



For Parents of Young Children Understanding Bullying in Ohio Schools

Because of the prevalence of bullying in today's schools and its negative consequences for students, Ohio law requires that by Dec. 30, 2007, 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.

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 particular 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.

The term "bullying" in this fact sheet refers to all instances of harassment, intimidation and bullying as defined by law.

Facts to know about bullying:

- Bullying is disrespectful and can be dangerous, humiliating and life threatening.
- Bullying includes electronically transmitted forms; "cyber bullying" occurs when a perpetrator conveys his/her message through the Internet or a cell phone, personal digital assistant (PDA) or other wireless hand-held device.
- Bullying on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation is a form of bias or hate and should not be dismissed as teasing.
- Bullying behavior that continues into adulthood may turn into violent behavior 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 suggestions to help parents teach 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.

For more information, see the model policy and school personnel fact sheet on the Ohio Department of Education's Web site, listed at the end of this document.

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 the bully's behavior is addressed and that your child will be protected.
- You are committed to helping the school protect your child and other children from bullies.

Additional Resources

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) provides varied materials and onsite presentations about bullying and the State Board of Education's model policy. For more information, contact ODE Safe and Supportive Learning toll-free at (877) 644-6338 or (614) 644-8863, or see <http://www.ode.state.oh.us>, keyword search: *bullying prevention*.

The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management is a state agency that provides resources, training and direct services to Ohio schools, communities, courts and local governments. The Commission provides Ohio schools with constructive, nonviolent methods for resolving disputes and creating supportive learning environments. For more information, contact Sarah Wallis at (614) 752-9595. <http://www.disputeresolution.ohio.gov/>

The Office of Ohio's Attorney General provides staff members to give presentations about bullying law and related criminal charges. **To schedule an onsite presentation**, call Kathleen Nichols at (614) 466-3965. The Office's Web site provides information on protecting children, Internet safety and cyber-predator awareness. <http://www.ag.state.oh.us/>