

For Parents of Teens

Understanding Bullying in Ohio's Schools

Because of the prevalence of bullying in today's schools and the negative consequences of this behavior for students, Ohio law requires that all Ohio public school districts have policies prohibiting bullying, harassment and intimidation. The law outlines a specific definition for these negative behaviors and requires that districts adopt procedures for documenting, investigating and reporting complaints. Parents who understand the law and local school policies about bullying are better prepared to play a role in any potential bullying situation involving their children. This fact sheet features: guidance for parents of bullied students; tips and facts to help prevent and understand bullying; and additional resources on bullying.

What is bullying?

State law defines bullying in Ohio schools as any intentional written, verbal, graphic or physical act that a student or group of students exhibits toward another student more than once, and that behavior both:

- Causes mental or physical harm to the other student; and
- Is sufficiently severe, persistent or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational environment for the other student. [Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3313.666(B)(E)]

Note that "bullying" here refers to all instances of harassment, intimidation and bullying as per state law. This definition also appears in the State Board of Education's Anti-Harassment, Intimidation or Bullying Model Policy, section 3.1. The State Board model policy adds a definition of *cyber bullying* as repetitive, hostile behavior with the intent to harm others through the use of information and communication technologies such as websites, instant messages, camera phones or iPods.

As children grow older, sexual harassment; bias or hate-motivated bullying; and aggressive and humiliating hazing as part of club, sports team or other group traditions may come into play.

What should parents do if their child is bullied at school or at school events?

- Be aware of their child's experiences at school;
- Ask to see the school district's official anti-bullying policy and learn about bullying's consequences;
- Report bullying problems to school officials immediately; and
- Call local law enforcement if they believe a child is in danger.

If a child has experienced a confrontation with a bully, parents can build the child's confidence with reassurances that:

- He or she is not at fault; the bully's behavior is the problem;
- Everyone is entitled to respect; he or she does not deserve to be bullied; and
- The parent will work with the child's teacher, principal, school counselor and school staff to ensure that the victim will be safe.

What are the responsibilities of school administrators when bullying occurs?

By law, building principals (or their designees) are to respond to and investigate any incident of bullying that is reported (either verbally or in writing), document the incident in writing and notify parents or guardians of any students involved. Their responsibilities also involve using intervention strategies for protecting victims from additional harassment or retaliation and interventions or disciplinary procedures for any guilty students. For more information, search for bullying resources at education.ohio.gov.

What can parents of teens do to prevent bullying?

Even when children reach their teenage years, their parents are still powerful teachers. When parents remain a strong force in their children's lives, they reinforce the values that guide their actions and decisions. Here are specific steps that parents can take to help their children develop positive social skills:

- Observe the ways in which children manage decisions, rules, responsibility and authority.
- Be aware of how children relate to friends and cope with popularity as well as personal and social power.
- Although teens push for independence, remain active and involved in children's lives and reinforce respectful behavior.
- Keep communication lines open with children, teachers and staff.
- Serve as positive role models by:
 - Refraining from using foul language or "put-downs;"
 - Maintaining friendships with others based on trust and respect; and
 - Acknowledging and accepting diversity, and resolving disputes peacefully.

Facts to know about bullying:

- **Bullying is disrespectful** and can be dangerous, humiliating and life threatening.
- **Bullying of a sexual nature** constitutes sexual harassment.
- **Bullying includes electronically transmitted acts**; "cyber bullying" occurs when a perpetrator conveys his or her message through the internet or a cell phone or other wireless hand-held device.
- **Bullying based on race, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation** is a form of bias or hate. No one should dismiss such bullying as teasing.
- **Bullying behavior that continues** into adulthood may turn into violent behavior toward strangers, friends and family.
- **A lifetime of consequences** may follow both the target and the bully.

Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying State Partners and Resources

Led by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), Ohio's Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Initiative includes state partners who provide information online including the model policy and resources support policy implementation in Ohio schools. ODE also provides free presentations on the model policy and workshops for school staff, community members and parents. For more information, contact ODE Office for School Improvement and Innovation at (877) 644-6338 or visit education.ohio.gov and search for bullying resources.

The Office of Ohio's Attorney General. The Office's website provides a tool kit for ensuring that kids use the internet and cell phones safely. Visit <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Home> and search for cyber safety.

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Rape Prevention Education Program (RPE) works to prevent sexual violence before it happens by promoting respectful and healthy relationships for all Ohioans. ODH partners with the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (www.oaesv.org) and the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (www.odvn.org) on a statewide sexual and intimate partner violence prevention plan and supports this work in local communities. Find more information at <https://www.odh.ohio.gov/health/phhsbg/rprev.aspx>.

Ohio Mental Health Network for School Success provides training, technical assistance and support to schools interested in anti-bullying education, prevention and intervention strategies. In addition, the OMHNSS maintains the Effective Practices Registry that highlights local best practices addressing non-academic barriers to learning, including bullying. Find more information at: www.muohio.edu/csbnhp

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Mental health and substance use prevention program specialists of the Division of Prevention Services provide training, technical assistance and presentations to community coalitions, schools and other community-based organizations about harassment, intimidation, violence and bullying as it relates to behavioral health.