

BULLYING

Bullying is systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt and/or psychological distress on one or more students. Bullying is not child's play, but a rather terrifying experience many American school children face every day. It can be as direct as teasing, hitting, or threatening or as indirect as in rumors, exclusion, or manipulation. Bullying can no longer be explained away—as some adults are inclined to do—as a normal part of growing up. Bullying in children can develop into sexual harassment in older students.

Whether you are a parent, an educator, or a concerned friend of the family, there are 10 steps you can take to stop and prevent bullying:

- Pay attention. There are many warning signs that may point to a bullying problem, such as unexplained injuries, lost or destroyed personal items, changes in eating habits, and avoidance of school or other social situations. However, every student may not exhibit warning signs or may go to great lengths to hide them. This is where paying attention is most valuable. Engage students on a daily basis and ask open-ended questions that encourage conversation.
- Don't ignore it. Never assume that a situation is harmless teasing. Different students have different levels of coping; what may be considered teasing to one may be humiliating

and devastating to another. Whenever a student feels threatened in any way, take it seriously, and assure the student that you are there for them and will help.

- When you see something, do something. Intervene as soon as you even think there may be a problem between students. Don't brush it off as, "Kids are just being kids. They'll get over it." Some never do, and it affects them for a lifetime. All questionable behavior should be addressed immediately to keep a situation from escalating. Summon other adults if you deem the situation may get out of hand. Be sure to always refer to your school's anti-bullying policy.
- Remain calm. When you intervene, refuse to argue with either student. Model the respectful behavior you expect from the students. First make sure everyone is safe and that no one needs immediate medical attention. Reassure the students involved as well as the bystanders. Explain to them what needs to happen next—bystanders go on to their expected destination while the students involved should be taken separately to a safe place.
- Deal with students individually. Don't attempt to sort out the facts while everyone is present, don't allow the students involved to talk with one another, and don't ask bystanders to tell what they saw in front of others. Instead, talk with the individuals involved—including bystanders—on a one-to-one basis. This way, everyone will be able to tell their side of the story without worrying about what others may think or say.
- Don't make the students involved apologize and/or shake hands on the spot. Label the behavior as bullying. Explain that you take this type of behavior very seriously and that

you plan to get to the bottom of it before you determine what should be done next and any resulting consequences based on your school's anti-bullying policy. This empowers the bullied child—and the bystanders—to feel that someone will finally listen to their concerns and be fair about outcomes.

- Hold bystanders accountable. Bystanders provide bullies an audience, and often actually encourage bullying. Explain that this type of behavior is wrong, will not be tolerated, and that they also have a right and a responsibility to stop bullying. Identify yourself as a caring adult that they can always approach if they are being bullied and/or see or suspect bullying.
- Listen and don't pre-judge. It is very possible that the person you suspect to be the bully may actually be a bullied student retaliating or a "bully's" cry for help. It may also be the result of an undiagnosed medical, emotional, or psychological issue. Rather than make any assumptions, listen to each child with an open mind.
- Get appropriate professional help. Be careful not to give any advice beyond your level of expertise. Rather than make any assumptions, if you deem there are any underlying and/or unsolved issues, refer the student to a nurse, counselor, school psychologist, social worker, or other appropriate professional.
- Become trained to handle bullying situations. If you work with students in any capacity, it is important to learn the proper ways to address bullying. Visit <http://www.nea.org/bullyfree> for information and resources. You can also take the pledge to stop bullying as

well as learn how to create a Bully Free program in your school and/or community.

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is the term applied to bullying over the internet, via email, text messaging, and similar technological modes of communication. Cyberbullying includes sending or posting harmful material or engaging in other forms of social aggression. This form of bullying is more intense as it can occur around the clock, and the text or images can be quickly and widely disseminated—well beyond the school grounds.

Cyberbullying is growing rapidly among youth. Whereas bullying used to be confined primarily to the schoolyard, young people are being bullied on their computers, cell phones, and with other technology. A good way to tackle the issue of cyberbullying is to stop it before it ever starts.

- **Implement and enforce an anti-bullying school code of conduct** that includes both bullying and cyberbullying. Spell out what behaviors and actions will not be tolerated and the consequences that will follow.
- **Have students sign an anti-bullying and cyberbullying pledge** where students pledge not to bully others and to speak up if they know someone is being bullied.
- **Create a safe place for students to voice concerns or problems**, and encourage students to come forward and speak to someone.
- **Learn how to tell the warning signs that a child might be being cyberbullied** and how to get the child appropriate help. Educate

teachers and staff on the warning signs and what they should do to help a student.

- **Talk with students about cyberbullying:** what it is, the impact it has, and its consequences. Let them know cyberbullying is a serious issue that will not be tolerated.
- **Educate parents on cyberbullying.** Let them know what signs to look for at home and how to talk with their children about the issue. Invite parents to talk with you about cyberbullying and send home resources.
- **Learn and teach conflict resolution and anger management skills.** Help students practice applying them in everyday life.
- **Develop and sustain a network** with health care, mental health, counseling, victim services, and social work resources in your community. Make sure all staff know how to connect students with available resources.
- **Encourage and sponsor a student-led, anti-bullying program.** Work with students to help raise cyberbullying awareness within the school through student-led clubs, assemblies, or posters.
- **Stay informed!** Stay up-to-date with the latest internet and technology trends.

LGBTQ+ Students

LGBTQ+ students are more likely to face bullying and harassment in school—leading to poor grades, dropping out of school, and even homelessness. LGBTQ+ students at the college level also report feeling unsafe and unwelcome.

Educators are uniquely positioned to address these issues and work toward creating a safe, supportive, and affirming school environment for LGBTQ+ students. Every student deserves the right to attend a school that fully embraces them for who they are and allows them to achieve to their full potential.

Every student deserves a safe, supportive, and affirming school environment. As a caring educator, pledge to create that space for LGBTQ+ students.

- Talk to and share resources with colleagues to educate them on the needs of LGBTQ+ students.
- Advocate for safe, supportive learning environments for LGBTQ+ students.
- Collaborate with colleagues, parents, administration, community, and most importantly, students to ensure students have access to LGBTQ+-related supports and resources.

Advocate for the rights of transgender students and stand in opposition to anti-transgender legislation, policies, and practices.

For more information on sexual orientation and gender identity, please go to:

<http://www.nea.org/tools/18846.htm>

https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/20184_Transgender%20Guide_v4.pdf