


Bullying

We Can All Help Stop It



A Guide for Parents
of Elementary and Secondary School Students

Spring 2013



The effects of bullying go beyond the school yard. As a parent or guardian, here's what to watch for, what you can do, and where you can go to get help.

What is bullying?

Bullying is aggressive behaviour that is typically repeated over time. It is meant to cause harm, fear or distress or create a negative environment at school for another person. Bullying occurs in a situation where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.

The full definition is in the Education Act at www.e-laws.gov.on.ca



Types of Bullying

Is it bullying if my child hasn't been physically hurt?

Bullying can take many forms. It can be:

- **physical** – hitting, shoving, damaging or stealing property
- **verbal** – name calling, mocking, or making sexist, racist or homophobic comments
- **social** – excluding others from a group or spreading gossip or rumours about them
- **written** – writing notes or signs that are hurtful or insulting
- **electronic** (commonly known as cyber-bullying) – spreading rumours and hurtful comments through the use of e-mail, cell phones (e.g., text messaging) and on social media sites.

What is electronic bullying or cyber-bullying?

It is electronic communication that:

- is used to upset, threaten or embarrass another person.
- uses email, cell phones, text messages and social media sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude or damage reputations and friendships.
- includes put downs, insults and can also involve spreading rumours, sharing private information, photos or videos or threatening to harm someone.
- is always aggressive and hurtful.

In Ontario schools, principals are required to address cyber-bullying if it has an impact on the school climate. For example, if the student is being bullied and is embarrassed as a result of an email message that was sent about him or her to other students in the school, he or she may not want to attend school.

Regardless of its form, bullying is unacceptable.

Bullying takes place when there is an imbalance of power between people. An “imbalance” could mean one student is older, of a different race or has more friends than another.

Pepler, D., Craig, W., Connolly, J., Yuile, A., McMaster, L., & Jiang, D. (2006). A developmental perspective on bullying. *Aggressive Behavior*, 32, p. 376.

Is conflict the same as bullying?

People may sometimes confuse conflict with bullying, but they are different.

Conflict occurs between two or more people who have a disagreement, a difference of opinion or different views. Conflict between students does not always mean it's bullying. Children learn at a young age to understand that others can have a different perspective than their own, but developing the ability to gain perspective takes time and the process continues into early adulthood (*Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development*, page 26).

In conflict, each person feels comfortable expressing his or her views, and there is no power imbalance. Each person feels able to state his or her view point. How people deal with conflict can make it positive or negative.

Conflict becomes negative when an individual behaves aggressively by saying or doing hurtful things. Then the conflict is an aggressive interaction. Conflict only becomes bullying when it is repeated over and over again and there is a power imbalance. Over time, a pattern of behaviour may emerge where the person who behaves aggressively in the conflict may continue or even make it worse. The person who is the recipient of the aggressive conflict may feel less and less able to express his or her point of view and feel more and more powerless. That is when negative conflict may turn into bullying.

A school will respond to bullying and conflict differently. For example, in the case of a conflict, a school staff member may try to have the students come together to tell their side of the story and help them resolve the situation together.

In the case of bullying, a principal will consider progressive discipline, which may include suspension or expulsion.

How serious a problem is bullying?

Bullying is never acceptable. It should not be considered just “part of growing up”. Research and experience consistently show that bullying is a serious issue, with far-reaching consequences for the students involved, their families and peers, and the community around them.

Those children who are victimized, bully other children, or both, are at risk for many emotional, behavioural, and relationship problems. They will require support from adults to help them develop healthy relationships, not only in school but throughout their lives.

Nearly one in three Ontario students (29 percent) report being bullied at school, according to a 2011 study from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH).

Students who are bullied often experience social anxiety, loneliness, withdrawal, physical illnesses and low self-esteem. They can also develop phobias, take on aggressive behaviour or slide into depression. Some students miss school, see their marks drop or even leave school altogether because they have been bullied.

Children and teens who learn to use power and aggression to distress others may stop caring about the difference between right and wrong in general. Eventually, they may become abusive adults. Therefore, it is important to help them to stop bullying as early as possible

Do boys and girls bully in the same way?

Both boys and girls can engage in bullying. Boys are more likely to bully physically, while girls generally use more indirect approaches, such as gossiping about classmates or isolating them by excluding them from activities or groups. With age, however, both boys and girls are more likely to bully in verbal and social ways.


How can I tell if my child or teenager is being bullied?

A young child may not know the word “bully”; but she knows when someone is being mean, hurting her, or making her feel sad or scared. She may not tell you because she may be worried she’ll make things worse if she “tells”, “tattles” or “rats”.

Tattling vs. Telling	
Tattling	Telling
Tattling is telling on someone to get that person in trouble.	Telling is getting help when you or someone you know is being hurt, or when your right or that person’s right to be safe is being taken away.

(Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) and Le Centre Ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA), *Creating Safe Schools*, January 2012, pg. 56)

Your teenager won’t necessarily tell you there’s a problem either and may use a term such as “harassment” rather than “bullying” to describe the behaviour. Teenagers often prefer to handle things on their own. They might think you’ll get upset, that you will take away their technology, such as their cell phones, or they might just find it embarrassing to have a parent involved.



Even if she doesn't talk about it, you can watch for signs that your child is being bullied. Here are some signs to watch for:

- Children who are being bullied may not want to go to school or may cry or feel sick on school days.
- They may not want to take part in activities or social events with other students.
- They may act differently than they normally do.
- They might suddenly begin to lose money or personal items, or come home with torn clothes or broken possessions, and offer explanations that don't make sense.
- Teens who are bullied and/or harassed may also start talking about dropping out of school and begin skipping activities that involve other students.

My child is being bullied. What should I do?

- Listen to your child and assure him that he has a right to be safe.
- Be clear on the facts. Make notes about what happened and when it happened.
- Help your child see that there is a difference between "ratting," "tattling" or "telling" and reporting. It takes courage to report. Reporting is done not to cause trouble for another student, but to protect all students.
- Make an appointment to talk to your child/teenager's teacher, another teacher that your child/teenager trusts or the principal or vice-principal of the school.
- Difficult as it may be, try to remain calm so that you can support your child and plan a course of action with him or her.
- Stay on course. Keep an eye on your child's behaviour. If your meetings with school staff haven't made the bullying stop, go back and talk to the principal. Follow up on the steps that were agreed to at the meeting.
- Speak to the instructor or coach if the bullying is taking place during after-school activities or sports events.
- Contact police if the bullying involves criminal behaviour, such as sexual assault or use of a weapon, or if the threat to your child's safety is in the community rather than the school.

Empathy is the capacity to recognize and share emotions that another person is experiencing. It develops late in adolescence and does not usually become fully developed until early adulthood. In childhood, a basic form of empathy emerges when children start to feel upset when they see other people are upset.

Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development, page 25

How can I help my child deal with bullying?

By working with the school to help your child or teen handle the bullying problem, you are leading by example and giving a clear message that bullying is wrong.

Regardless of age, you can help by encouraging your child to talk to you about bullying and by giving the following advice:

- Stay calm and **walk away** from the situation.
- **Tell an adult** whom you trust – a teacher, the principal, the school bus driver or the lunchroom supervisor – about what happened or report it anonymously.
- **Talk about it** with your brothers or sisters, or with friends, so that you don't feel you're alone.
- **Call Kids Help Phone** at 1-800-668-6868 or visit www.kidshelpphone.ca

Is it possible that my child is bullying others?

Children who bully sometimes do so at home as well as at school. Look and listen within your own household. Are there signs that one of your children is bullying a sibling?

Children who bully may sometimes be aggressive and disruptive at home and may not show respect for household rules. If you are concerned that your child may be bullying others, watch how they interact with siblings, with you, and with friends when they come over to your home. If they seem to be aggressive, not getting along or don't show empathy - these could also be signs that they are bullying others at school.

Children who physically bully other students may also come home with bruises, scrapes, and torn clothing. They may suddenly have more money to spend than usual or new possessions that they would normally not be able to afford. They may also "talk tough" about other students.

Bullying behaviour can develop over a long period of time or as a result of major changes, losses or upsets in a child's or teen's life. Have any of your children recently had this kind of experience?

Think about how problems and conflicts are dealt with in your home. Do you talk through issues positively as a family? An important way to discourage bullying is to be a good role model and show your child how to sort out difficulties without using power or aggression.

It is also important to tell your children what bullying is. You should describe the different types of bullying and explain it is hurtful and harmful. Let your child know that bullying is wrong and is not acceptable behaviour under any circumstances.

How do schools deal with bullying and other incidents?

Students who bully others, whether it happens in person or online, can face different consequences.

When addressing bullying, principals use a progressive discipline approach. Ontario's progressive discipline policy allows a principal to choose from a range of options to address the behaviour and help the student learn from his or her choices. Some examples include:

- an apology for a hurtful or disrespectful comment
- a review of the expectations for the student
- a meeting with parents/guardians
- anger management counselling
- having the student suspended from school.

In more serious cases, the principal may recommend that the student be expelled from school if the student was previously suspended for bullying and continues to present an unacceptable risk to the safety of another person. These rules apply to both elementary and secondary students.

Progressive discipline helps to prevent inappropriate behaviour from getting worse and having a negative impact on all students and their perceptions of safety and the school. It also promotes positive student behaviour and helps the student take responsibility for his or her behaviour and learn more positive ways of interacting with others.

Schools will provide support to all students who are involved in bullying: students who have been bullied, students who engaged in bullying behaviour, and those who witness this behaviour.

All schools and boards are required to have:

- policies to prevent and address bullying
- bullying prevention and intervention plans
- policies for progressive discipline and equity and inclusive education.

All board employees are required to report serious student incidents, such as bullying, to the principal. Principals are required to investigate all reported incidents of bullying.

Board employees who work directly with students, such as teachers, social workers and guidance counsellors, must respond to all inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour that has a negative impact on the school climate, including bullying.



School boards are required to provide programs, interventions or other supports for students who have been bullied, who have witnessed bullying and who have engaged in bullying.

For more information on how staff deal with incidents at school, see the “Reporting and Responding” section on the ministry website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/reportingResponding.html or talk to your school’s principal if you would like to learn more about the services available through the school.

Principals must contact the parents/guardians of students who have been bullied, as well as students who have engaged in bullying, and tell them:

- what happened
- what harm was done to the student
- what steps were taken to protect the student’s safety, including any disciplinary measures taken in response to the incident
- what supports will be provided for the student in response to the incident.

In addition:

- principals must invite parents to have a discussion about the supports provided to their child.


If my child is being bullied, what can I expect from the school?

The school must have a procedure that allows you, students and other people to anonymously report incidents of bullying.

If you are concerned about your child or simply want more information, ask to see your:

- School board’s bullying prevention and intervention policy.
- School’s code of conduct, which sets out how students, teachers, and other members of the school community should behave towards one another.
- School and board’s bullying prevention and intervention plan. This document outlines what school staff can do to solve the problem.
- School’s results from the School Climate Survey. This anonymous survey helps schools assess feelings about safety and make decisions about how to prevent bullying and promote safe and accepting schools. Surveys must be done at least every two years.

If staff becomes aware that your child is being bullied, you can expect the school to contact you. You may find that your child’s teacher or another teacher your child trusts may be able to help identify some strategies that will help resolve the problem.



Schools are expected to make every effort to fully investigate your concerns, while protecting students' privacy.

Schools will assist all students who are involved in bullying, including those who engage in bullying, those who are bullied and those who witness bullying.

The school will have a process you can follow if you are concerned about the support provided to your child. If you are not satisfied with the school's response, you may contact the supervisory officer of your school board.

In addition, you may consider joining the Safe and Accepting Schools Team at your school. The team is responsible for fostering a safe, inclusive and accepting school climate. It includes the principal, at least one parent, school staff, a student and a community partner.

Well, at least my child isn't involved in bullying ...

Everyone suffers when bullying occurs, and everyone can help to prevent it. In 85 percent of cases, bullying takes place in front of witnesses. These witnesses are affected by what they see. Even though the witnesses may be afraid and may not want to get involved because they're afraid of becoming a target themselves or making things worse for the person being bullied, they can report bullying anonymously.

You can help your child understand that bullying is not acceptable and that he can help stop it by reporting it to an adult or reporting it anonymously.

Nurturing healthy relationships can help stop bullying

Bullying prevention and intervention is about more than just eliminating bullying.

It also promotes the development of healthy relationships. Healthy relationships involve respectful interactions between people, whether face-to-face or online. The goal is to help ensure that all students have healthy, safe, respectful and caring relationships with everyone in their lives.

Teachers, parents, and other adults support and act as role models for children by showing them how healthy relationships can work. Children's positive relationships with other children depend on positive relationships with adults.

Students who are able to have healthy relationships will be less likely to bully others, will be more likely to support students who are bullied, and will be better able to reach their educational goals. Promoting healthy relationships is a key way to prevent bullying and create a safe and accepting school climate.



How we're helping to make Ontario's schools safe and accepting

A positive school climate and a safe learning and teaching environment are essential if students are to succeed in school.

Learn more about:

- **Safe Schools Strategy.** This comprehensive strategy includes a safe and accepting schools team in every school, school resources, training for teachers and principals, and a partnership with Kids Help Phone. ontario.ca/acceptingschools
- **School climate survey for parents.** This survey is available in 22 languages. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/climate.html
- **Ontario's approach to discipline.** "Progressive discipline" involves the whole school and promotes a positive school climate. It enables the principal to choose the appropriate consequences to address inappropriate student behaviour. It also offers students multiple supports to promote positive behaviour. This policy is explained in detail at www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/145.pdf
- **Code of conduct.** This guide to Ontario's code of conduct outlines the roles and responsibilities for everyone in the school community, including students, parents, school staff and community partners. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/code.html
- **Ontario's Policy on Bullying Prevention and Intervention.** This policy outlines expectations for school boards on developing and implementing their bullying prevention and intervention policy. www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/144.pdf
- **Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.** This outlines how the ministry, school boards and schools are supporting equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.html
- **Premier's Awards for Accepting Schools.** The award recognizes up to 10 safe and accepting schools teams that have done exceptional and innovative work in creating a safe and accepting school environment. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/award.html
- **Kids Help Phone.** This confidential counselling service is available 24/7. Visit www.kidshelpphone.ca or call 1-800-668-6868.

Additional information:

- **Bullying Resources for parents, developed by PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network)** www.prevnet.ca/BullyingResources/ResourcesForParents/tabid/390/Default.aspx
- **Parent Tool Kit Teen Edition: What Parents Can Do To Help Their Teens Succeed.** This toolkit is a collection of tips, suggestions and resources for parents to help them support and encourage their teens in school. www.ontariodirectors.ca/Parent_Engagement/Parent_Engagement.html
- **Safe@School.** This website provides resources about bullying prevention and equity and inclusive education, including training resources for teachers and school staff members. www.safeatschool.ca
- **Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development.** Developed by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, this provides an overview of the developmental stages of youth aged 12 to 25, and the ways in which we can identify and respond to their needs. Available at ontario.ca/steppingstones

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ontario.ca/acceptingschools

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