

For Parents of Young Children

Understanding Bullying in Ohio's Schools

Because of the prevalence of bullying in today's schools and its negative consequences for students, Ohio law requires that all Ohio public school districts adopt policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying. The law outlines a definition for these behaviors and requires that school 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. Note that "bullying" here refers to all instances of harassment, intimidation and bullying as defined by law.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Ohio law [Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3313.666(B)(E)] defines bullying, harassment and intimidation 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.

FACTS TO KNOW ABOUT BULLYING:

- Bullying is disrespectful and can be dangerous, humiliating and life threatening.
- "Cyber bullying" occurs when a perpetrator conveys his or her message through the internet or a cell phone, personal digital assistant (PDA) or another wireless hand-held device.
- Bullying based on race, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation is a form of bias or hate and should not be dismissed as teasing.
- Bullying that continues into adulthood may turn into violence toward strangers, friends and family.

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP PREVENT BULLYING?

Parents are their children's first teachers. Whatever parents say and do at home, their children are likely to imitate and repeat in other settings. The most important skills that parents can teach their children are to speak and act in respectful ways and to solve problems fairly and peacefully. Here are tips for teaching by example:

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.
- Discuss the fact that all people deserve respect, even though their individual characteristics and personalities may differ from the expected.
- 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 that it is happening.
- Ask for and accept the school's help if your child is a target, a bully or a bystander.

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

- Be aware of their child's experiences at school.
- Obtain their school district's written anti-bullying policy; learn about bullying's consequences.
- Report bullying problems to school officials immediately.
- Keep accurate records of incidents and be specific about their child's experiences when discussing resolution of the problem with school staff.
- Call local law enforcement if they believe their child is in immediate danger.

What should school administrators do when bullying occurs?

By law, building principals or their designees are to:

- Respond to and investigate any incident of bullying that is reported verbally or in writing;
- Document the incident in writing and notify parents or guardians of any students involved;
- Use intervention strategies to protect victims from additional harassment or retaliation; and
- Use interventions or disciplinary procedures for any guilty students.

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

- The child is not at fault; the bully's behavior is the problem.
- Everyone is entitled to respect; the child does not deserve to be bullied.
- You will work with the child's teacher, principal, school counselor and school staff to ensure that your child will feel safe.
- You are committed to helping the school protect your child and other children from bullies.

ANTI-HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION AND BULLYING STATE PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

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 by topic that 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 the Office for School Improvement and Innovation toll-free at (877) 644- 6338 or see education.ohio.gov, keyword searches: 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/csbmhp

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.