning.

Allowing bullying to continue

Bullying behavior permeates a school in the same way that it starts and continues in families. Adults who overlook bullying are, in essence, allowing bullying to continue. Just as a student may bully a student thinking they are motivating him or her, adults who socially ostracize or humiliate a student in front of others may believe they are motivating or disciplining the student when, in fact, the student being embarrassed is actually being bullied. Adults also overlook bullying when they:

- Condone mistreatment of younger students.
- Allow derogatory names or labels for groups of students.
- Overlook casual cruelty, sexual harassment, hate or bias-based behavior, or "hazing" activities in student clubs or sports programs.

A school not only runs the risk of gaining a reputation for being dangerous or unsafe, it also risks not fulfilling its academic mission, losing enrollment, or being the subject of litigation.

What can a school community do about bullying?

Preventing and responding to school bullying is the responsibility of every school administrator, teacher, school staff member, student, and parent. The entire school community must recognize the responsibility to create a climate in which bullying is not tolerated. A comprehensive program, founded by Swedish researcher Dan Olweus and believed to be highly effective in reducing bullying and other antisocial behavior among students in primary and junior high schools calls for interventions at different levels. The levels are as follows:

Schoolwide interventions

Strategies include implementing a schoolwide antibullying policy, a survey of bullying problems at each school, increased supervision, schoolwide assemblies, and teacher in-service training to raise the awareness of children and school staff regarding bullying.

Classroom interventions

Strategies include establishing classroom rules against bullying, holding regular class meetings to discuss bullying at school, and scheduling meetings with all parents.

Individual interventions

This strategy consists of having individual discussions with each student identified as either a bully or a target. Other practices for schools are as follows:

- Take immediate action when bullying is observed.
- Respond in a timely manner to all reports of bullying.
- Provide protection for students who are bullied.
- Establish support programs and resources for both the target and bully.
- Develop policies that define bullying and provide appropriate responses to the problem.
- Apply school rules, policies, and sanctions fairly and consistently.
- Establish an effective system for reporting bullying, including adults who can be relied on to respond responsibly and sensitively.

- Teach parents to understand bullying and the consequences.
- Partner with law enforcement and mental health agencies to identify and address cases of serious bullying.
- Promote the norm for a bully-free school throughout the entire school community.
- Engage students to help promote the norm of a bully-free school.
- California *Education Code* Section 48900(r) allows for the suspension or recommended expulsion of a student engaged in an act of bullying.

What can teachers do about classroom bulling?

Both seasoned and new teachers can develop and apply a repertoire of strategies that will help prevent, deter, and respond to classroom bullying and promote their academic mission. These strategies include:

- Model behavior that is inclusive and promotes respect for all students.
- Provide students with opportunities to talk about bullying and enlist their support in defining bullying as an unacceptable behavior.
- Develop an *action* plan for what students are to do if they observe a bully or are confronted by a bully.
- Share with students the responsibility for the classroom's social and physical environment to reinforce acceptable behavior.
- Post and publicize rules against bullying, including fair and consistent consequences for bullying.
- Refer both the bully and his/her target to counseling.
- Have students and parents sign behavior contracts consistent with written and communicated behavior codes for students, teachers, and staff.
- Maintain constant monitoring of cafeterias, playgrounds, and "hot spots" where bullying is likely to occur but direct adult supervision may not be present.
- Take immediate action when bullying is observed so that both the target and the bully know that mistreating someone is not tolerated. Notify the parents of both the target and the bully and attempt resolution expeditiously at school.
- Create cooperative learning activities in which students change groups for balance and interest, and equal treatment of all the participants may be ensured.
- Incorporate classroom activities designed to build self-esteem and spotlight individual talents, interests, and abilities.
- Implement a *buddy system* so that students pair up with a particular friend, an older student mentor, or someone they can depend on for support, particularly if they are new to the school.
- Form friendship groups that support children who are regularly bullied by peers.
- Develop peer mediation programs to help students learn to communicate and resolve issues among themselves.

What can students do about school bullying?

A student may be a *bully* or the *target* of a bully. Some students may be *both*. The majority of students, however, are *bystanders* or observers of bullying, and still others may not be aware of bullying happening at all but may be affected by the problems caused by the behavior.

The *targeted* student needs to know that bullies rarely stop bullying on their own. A bully's aggressive behavior more likely will escalate and over time, he/she will devise bolder methods for hurting people. Telling a responsible, caring adult at school about the bullying and asking for help are essential. The targeted student should also avoid the usual times and places where they come in contact with the bully. The targeted student should chose safe places to be at school, stay with someone, and avoid being vulnerable by being alone or in some secluded area of the school.

The *bully's* primary purpose is to gain power or acclaim. Some targeted students have made the mistake of thinking that use of a weapon or retaliation against the bully will resolve the problem. These choices are not viable because they are rarely effective. Rather than end the problem, retaliatory methods tend to escalate the aggression and hurt or injure unintended victims.

Students who bully should admit to the behavior and acknowledge it as being hurtful. A student who bullies can ask for help just like the targeted student or accept help from an adult whom they trust and begin to explore more respectful methods of expression and for gaining power and prestige at school.

The *bystander* should recognize that he/she must choose to be either a part of the problem or a part of the solution. Hurtful actions can deliberately affect the targeted person, witnesses to the humiliation, and the entire campus climate. *Bystanders* are a powerful majority and can use their social power and personal actions to promote respect for themselves and others. There are ways to prevent bullying from being established in a school. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- Report bullying to a responsible and caring adult.
- Express disapproval by not joining in the laughter, teasing, or gossip.
- Campaign against bullying through school activities (e.g., the school newsletter, the student handbook, school calendar, poster contests, a "student watch" program, plays and productions, or suggestion boxes for safe, anonymous reporting).
- Advocate mediation programs or programs to develop students' problem-solving skills.

What can parents of young children do about school bullying?

Parents are their children's first teachers. Therefore, parents' words and actions at home will be imitated by their children in other settings. The most important opportunity that parents have is to speak and act in a respectful way and to solve problems fairly and peacefully. Being a positive role model means teaching children respect and peaceable behaviors by example. Suggestions for ways to be a positive role model are as follows:

At home

- Talk with children often and listen carefully to what they have to say.
- Discuss bullying behavior and how hurtful it can be to others.
- Make behavioral expectations clear and be consistent with discipline when siblings and peers engage in hurtful teasing and bullying.
- Help children understand the meaning of friendship by modeling friendly behavior and showing how friends act positively toward each other.
- Discuss the fact that people are individuals and everyone develops characteristics and personalities that make them who they are.
- Model basic manners and respect for family, friends, and peers.
- Urge children to tell an adult when they are being bullied.

At school

- Learn the school rules, expected behavior, and consequences of bullying.
- Participate at school, offer services, and attend school-sponsored activities.
- Communicate regularly with your child's teacher.
- Report bullying behavior immediately when you become aware it is happening.
- Ask for and accept the school's help whether your child is a target, a bully, or a bystander.

If your child has experienced conflict or confrontation with a bully, build his or her confidence and independence with reassurances:

- He or she is not at fault, and the bully's behavior is the problem.
- Everyone is entitled to respect, and he or she does not deserve being bullied.
- You will work with the school staff to address the problem. You are committed to helping the school protect your child and other children from bullies. (Keep accurate records of incidents and be specific about your child's experiences when discussing resolution of the problem with staff.)
- You will meet with your child's teacher, the principal, and/or the school counselor.

Meeting with the family of the bully may be difficult as family members could interpret the bully's behavior as "standing up" for himself or herself. However, if a counselor or principal offers practical advice or interventions that could help resolve the situation, including the bully's family in the discussion could end the problem.

What can parents of teens do about school bullying?

As children grow older, bullying behavior may be complicated by other factors. Sexual harassment, bias or hate-motivated bullying, and the aggressive and humiliating hazing done as part of tradition or initiation into a club, sports team, or other group may come into play. Parents, whether or not they are aware of these forms of bullying, are able to observe the ways in which their children manage decisions, rules, responsibility, authority, friends, popularity, and personal and social power. Although teens push for independence, parents should remain active and involved in their lives. As well as being there, parents must remain proactive and reinforce respectful behavior. During a child's life, parents must remain a strong force by anchoring the values that guide their children's actions and decisions. Parents may not know it, but they are still powerful teachers. They should keep in mind the following suggestions in maintaining guidance of their teens:

- Bullying is disrespectful and can be dangerous even if perpetuated in the spirit of team building or as the price to pay for joining a group. This behavior, or *hazing,* is illegal and is humiliating at the least and life threatening at the worst.
- Bullying of a sexual nature constitutes *sexual harassment* and is also illegal.
- Bullying on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexual orientation is a form of *bias* or *hate* and cannot be dismissed as teasing. The difference between hate-motivated behavior and crime is negligible, and hate crime is punishable by law.
- Bullying behavior that continues into adulthood escalates to violent behavior toward strangers, friends, and even family.
- A lifetime of consequences may follow both the target and the bully.

Parents of teens should remain vigilant and understand school policies regarding bullying and the consequences of bullying. Parents must keep communication flowing between them and their children, teachers, and staff. If they become aware of bullying problems at school, parents must report it to the school immediately and ask for and accept help from the school whether their child is the bully, the target, or a witness.

Parents must continue to be a positive role model in any setting and refrain from using foul language or "put-downs." Maintaining friendships with others based on trust and respect, acknowledging and accepting diversity, and resolving disputes peacefully are positive ways to model appropriate social behavior.

What can community partners do about bullying?

No single factor contributes to bullying behavior, but several influences allow it to develop as the norm. For example if family members criticize regularly or use "put-downs," children may assume that this is the way to deal with people generally. Media images of bullying and harassment being portrayed as humorous, peer norms that communicate bullying as acceptable, and a school culture that ignores obvious signs of bullying can all allow bullying to grow.

School bullying is a challenge, and it affects the entire community. Community partners can help schools deal effectively with bullying problems. Law enforcement officers, representatives of juvenile justice, business owners, faith community members, attorneys, and local mental health and social service experts can share expertise, resources, and skills. Community partners can contribute support to combat bullying by taking the following actions:

- Participate in problem-solving groups or antibullying policy committees.
- Share positive cultural perspectives, norms, and expectations as models for youths.
- Offer counseling and other mental health and social services as appropriate.
- Provide legal counsel to clearly define bullying behavior and the law.
- Help identify students at risk of becoming bullies or targets.
- Volunteer to mentor bullies and targets of bullying.
- Provide support for parents whose children are experiencing bullying problems.
- Demonstrate to all students the concern and support of the community by providing resources and supporting positive school projects, sports, and field trips.
- Model responsible citizenship.
- Promote norms that show the community does not tolerate bullying.
- Consider adapting the school rules against bullying and the protocols to apply to businesses, recreation agencies, and churches in the community.

How can a caring adult work with a bully?

First, it is generally not effective to talk to bullies as a group. The setting and composition of the group may reinforce negative, aggressive behavior and create new struggles for power and status among peers. If more than one student is suspected of bullying, speaking to each student separately is more effective and more appropriate.

How an adult can work with a bully largely depends on what motivates the student to bully in the first place. The caring adult must be prepared to invest time and energy in forming a relationship with the student who bullies. A relationship with a caring adult may be the experience the bully needs to examine and change behavior. Conversations with the student who bullies will help in the following ways:

- Whether a bullying problem needs to be addressed will be validated.
- Options for an appropriate course of action will be identified.
- The conversations show a caring adult who is interested and wants to help.
- Communication opens up options to refer serious bullying problems to the appropriate support agency.

Talking to a bully can help when such conversations are guided by a clear purpose. A continuing conversation helps the bully to:

- Define and comprehend bullying behavior and think through its consequences.

- Identify the people targeted, the ways, times, and places where the bully goes into action.
- Understand how bullying hurts others and the bully himself or herself.
- Explore the reasons for the behaviors.
- Explore other, more respectful ways to express and use personal power.

Determining whether the problem is *teasing* or *bullying* is often difficult. Some people believe that all teasing is bullying; still others believe that all bullying is harmless teasing. The distinction becomes clear to the student who bullies when he or she is helped to understand the impact on others of such behavior.

Teasing

Students who tease may be convinced to give up the hurtful behavior when they are helped to realize their actions are hurtful and disrespectful. They may also stop the behavior after being reprimanded or suffering the consequences defined in the policies of the school district.

Bullying

Students who bully are motivated by the idea of having the power to cause hurt, embarrassment, fear, or intimidation. Bullies typically have little or no regard for rules, policies, or consequences. Efforts to change a bully's behavior may require a significant amount of time and patience, intense discourse, and, in some cases, professional assistance and/or special programs.

How can a school community promote an anti-bullying climate?

Schools can identify an existing event, one that is repeated annually, and redesign it in ways that highlight the antibullying message. They may also use selected strategies that have proven to be effective. One smart and efficient strategy is to use traditional, established practices for promoting an antibullying message. The following opportunities are common to most schools:

- Staff meetings are a good place to regularly assess school climate. A simple invitation to complete a quick survey and discuss emerging issues can help short-circuit problems and can allow school staff to evaluate progress.
- Public announcements offer an ideal way for student campaigns that promote a bully-free campus. This is also a way to encourage students to report bullying and teach them how to get help if they feel threatened.
- School Web sites are a technology-based way to communicate expectations of student behavior and show how bullying will be perceived and dealt with at the school. Posting the policy and notifying students, staff, and parents prevent misunderstanding and ensure clarity of intent for all concerned.
- Student handbooks, planners, and calendars can be designed to include an antibullying message and tips on how to ask for help for oneself or others. All requirements, policies, and grievance procedures that must be communicated to parents may be detailed in the handbook.
- School mascots and mottos can promote values, messages, and expectations of respect and safety.
- School newspapers may feature articles that help keep the antibullying message alive. They can also publicize organizations and groups that help build positive social skills and self-discipline (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, Scouting, martial arts classes).
- Leadership classes can integrate information on the prevention of bullying to promote the power of peers and establish the expectation that bullying will not be tolerated.
- Campus parents centers may be used to recruit parents and encourage them to help with school projects; monitor cafeterias, playgrounds, and hot spots on campus; or to train to be adult mentors for students.

- Adult mentors may be trained as safe contacts for students to report bullying problems or ask for advice for themselves or others.
- Plays and productions may explore and personalize the issues and consequences of school bullying.
- Cooperative classroom and schoolwide activities foster mutual understanding and appreciation for others.
- Suggestion boxes are an anonymous way to report incidents of bullying.
- Marquees or message boards may display messages or graphics that remind students to show respect and appreciation for everyone.

[1]Dan Olweus, *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do,* Malden, Mass.: Backwell Publishers Ltd., 1993, p. 1.

[2]*Addressing the Problem of Juvenile Bullying.* Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*,* Fact Sheet #27, Washington D.C.: 2001, p. 2.

[3]Ibid.

What is cyber bullying?

Cyber bullying or online bullying is a term used to refer to bullying over electronic media. Cyber bullying is willful and involves recurring or repeated harm inflicted through electronic text. Cyber bullying can be as simple as continuing to send e-mail to someone who has said they want no further contact with the sender. Cyber bullies may also include threats, "putdowns" or hate-motivated speech. Cyber bullies may publish the personal contact information of their victims. They may attempt to assume the identity of a victim for the purpose of publishing material in their name that defames or ridicules them.

What can parents do to promote safe use of the Internet?

1. Keep your child's computer in an open area of the house. It is easier to monitor what your child is viewing.
2. Install filtering software on the computer your child uses or use child-friendly search engines.
3. Instruct your child to never give out personal information online to someone they do not know. Explain that people are not always who they say they are. Even small amounts of information like hobbies or a child's favorite hangout provide too much detail to be shared on the Internet.
4. Instruct your child to never meet in person with someone they first meet online. No matter how long they have been communicating online, it is virtually impossible to know if your child's new "friend" is who they say they are.
5. Make sure your children know they should not respond to offensive or dangerous emails. Encourage your child to follow three simple steps: Stop, Block, and Tell.
    "Stop" the correspondence immediately; responding can make the situation worse.
   "Block" the user from sending additional emails.
   "Tell" a parent or trusted adult about the situation.

6. Visit the Web sites your child visits. Spend some time familiarizing yourself with your child's online world. Many children know more about the Internet than their parents do. Ask them to show you what they like to do online.
7. Be a responsible cyber citizen. Just like being a citizen of your local community carries responsibilities, so does being a citizen of the cyber community. Use good manners, be respectful of others, and be safe.
8. Finally, if a child sees something that is inappropriate or makes them uncomfortable, they should report it immediately to a parent. Parents should then report the behavior to their Internet Service

Provider or law enforcement.

Questions: Coordinated School Health and Safety Office| 916-319-0914

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