

Addressing Bullying Information for Teachers about Bullying

Being bullied is a frightening experience. It is a serious problem. All children and their peers have a right to an education in a caring, respectful, and safe learning environment free from bullying in any form. Everyone, including students, school staff, parents, and community members must work together to reduce bullying and the damage bullying does.

What is Bullying?

Bullying can be physical (e.g., hitting, pushing, tripping), verbal (e.g., name calling, insults, put-downs), social (e.g., social isolation, rumours), or cyber (e.g., threats or insults spread through the Internet). Bullying can be direct (such as face-to-face) or indirect (such as spreading rumours). A person being bullied often feels helpless in trying to stop it. It is important to remember that bullying is repeated, hurtful behaviour by a stronger or more powerful person or group and creates distress, fear, and lowered self-worth.

Signs to Watch For

There are no clear-cut ways to determine if a student is being bullied. Bullying is difficult to prove as it often happens out of the earshot of adults. Symptoms such as illness, avoidance of school, unexplained injuries, and damaged or missing belongings may have simple explanations, or may be the result of being bullied. It is important that students get the help and support they need, whether they are being bullied or are bullying others.

If a student is being bullied, s/he may go to great lengths to hide it. S/he may feel ashamed, may not want to "tattle", or may not want to appear weak. Students may believe that telling will make things worse or that adults may be unable or unwilling to do anything to help.

Teachers can be alert to signs that students are being bullied. Teachers should watch for:

- unexplained physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomach aches)
- reluctance to talk about physical injuries
- fear or reluctance to come to school or take the bus
- crying before or after recess
- sudden problems with school work (e.g., drop in marks)
- torn clothes, or damaged or missing property
- lack of or loss of friends
- sudden change in behaviour
- stealing money
- reluctant to do group work
- playing alone
- clinging to teachers/staff members
- chosen last for games/activities.

What Can Teachers and Other Staff Members Do?

- Involve students in developing a classroom code of conduct outlining a set of positive expectations for classroom and school behaviour.
- Get involved in developing a school-wide policy to prevent bullying.
- Create an inclusive, caring, and respectful classroom and school climate in which bullying is not tolerated and where students feel safe.
- Focus on the Common Essential Learning of Personal and Social Development (PSD) and incorporate PSD learning objectives into all classroom practices.
- Teach personal and social skills in areas of making friends, assertiveness, problem solving, conflict resolution, and peer mediation (i.e., health education curricula and PSD).
- Educate students about bullying and the impact of bullying on others.
- Teach, talk about, and name bullying behaviours.
- Model, teach, and support positive, caring, and respectful behaviour.
- Actively discourage bullying by being observant and responding immediately when bullying occurs.
- Teach bystanders the skills to support the person who is bullied and to discourage bullying.
- Encourage students to report instances of bullying.
- Listen to a student's report of bullying, show you care, and convey the message that s/he has a right not to be bullied.
- Talk to individual students who bully about his/her behaviour and support him/her in developing a plan for more appropriate non-aggressive behaviour.
- Talk with parents/caregivers of both the child being bullied and the child who is doing the bullying to resolve the incident.
- Monitor action plans and follow up with students and parents/caregivers.
- Offer support and suggest information about access to specialized support and counselling help if needed.

Responding to Bullying Situations

The school division policy to prevent bullying provides direction for individual schools to develop a school specific response to the problem of bullying, including implementing school-wide measures to prevent bullying. In addition to school-wide and classroom measures to reduce bullying behaviour, the following steps can be taken when intervening in bullying situations:

- Respond immediately; stop bullying as soon as you see it or are told about it.
- Talk to the child who is bullying and the bullied child, individually. If more than one child is involved in bullying another child, talk to each, one by one, as quickly as possible.
- Do not refer incidents of bullying to a peer mediation program. Doing so will more than likely be very intimidating to the child being bullied and cause further distress.
- Talk with administration and other school staff to get further information about the extent of the problem, and to let them know about the problem.

For the Child Who Has Bullied

- Anticipate that the child who is bullying may minimize the problem and/or deny his/her actions and responsibility.
- Talk with the child and let him/her know that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- For children who are bullying others, it is important to provide structured opportunities to learn appropriate social skills in addition to following through with consequences for the bullying behaviour.
- Follow through with consequences that are consistent with the school's discipline and bullying prevention policies.
- Talk to the child who bullied about more appropriate non-aggressive behaviour and support him/her to redirect his/her behaviour.
- Talk to his or her parents/caregivers as soon as possible and involve them in a plan to redirect the bullying behaviour.
- Strengthen classroom instruction about bullying and the impact of bullying on others.
- Maintain regular contact with the parents/caregivers about their son's or daughter's behaviour and encourage them to acknowledge positive change.
- If an educational approach is insufficient to shift the behaviours, talk to the child's parents/caregivers about counselling and support available through the school and/or community agencies.

For the Child Who Has Been Bullied

- Listen to the child, and reassure him/her that everything possible will be done to prevent a recurrence of the bullying.
- Provide support and protection.
- Talk to his/her parents/caregivers, as soon as possible and involve them in developing the plan of action.
- Talk to the child's parents/caregivers about counselling and support through the school and/or with community agencies.
- Follow up with parents/caregivers and with other teachers about the bullying situation, until the bullying has stopped.
- Monitor the situation on a school-wide basis to ensure the safety of the child who has been bullied.

For the Bystanders

- Provide specific instruction in conflict resolution and peer mediation (e.g., grade 3 health education, grade 7 health education).
- Strengthen classroom instruction about bullying and its impact on others (see Addressing Bullying in the Context of English Language Arts, Health Education, Social Studies, and Personal and Social Development).
- Highlight in classroom instruction how the role of spectator encourages the bullying.
- Review appropriate responses and what students' responsibilities are when they witness bullying.
- Support and encourage students to report bullying situations.