

# What is Bullying?

## What Bullying IS...

### Bullying is aggressive behavior:

1. It involves an imbalance of power (real or perceived)
2. It is intentional and purposeful
3. It is repeated over time or has the potential to be repeated
4. It causes physical hurt or psychological stress

### Physical bullying:

Hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, making mean or rude gestures, taking or destroying someone's belongings...

### Verbal bullying:

Teasing, name-calling, making inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, threatening to harm...

### Social bullying:

Leaving someone out on purpose, telling others not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors, embarrassing someone...

Those who bully others do not need to be stronger or bigger than those they bully. The power imbalance can be one of popularity, strength, or even intellect. Bullying creates a hostile environment and frequently interferes with the victim's participation in school.

Bullying can be one person repeatedly acting aggressively toward another, or, it can be many people acting aggressively *only once* toward one individual.

## What Bullying is NOT...

- ◆ Bullying is not a mutual conflict between two individuals; bullying must involve an imbalance of power.
- ◆ Bullying is not just physical. The most common form of bullying for both boys and girls is verbal bullying (name calling) and social bullying (excluding someone)
- ◆ Children who have social power and like to dominate are not the only ones likely to exhibit bullying behavior. Children who are socially isolated or have low self-esteem may also bully others

Adults play a critical role in helping children deal with bullying—children should not be expected to deal with this on their own..



# What is Harassment?

Although bullying and harassment sometimes overlap, there *is* a difference. Harassment can affect the whole climate of a classroom, playground, bus, or school.

Harassment (as defined in Florida's anti-bullying law) is any threatening or insulting conduct or any dehumanizing gesture that has the following effect:

- Instills reasonable fear of harm to a person or damage to their property
- Interferes with a student's education
- Disrupts the orderly operation of a school

Harassment (as defined by federal civil rights law) is any unwelcome conduct based on a protected class such as race, national origin, color, sex (including sexual orientation), age, disability, and religion, that results in creating a hostile environment.

For more information on the Florida's anti-bullying/anti harassment law or the federal anti-discrimination law, please go to: <http://www.fldoe.org/safeschools/bullying.asp>

# Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is using electronic technology to send mean messages, spread rumors, or share embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles. Cell phones, computers, social media sites, text messaging, chatting, websites, and blogs can all be conduits for cyberbullying.

Some facts about cyberbullying:

- Children who are being cyberbullied are often bullied in person as well.
- Children who are cyberbullied have a harder time getting away from the behavior. Most youth are embedded in an online culture that is inseparable and indistinct from their offline world.
- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a child even when he or she is alone.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting messages, texts, and pictures are extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

To learn more about cyberbullying, go to: <http://www.fldoe.org/safeschools/bullying.asp>



# How can I tell if my child is being bullied?

Look for changes in your child. Keep in mind that warning signs can point to other issues such as depression or substance abuse, and, not all children exhibit warning signs.

Warning signs:

- ◆ Unexplainable injuries
- ◆ Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, jewelry
- ◆ Frequent headaches, stomach aches, faking illness
- ◆ Changes in eating (skipping meals, binge eating, coming home hungry because they didn't eat lunch)
- ◆ Difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, not wanting to go to school
- ◆ Sudden loss of friends, avoiding social situations
- ◆ Feelings of helplessness, decreased self-esteem
- ◆ Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

If you suspect your child is the victim of bullying, talk to your child to try to identify the problem. Sixty-six percent of children do not let an adult know they are being bullied.

## Is my child at risk?

No single factor puts a child at risk of being bullied or being a bully. However, some groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) youth, youth with disabilities, and socially isolated youth may be more at risk of being bullied.

Generally, children who are bullied have one or more of the following risk factors:

- ◆ Are perceived as different from their peers: overweight, underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing, being new to school, or don't own "cool" items
- ◆ Are perceived as weak
- ◆ Are depressed, anxious, or have low self-esteem
- ◆ Have few friends
- ◆ Don't get along well with others, are seen as annoying or provoking

Generally, children who bully fall into two categories:

- Those who are well-connected to their peers, have social power, and like to dominate others
- Those who are more isolated from their peers, appear depressed or anxious, have low self-esteem, and are less involved in school

Children who have the following characteristics are also more likely to bully others:

- ◇ Are aggressive or easily frustrated
- ◇ Have less parental involvement or have problems at home
- ◇ Think badly of others
- ◇ Have difficulty following rules
- ◇ View violence in a positive way
- ◇ Have friends who bully

# What can I do if my child is being bullied?

## **Step 1**

- \* First, focus on your child. Be supportive and gather information about the bullying.
- \* Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. Ignoring bullying may make the situation worse.
- \* Don't blame your child, and don't assume that your child did something to provoke the bullying. Don't ask, "What did you do to aggravate the other child?"
- \* Listen carefully. Ask your child for details: who, what, when, where, and how. Who all witnessed it?
- \* Empathize with your child. Tell your child that bullying is wrong, not his fault, and that you are glad he had the courage to tell you about it.
- \* Ask your child what she thinks can be done to help.
- \* Assure him that you will think about what needs to be done and you will let him know what you are going to do.
- \* If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, don't criticize her.
- \* Don't encourage retaliation ("Just hit them back") as a solution.

To learn about the role which parents can play to address bullying, go to the following website:

<http://www.fldoe.org/safeschools/bullying.asp>

## **Step 2**

- ◆ Request an official investigation from the school. Schools are legally required to conduct these investigations when bullying is reported.
- ◆ Help develop your child's talents or interests such as music, athletics, or art.
- ◆ Encourage your child to make contact with friendly students. Consult the teacher to help identify individuals.
- ◆ Help your child meet new friends outside of school.
- ◆ Teach your child to seek help from an adult. Identify a few supportive adults at school. Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.
- ◆ Ask yourself why someone may have chosen your child to bully. Does he or she have a learning difficulty or a lack of social skills? Is he or she hyperactive, impulsive, or overly talkative? Does he or she exhibit annoying or irritating conduct? These factors do not excuse bullying, but identifying the trigger may help in addressing the situation.
- ◆ Provide a safe and loving home environment where your child can take shelter.
- ◆ Always maintain open lines of communication.