



What Can School Personnel Do about Bullying at School?

Ohio's response to a national problem

In this country, 50 percent of students are bullied at some time during the school year and 10 percent of students are bullied on a regular basis. Bullying has negative and often long-term consequences. It also can deter schools' efforts to create safe and supportive learning environments for students and staff.

Ohio law requires that by Dec. 30, 2007, all public school districts adopt policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying. The law outlines a specific definition for these negative behaviors and requires that districts adopt procedures for documenting, investigating and reporting complaints.

It is important for school staff members to learn how their district is establishing or updating its policy and how it defines their role in addressing prohibited behaviors. To assist school districts in developing policies, the State Board of Education adopted a Model Anti-Harassment, Anti-Intimidation and Anti-Bullying Policy in July 2007. In addition to procedures for handling complaints about perpetrators (including anonymous complaints), the model policy suggests specific interventions and disciplinary actions.

This fact sheet presents:

- The legal definition of harassment, intimidation and bullying;
- School district responsibilities required to be included in local policies;
- General guidelines for teachers; and
- Links to useful resources that address bullying.

Definition: bullying, harassment or intimidation

Any intentional written, verbal, graphic or physical act that a student or group of students exhibited toward another particular student more than once and the 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.

For brevity, the term "bullying" is used throughout this fact sheet to convey all instances of harassment, intimidation and bullying as defined by Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3313.666 (B)(3). This definition also appears in the State Board of Education's Anti-Harassment, Anti-Intimidation or Anti-Bullying Model Policy, section 3.1.

The model policy adds a definition of *cyber bullying* as repetitive, hostile behavior with the intent to harm others through the use of information and communication technologies such as Web sites, instant messages, camera phones or Ipods.

Responsibilities of parents or school staff members

If they observe bullying or are told about such incidents by others, staff and parents are to report and document prohibited incidents they witness—or receive reports about—to the school principal or other designated administrator in a timely manner. (Also see anonymous complaints.)

Responsibilities of administrators

By law, building principals (or their designees) are to respond to and investigate any incident of bullying that is reported (either verbally or in writing), document the incident in writing and notify parents or guardians of any students involved in such occurrences. Their responsibilities also involve using intervention strategies for

protecting victims from additional harassment or retaliation and employing interventions or disciplinary procedures for any guilty students.

Can complaints be made anonymously?

When students making complaints request anonymity, administrators' capacity for investigating and taking disciplinary action may be limited. Such an investigation may be restricted to a simple review of the complaint (with or without discussion with the alleged perpetrator), subject to the receipt of further information or the withdrawal of the request for anonymity.

How are school districts to monitor instances of bullying in their schools?

School districts are required to submit semiannual written summaries of all reported incidents to the district board president and post the summary on the district's Web site. The district is to collect and monitor data. When bullying occurs, training and intervention activities should be scheduled as funds allow.

Strategies for school personnel

Both seasoned and new educators can develop and apply a repertoire of strategies that will help prevent, deter and respond to bullying and promote their school's academic mission. These strategies include:

- Modeling behavior that is inclusive and promotes **respect for all students**;
- Providing students with opportunities to talk about bullying and enlist their support in **defining bullying as an unacceptable behavior**;
- **Helping students know what to do** if they observe or are confronted by a bully;
- Posting and publicizing rules against bullying, including **fair and consistent consequences**;
- **Referring both the bully and his/her target** to the principal or building designee;
- **Establishing and explaining written student behavior codes** to students, parents and the community and having students and parents sign **behavior contracts** consistent with these codes;
- **Constantly monitoring** cafeterias, playgrounds and other "hot spots" where bullying is likely to occur and where direct adult supervision may not be present;
- **Taking immediate action** when bullying is observed so that both the target and the bully know that mistreating someone is not tolerated;
- **Creating cooperative learning activities** that encourage interaction among students from different groups and ensure equal treatment of all participants;
- Implementing a **buddy system** that pairs students with friends, student mentors and other supportive students, particularly if they are new to the school; and
- Forming friendship groups that **support children** who are regularly bullied by peers.

Additional Resources

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) offers information online including the model policy, a Power Point presentation, fact sheets and Web links. ODE also provides free presentations on the model policy and workshops for parents titled the Parent Academy: Conditions for Learning, which addresses bullying. **The Ohio Resource Network (ORN)**, which is among the ODE Web links, provides resources on behalf of ODE for educators, families and communities. 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 searches: *bullying prevention*, *ORN* and *parent academy*.

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/>