

Bullying Definitions and Categories

What is Bullying?

Bullying, as defined by Indiana statute IC 20-33-8-.2, means overt, unwanted, repeated acts or gestures, including verbal or written communications or images transmitted in any manner (including digitally or electronically), physical acts committed, aggression, or any other behaviors, that are committed by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the other targeted student and create for the targeted student an objectively hostile school environment that:

- (1) places the targeted student in reasonable fear of harm to the targeted student's person or property;
- (2) has a substantially detrimental effect on the targeted student's physical or mental health;
- (3) has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's academic performance;
- or
- (4) has the effect of substantially interfering with the targeted student's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, and privileges provided by the school.

Bullying fosters a climate of fear and disrespect that can seriously impair the physical and psychological health of its victims and create conditions that negatively affect learning. Bullying includes unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. The imbalance of power involves the use of physical strength, or popularity to access embarrassing information to control or harm others. Bullying can occur anywhere (in-school or outside of school) and at any time – both during and after school hours. Bullying can include physical bullying, verbal bullying, social/relational bullying, and electronic/written communication.

Categories of Bullying per Reporting Requirements:

As the below categories are used when reporting incidents of bullying to IDOE, it may be helpful for schools to better understand these categories when identifying bullying behaviors.

- (1) **Physical:** involves hurting a person's body or possessions. It includes hitting/kicking/punching, spitting, tripping or pushing, taking or breaking someone's things, and making mean or rude hand gestures.
- (2) **Verbal:** involves saying mean things. It can include teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, or threatening to cause harm.
- (3) **Social/Relational:** involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying involves telling other children not to be friends with someone, leaving someone out on purpose, spreading rumors about someone, or embarrassing someone in public.
- (4) **Electronic/Written Communication:** involves cyber-bullying, collective or group note writing, any bullying undertaken through the use of electronic devices (computer, cell phones).

Considerations for Meeting the Definition

There are several things to consider when determining if a student's behavior meets the definition of bullying.

- (1) **History:** The history between the individuals. Have there been past conflicts? Have these individuals had a dating relationship? (This may not be considered bullying)
- (2) **Power differential:** Is there an imbalance of power? (Power imbalance is not limited to physical strength.)
- (3) **Repetition:** Has this or a similar incident happened before? Is the individual worried that it may happen again?
- (4) **Gang Affiliation:** Are any of the individuals involved with a gang? (This may result in interventions different from bullying.)

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying, as defined by Indiana Statute IC 20-19-3-11.5, refers to bullying (IC 20-33-8-.2) that occurs through the use of data or computer software accessed through a:

- (1) computer;
- (2) computer system;
- (3) computer network; or
- (4) cellular telephone or other wireless or cellular communications device.