Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Strategies and Resources

Create a safer, more supportive school environment by preventing and addressing bullying and cyberbullying.

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying can be physical, verbal, relational or social, or take place over technology (known as cyberbullying).

While bullying can happen to anyone, some groups may be at greater risk. Depending on the environment, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) youth, students with disabilities, socially isolated children, or other individuals with differences in physical appearance or cultural background may be more frequently targeted for bullying. Research shows the prevalence of bullying increases during elementary school, peaks during middle school years, and then slightly decreases during high school.

The negative effects of bullying are not limited to the individual who is being bullied. Those who bully others, bystanders, and other members of the school community are also impacted when bullying occurs. Negative outcomes may include impacts on mental and physical health, substance use, educational experience, violence, and suicide.

To prevent and reduce bullying in K-12 settings, schools should implement a multi-faceted and community-based approach that includes immediate response and appropriate consequences and support for serious incidents. As part of these efforts, K-12 leaders can consider assessing the frequency, locations, and types of bullying behavior to better understand the current landscape and determine appropriate prevention and intervention plans. Building positive school environments, developing youth social-emotional skills, and communicating clear expectations of student behavior can also be effective strategies in decreasing incidences of bullying and associated risk factors.
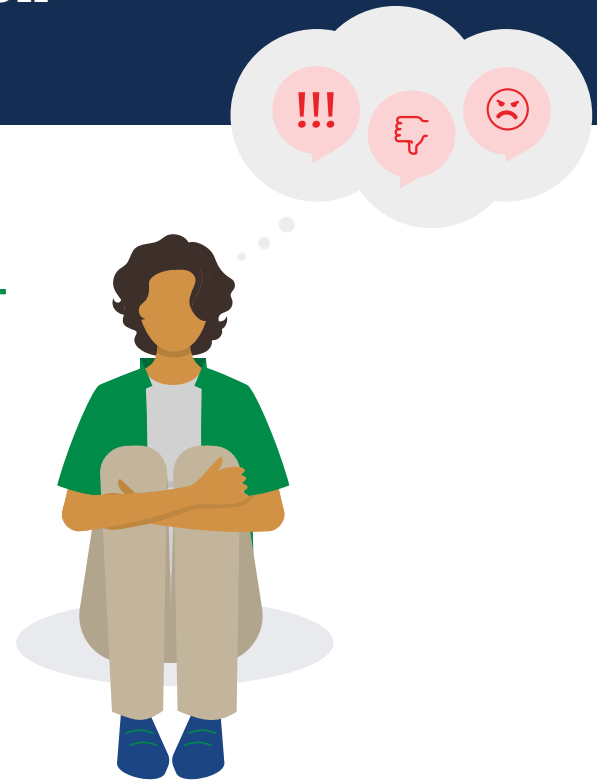
Bullying is a widespread issue in the United States. Nearly 20 percent of students in grades 9-12 reported being bullied on school property in 2022.

Indicators of Bullying and Cyberbullying

There are several signs that may indicate a child is involved in bullying. By recognizing indicators of bullying, parents, guardians, educators, and other trusted adults may be able to better identify and support impacted students. Potential warning signs could include:

- Avoiding social situations or expressing a desire to not go to or be at school
- Displaying physical symptoms such frequent headaches, unexplained injuries, or difficulty sleeping
- Exhibiting changes in eating habits, such as skipping meals or binge eating
- Expressing feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, or talking about suicide
- Displaying changes in device use and/or hiding screens when others are near
- Losing or having damaged clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry

⚠ Bullying and Suicide Risk

Both victims and perpetrators of bullying are at higher risk of suicide than their peers. Research indicates that persistent bullying can lead to or worsen feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, depression, and anxiety, which can all contribute to suicidal behavior in those at-risk. Additional data show that those who are bullied are 19 times more likely to experience suicidal ideation than youth with no history of bullying.

Those who witness bullying are also more likely to suffer from mental health issues like depression and anxiety, which can increase the risk of suicidal behavior. These factors elevate the criticality of implementing an effective school-wide bullying prevention strategy, as well as incorporating relevant and appropriate mental health programs, services, and supports for students.

Related Resources

☑ The Relationship Between Bullying and Suicide: What We Know and What it Means for Schools
This resource provides school administrators, teachers, and other school staff with information to help improve schools' understanding of and ability to prevent and respond to bullying and suicide-related behavior.

☑ Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention
This resource provides a plan for school districts to implement suicide prevention policies. It includes specific, actionable steps to support school personnel; sample language for student handbooks; suggestions for involving parents and guardians in suicide prevention; and guidance for addressing in-school suicide attempts.

🖥 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that occurs through technology. Social media, gaming platforms, and text messages are all forms of technology through which cyberbullying can occur. Many students who are cyberbullied also face in-person bullying.

Cyberbullying can be especially harmful because digital platforms are always accessible, making it harder for victims to find relief. Online content can be difficult to remove or delete, having compounding effects on a victim's mental and emotional well-being over a long period of time. Because cyberbullying takes place over devices or in digital spaces, it can also be harder for parents, caregivers, and teachers to identify, monitor, or address the behavior in an effective or quick manner.

To help prevent and address cyberbullying, families and educators can consider actions such as:

- Educating youth about digital citizenship and establishing rules for appropriate digital behavior.
- Learning about young people's digital habits and how they may relate to cyberbullying.
- Helping children develop emotional intelligence and learn self-awareness and self-regulation skills.

Related Resources

☑ #StartTheConversation: Cyberbullying: This fact sheet provides an overview of cyberbullying, including signs to look for, potential effects, and tips for talking to children about their online engagement.

☑ Cyberbullying: This resource outlines what cyberbullying is, how parents can prevent it, and what to do if your child is being cyberbullied.

☑ Cyberbullying Research Center: This website provides information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents.

☑ Dealing with Cyberbullies: This article provides an overview of what cyberbullying is, why it has become a problem, and how to protect yourself or children from it.

☑ Safe Online Surfing: This educational program helps children learn about online safety and digital citizenship. It includes interactive games that cover topics such as cyberbullying and online etiquette.

☑ Tips for Teachers: This resource can help teachers, school personnel, and staff identify warning signs a child is being cyberbullied or is cyberbullying, as well as strategies to prevent and address it.

Sources: About Bullying | Build a Safe Environment | Bullying and Cyberbullying | Bullying Prevention for Parents of Middle School Students | Engage Parents & Youth | Five Things About School-Based Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs | Key Considerations for Bullying Prevention | Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention | YRBS Data Summary Trends Report | SchoolSafety.gov Bullying and Cyberbullying | Social Emotional Learning at a Glance | Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Needs | Tips for Teachers | The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions

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Bullying Prevention Strategies

There are several strategies school leaders, teachers, and staff can consider to identify, address, and prevent bullying in schools.

Create a Positive School Environment

A positive, inclusive, and welcoming school climate can prevent bullying and reduce the impacts and risks associated with bullying behavior. In the classroom, educators can create a safe and supportive environment by modeling and rewarding positive behavior, implementing classroom management approaches, and utilizing restorative practices that help students build relationships and solve conflicts.

A positive school climate can promote a culture of inclusion and respect and build school connectedness among all members of the K-12 community. As part of this, schools can foster trusting relationships and open lines of communication among teachers/school staff and students, which can help students feel more comfortable sharing potential concerns or instances of bullying. School personnel can also consider implementing anonymous and confidential reporting options to enable students to submit reports of bullying without revealing their identity.

Involve School Staff and Incorporate Classroom-Based Activities

A schoolwide-based approach that engages all staff members can help create an environment where bullying is not acceptable. As part of these efforts, school leaders can provide training and professional development for teachers and staff on effective bullying prevention techniques and strategies, as well as ensure community members are educated on school policies and equipped with tools to respond to bullying consistently and appropriately.

Classroom teachers play a critical role in intervening in bullying behavior, and their attention to a positive classroom climate can be a significant mitigating factor to bullying patterns. Classroom meetings with open-ended questions can provide children with an opportunity to discuss issues in a structured environment as well as help them build relationships and learn critical problem-solving skills. Planning activities that encourage self-reflection can also help students build empathy and emotional regulation skills.

Establish and Enforce Rules

Establishing and communicating clear expectations for how students should treat each other – and the consequences for when those expectations are not met – can help prevent and reduce bullying in school settings. School staff can respond more effectively to incidents of bullying when they can point to established behavior guidelines. Examples of school policies that outline student behavioral expectations can include a code of conduct, a student bill of rights, or other such documented guidance that can be accessed by the entire school community.

Actively monitoring areas where bullying is more likely to occur, such as bathrooms, playgrounds, and cafeterias, can also help staff prevent bullying or enforce rules on the spot. To respond to bullying in a manner that is both constructive and respectful, staff can give one-on-one feedback, help students correct their behavior, and use language that is direct, specific, and simple.

Implement Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes through which children acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Students participating in SEL programs have shown improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school – all factors that can reduce instances of conflict and bullying.

Implementation of school-wide SEL frameworks and teacher-led integration of SEL in classrooms are a few ways to include SEL into schools. K-12 leaders can also incorporate trainings to ensure educators are equipped with evidence-based and culturally competent tools and resources to use in lesson plans or classroom activities.

Engage Parents and Youth

Families and students are critical partners in preventing bullying because they can contribute to a positive school climate and reinforce anti-bullying rules and expectations. To support bullying prevention activities that take place at school, parents and guardians should watch for key indicators or warning signs of bullying, actively talk about bullying with their children, and communicate with school staff if their student is involved in bullying. Modeling positive behaviors at home can also help children understand what respect and inclusivity looks like.

School activities and engagements such as school safety committees or volunteer opportunities can serve as more formalized mechanisms for engaging parents, caregivers, and students in building school connectedness and implementing bullying prevention actions. Youth can prevent bullying by talking openly with their parents, engaging in activities they feel passionate about to build friendships and confidence, and becoming an upstander if they observe bullying taking place on school grounds or in digital spaces.

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Resources

SchoolSafety.gov features resources schools and districts can use to adopt bullying and cyberbullying prevention strategies and programs. These include:

Guides, Reports, and Toolkits

- **Bullying Surveillance Among Youths: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements, Version 1**: This report can help educators and other officials define and gather systematic data on bullying to better inform research and prevention efforts. It is intended to improve the consistency and comparability of data collected on bullying.

- **Community Violence Prevention Resource for Action**: This resource provides information that communities can use to begin new efforts or expand existing efforts to reduce violence and associated risk factors. The approaches in this resource, particularly universal school-based programs that strengthen youths' skills and modify the physical and social environment, can help schools reduce bullying or key risk factors.

- **Key Considerations for Bullying Prevention**: This guide presents key information that schools can consider as they develop and maintain bullying prevention programs. It provides an overview of bullying, bullying prevention, context-specific considerations, information on youth engagement and empowerment, and resources related to the intersection of social media and bullying.

- **Preventing and Responding to Bias and Hate Incidents in K-12 Educational Settings: A Toolkit for School and Community Leaders**: This toolkit provides school and community leaders with information and strategies to create safe and inclusive learning environments free of harassment and discrimination. It includes best practices to facilitate difficult conversations and equip schools to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to bias and hate incidents.

- **Social Emotional Learning at a Glance**: This resource provides an overview of social emotional learning and outlines facts, common misunderstandings, and benefits of the approach.

Articles, Trainings, and Websites

- **About Bullying**: This website provides information on what bullying is, facts and statistics related to bullying, and prevention strategies and resources.

- **Bullying in Children: Impact on Child Health**: This article describes bullying in childhood as a global public health problem that impacts child, adolescent, and adult health. It outlines the context in which bullying occurs, the types of bullying, consequences of bullying, and the gaps in evidenced-based prevention strategies.

- **Bullying Resource Center**: This website provides facts, video clips, answers to frequently asked questions, book recommendations, and a variety of resources to help families understand, prevent, and respond to bullying.

- **Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**: This center supports schools, districts, and states to build systems capacity for implementing a multi-tiered approach to social, emotional, and behavior support.

- **Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in Our Nation's Classrooms**: This training is designed to support classroom teachers, other educators, and support personnel to reduce instances of bullying behavior and to build a supportive classroom climate in which bullying is less likely to occur.

- **StopBullying.gov**: This interagency website provides information on what bullying is, what cyberbullying is, who is at risk, and how schools and individuals can prevent and respond to bullying.

> **Learn more and find additional resources on SchoolSafety.gov's bullying and cyberbullying page.**

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