Bullying

Engaging Families, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program

BULLY-
FREE
ZONE

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Making the case: The high cost of bullying

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center provides a comprehensive overview of bullying research from government and higher education agencies. The studies found that:

- Bullying is most prevalent in middle school—28% of middle schoolers reported being bullied at school in 2019. Overall, 19% of students reported being bullied at school during that year.

- Males are more likely to be physically bullied, while females are more likely to be verbally or socially bullied.

- Children who are bullied are at increased risk for depression and anxiety.

- While bullying has not been shown to be a direct cause of suicide, bullied students are more than twice as likely to have suicidal thoughts or to attempt suicide.

- Children targeted by bullying tend to have lower academic achievement and are more likely to drop out of high school.

- Witnessing bullying can have a negative impact on mental health.

- Witnesses don't intervene for fear of making things worse, being made fun of, or being hurt. In addition, witnesses may not know what to say, who to tell, or how to report the bullying.

- Students who participate in bullying and are bullied themselves are at higher risk for mental health and behavioral issues than students who only bully or are only bullied.

- Cyberbullying has a negative impact on children's self-image, friendships, physical health and schoolwork.

State laws related to bullying

All 50 states have passed anti-bullying laws. New laws are being proposed and old laws are being revised on a regular basis, so it's important for schools to stay up-to-date.

While each state law is different, most require or encourage school officials to:

- **Develop a policy to prohibit bullying.**

- **Implement a bullying prevention program.**

- **Require training for school staff** on bullying and bullying prevention.

- **Report bullying** incidents to authorities.

- **Impose disciplinary action** for students who bully.

Use an integrated approach to combat bullying

Experts recognize bullying as a critical problem, one that has led to a number of school tragedies and countless psychological and physical scars that students carry with them throughout their lives. According to researchers, the only type of effective bullying prevention program is one that involves everyone: school staff, families, students and the larger community.

Families can:

- **Model how to treat others** with kindness and respect.

- **Help children get involved** in school or community activities that match their interests. Activities build self-confidence and help children make friends—two factors that can reduce the risk of bullying or being bullied.

- **Communicate regularly** with their children. Know where they are, what they're doing, and who they're with. Encourage children to talk about school and about peer relationships.

- **Recognize signs** that their children have been bullied or are bullying others. Partner with the school to put an end to the bullying.

Students can:

- **When witnessing bullying,** step in (if it's safe to do so) or get adult help.

- **Report bullying** incidents promptly to a trusted adult.

- **Choose to spend time** with peers who treat each other with kindness and respect.

- **Make other students feel included.** Reach out to those who are sitting alone.

Staff can:

- **Create a positive school climate** that fosters respect for all students and staff.

- **Establish clear anti-bullying policies.**

- **Develop effective systems** that students can use to report bullying, and respond promptly to all reports.

- **Provide training for staff** on identifying and responding to bullying.

- **Consistently enforce consequences** for bullying.

- **Provide adequate adult supervision** in bullying "hot spots," including hallways, stairwells, bathrooms, the cafeteria and the playground.

- **Partner with families** to help prevent and respond to bullying.

Create a bullying prevention leadership team

Social scientists agree that the most effective bullying prevention programs are the ones built from within schools. That makes sense, since all schools are different and have unique challenges. However, not all schools know where to begin. The first step is to form a team to coordinate your efforts—a bullying prevention leadership team. The formation of this team will send the message that bullying is a problem that your school takes seriously.

What is the purpose of the team?

The purpose of a bullying prevention leadership team is to guide, plan, implement and evaluate your school's bullying prevention efforts.

Who are the members?

In order for your leadership team to be effective, it should include members who represent all areas of your school community. Groups of 10 to 12 members usually function best and should be made up of:

- **Administrators**
- **School counselors, nurses and social workers**
- **Families**
- **Students***
- **Teachers** from every grade level
- **Non-teaching staff**—bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria/playground monitors
- **Community members**—law enforcement and those who interact with students, such as after-school care providers, community sport coaches, scouting club leaders, etc.

* While it is important for students to be involved in your bullying prevention efforts, not all schools will want to include a student representative on their bullying prevention leadership team. Those schools should consider forming a student advisory group. (See page 60.)

What are the responsibilities?

Your bullying prevention leadership team should meet regularly and be led by an organized and committed chairperson. Depending on your school, the responsibilities of your team will vary. Evaluate the responsibilities listed on the next page and determine which ones are a good fit for your school.

A bullying prevention leadership team can work with school administrators to:

- **Educate themselves about bullying**—why students bully, why students who are bullied don't tell, why bystanders don't act, etc. (Sections 1 and 2 of this binder can serve as a bullying primer for members of this group.)
- **Create a definition of bullying** that is easy to understand and meets legal requirements. Check your school district policy and state and federal laws.

Survey families about bullying

Do families think bullying is a problem in your school? Survey them to find out. Below is a sample survey. (You'll also find separate surveys to give to students and school staff in this section.) A customizable version of this resource, which you can adapt to your needs, is available in the online portal.

Bullying survey for families

1. During this school year, how often has your child mentioned witnessing bullying?
   a. Never
   b. Sometimes (one or more times a month)
   c. Regularly (one or more times a week)
   d. Every day
   e. I don't know

2. Has your child ever been bullied in school?
   a. Yes   b. No   c. Not that I'm aware of

3. Do you feel that bullying is a problem at our school?
   a. Yes   b. No   c. I don't know

4. Where do you think bullying is most likely to take place? (circle all that apply)
   a. Hallway
   b. Classroom
   c. Locker room
   d. Cafeteria
   e. Bathroom
   f. Outside during recess or free periods
   g. Gymnasium
   h. Route to or from school
   i. Library
   j. Online
   k. Other _____

5. What kind of bullying has your child experienced? (circle all that apply)
   a. Hasn't been bullied
   b. Called names
   c. Threatened
   d. Shoved/pushed or hit
   e. Ignored or excluded
   f. Laughed at
   g. Cyberbullied
   h. Other _____

6. When bullying occurs at the school, do you think students report it to the school?
   a. Never
   b. Sometimes—depending on the situation
   c. Every time
   d. I don't know

7. Whom do you think your child would feel most comfortable talking to about bullying? (circle all that apply)
   a. Teacher
   b. Principal
   c. Assistant Principal
   d. School Counselor
   e. Other _____
   f. No one at school

Create a rubric of consequences for bullying

Schools must be consistent when issuing consequences to students who bully. Developing a rubric of consequences will help you do just that. Staff members can refer to the rubric to ensure they are responding effectively and consistently to incidents of bullying. Review your current discipline plan and consider making it rubric-based. Here's a sample rubric of consequences. A customizable version of this resource, which you can adapt to your needs, is available in the online portal.

(School Name) Consequences for Bullying Rubric

Behavior	First Incident	Second Incident	Third Incident	After Three Incidents
Level One: • Teasing or name-calling* • Spreading rumors* • Intimidating or humiliating others* • Threatening to reveal personal information* • Purposely and willfully excluding/ignoring others • Kicking, pushing or hitting • Stealing or defacing property	Verbal warning, discipline referral, letter to family (must be signed and returned), and student makes amends	Two-day privilege loss, discipline referral, student calls family, letter to family (must be signed and returned), student makes amends, and student completes reflection worksheet	Three-day privilege loss, discipline referral, student calls family, letter to family (must be signed and returned), student makes amends, student completes reflection worksheet, and student meets with school counselor	Meeting with principal, discipline referral, and administration will develop an individual plan and determine consequences
Level Two: • Harassing others based on race, color, national origin, sex or disability* • Threatening violence* • Making obscene sexual comments or gestures*	Two-day privilege loss, discipline referral, student calls family, letter to family (must be signed and returned), student makes amends, and student completes reflection worksheet	Three-day privilege loss, discipline referral, student calls family, letter to family (must be signed and returned), student makes amends, student completes reflection worksheet, and student meets with school counselor	Meeting with principal, discipline referral, and administration will develop an individual plan and determine consequences	Administration will determine consequences
Level Three: • Inflicting severe bodily harm • Threatening with a weapon • Extortion* • Exposing oneself* • Touching others inappropriately	Administration will determine consequences for all Level Three behaviors, which may result in suspension or expulsion. Criminal behavior will be reported to law enforcement.			

Verbal, handwritten or digital, which includes, but is not limited to, text messages, photos, emails and online posts.

Sample

Ask parents and students to sign a contract

Reinforce your school's anti-bullying policy by asking parents and students to sign an anti-bullying contract. Here's a sample contract to send home or post on your school's website. A customizable version of this resource, which you can adapt to your needs, is available in the online portal.

(School Name) Anti-Bullying Contract

Student Name _____

Grade _____

Parent/Guardian Name _____

We have read and discussed the school's anti-bullying policy and understand our responsibilities.

Student's responsibility:
___ I will treat others with respect.
___ I will not bully others.
___ I will report all instances of bullying to an adult.
___ I will support students who are bullied.

Parent/Guardian's responsibility:
___ I will encourage my child to treat others with respect.
___ I will make it clear to my child that bullying is never acceptable.
___ I will report all instances of bullying to the school.

Student Signature _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

Prepare for a parent conference about bullying

Solving a bullying problem usually means involving the parents. Here are tips for speaking with the families of students who bully and students who are targeted.

When meeting with the family of a student who has participated in bullying:

- **Begin by talking about how you are working** to make sure your school a place where every student feels safe. Share information about what the school is doing to address bullying.

- **Point out the positive behaviors you have seen from their child.** Be as specific as you can. If you show that you know their child well, they are more likely to hear you out.

- **Explain the situation.** Don't make light of the student's behavior. Let the family know that bullying is against school rules and that you need their help in ending this behavior.

- **Ask parents what else they can tell you.** Try to keep the focus on cooperation—what you and they can do together to help the child address the issue. Avoid placing blame, and start with the premise that you and the family are on the same side.

- **Suggest finding positive ways to help their child** deal with issues that may be contributing to the bullying behavior. Encourage them to let their child know that they do not approve of bullying.

- **Thank parents for working with you and promise to keep in touch.** Make a written record of your meeting. Follow up with a letter to the family summarizing your conversation and thanking them for their willingness to work with you to resolve the issue.

When meeting with the parents of a child who is targeted by bullying:

- **Schedule the meeting so students won't see parents arrive**—and so the two families involved won't see each other.

- **Thank parents for coming in.** The first words they should hear are, "I am so sorry this happened. I support your child. We will work together to solve this problem." The initial response from you can set the tone for either a peaceful resolution or an adversarial battle.

- **Verify the facts if you can.** What specifically happened? Who is involved? Where did it happen? Listen carefully and respond sensitively. The family will probably be upset, so it's important that you remain calm.

- **Reassure the family** that you will work to resolve the issues. Share the school's anti-bullying policy. Let the family know you plan to take action.

- **Do not discuss the exact action you will take.** The student who bullied also has privacy rights.

- **Thank the family for working with you and promise to keep in touch.** Make a written record of your meeting. Follow up with a written letter to the family summarizing your conversation.

Create a school climate based on good character

As part of your anti-bullying program, work on creating a climate at your school that promotes and recognizes positive character traits.

Promote good character

- **Select character traits to highlight** throughout the year, including kindness and respect. Have students write words connected with each of the character traits on pieces of construction paper. For example, for *compassion*, they might write: *kindness, understanding, caring, helping,* etc. Let students create "character mobiles" to hang in classrooms or in a prominent location in your school.

- **Create a character wall** where students can write messages that reflect good character, such as "Respect differences," "No put-downs allowed," "Listen, cooperate and share," "Be a friend." Post these messages in your school buses, too, so students will be reminded as they travel to and from school each day.

- **Ask each teacher to keep a "Kindness Journal."** Have teachers note acts of kindness they observe throughout the school day. Ask students to report signs of kindness as well. Make it a competition among classes.

- **Have students write essays,** poems or song lyrics about what it means to be respectful or why everyone has a responsibility in building the good character of the school.

- **Place a "Kindness Box"** in a prominent place for students to deposit reports of acts of kindness they observe throughout the day.

Recognize good character

- **Post students' good character messages** in your newsletter and on your website.

- **Draw reports from the "Kindness Box."** Announce and post names of students who performed acts of kindness. Award bookmarks, stickers or wristbands with anti-bullying slogans.

- **Note good character progress** made by students who had exhibited bullying behavior in the past. Acknowledge their success. Send good-news notes to families.

- **Recognize positive actions and thoughtfulness** that teachers have recorded in their class journals. Announce the winning class. Reward them with an ice-cream party.

- **Publish students' essays, poems and lyrics online.** Send them to your district office.

- **Celebrate bully-free progress** at your school with an end-of-year pizza party or teacher-student athletic event.

Presenter's script for the family presentation

This presenter's script provides suggested wording if you wish to personally narrate the *Bullying: Working Together to Combat Bullying in Our School* PowerPoint presentation found in the online portal. You are, of course, free to modify the script to make the words your own, adding or deleting information as you choose. You may make changes in the presentation as well. Please note, however, that under the resource kit license, you may use the modifications only for your own school presentation use.
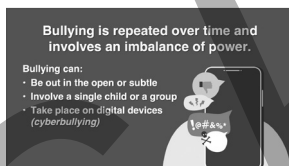
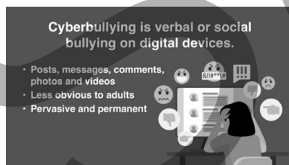**Slide 1**
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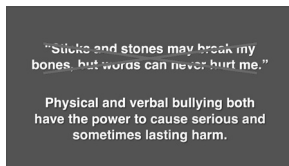
Slide 2
"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Sound familiar? Most adults remember this saying from childhood—**[+]** but it simply isn't true. **[+]** Physical and verbal bullying both have the power to cause serious and sometimes lasting harm. And the ways that students bully each other in today's world are often much more complex than the schoolyard taunts you may remember.

Slide 3
Bullying is defined as a pattern of deliberate, harmful behavior that a more powerful child exhibits toward a less powerful one. It can take many different forms, but there are three main types: Verbal, social and physical.
[+] Verbal bullying is spoken or written. It can include name-calling, teasing, threats, harassment and intimidation.
[+] Social bullying involves using social status to exclude or embarrass others or spread rumors.
[+] Physical bullying harms a person's body or belongings. It may include hitting, shoving, spitting, making inappropriate gestures and taking someone's possessions.

Slide 4
Sometimes bullying takes place right out in the open, and other times it's so subtle that it's hard for adults to see. **[+]** Social bullying, for instance, is often invisible to adults. **[+]** And adults typically don't see cyberbullying, which takes place on digital devices.

Slide 5
Cyberbullying is verbal or social bullying on digital devices including phones, tablets and computers. **[+]** It usually involves sending, posting or sharing harmful content, such as messages, comments, photos or videos. The most commonly cited forms of cyberbullying reported by students are mean or hurtful comments, and rumors spread online. **[+]** This type of bullying carries unique risks because it is less obvious to adults than bullying that takes place in person. In addition, **[+]** it is more pervasive—students may be cyberbullied even in the safety of their own bedrooms. And because digital information is permanent, it can be difficult for children to put bullying incidents behind them.

Presenter's script for educator presentation

This presenter's script provides suggested wording if you wish to personally narrate the *Bullying: Everyone's Problem* PowerPoint presentation found in the online portal. You are, of course, free to modify the script to make the words your own, adding or deleting information as you choose. You may make changes in the presentation as well. Please note, however, that under the resource kit license, you may use the modifications only for your own school presentation use.

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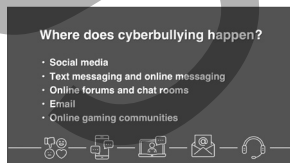(Opening slide, no narration.)

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Cyberbully can happen on any platform students use to communicate with others, including **[+]** social media, **[+]** text messaging and online messaging, **[+]** online forums and chat rooms, **[+]** email, and **[+]** online gaming communities.

Preventing and responding to cyberbullying

Millions of kids in all age groups are online and on cell phones every day—at home, at school, at friends' homes and at the library. As a parent, how can you keep your child safe?

Set guidelines for online safety

- **Set expectations** for your child's online behavior. Make it clear that participating in cyberbullying is never acceptable. For example, your child should never "like" or share harmful messages or posts. If your child is cyberbullied, your child should seek help from you or another adult.

- **Talk about your child's online activities.** Identify what kind of content your child is allowed to view or share and which apps your child can use. Check in frequently about what's happening in your child's digital life. Talk about ways you behave respectfully on your own accounts and devices.

- **Remind your child to keep** passwords private and to change them often.

- **Tell your child** never to share personal information online, such as phone number, address and age.

- **Have your child use the privacy tools** on devices, apps and accounts to control what information is visible to others.

- **Enter your child's name,** address and phone number into a search engine to see if someone has posted something about your child online.

- **Make sure your child knows** and follows the school policy regarding cell phone use.

- **Remind your child** that messages, photos and videos may be forwarded to or viewed by others.

If your child is cyberbullied:

- **Tell your child never** to respond—even to a text message. Responding may encourage the behavior to continue.

- **Keep a record.** Save any messages, and take screenshotss of everything posted online or sent to your child.

- **Alert the school to the problem.**

- **Contact the police** if your child is threatened and you fear for your child's safety.

If your child witnesses cyberbullying:

- **Tell your child to take screenshots** of any evidence of cyberbullying. Your child should share them with an adult—*never* with other students.

- **Encourage your child to stand up** for the person being bullied. Your child can type or say something like, "That's not cool," "That isn't true," or "Come on, this is ruining the game."

- **If the bullying continues,** your child should message the student being bullied privately. Your child can give the student an "out" by offering to start a new chat or game, then encourage the student to report the bullying and offer to assist if necessary.

- **Tell your child to follow up** with the student who was bullied by asking whether they reported the bullying, whether it is continuing, and how they are doing. If the bullying is ongoing and the student won't report it, your child should tell an adult.

Get families to talk to their children

Families who worry that their child is being bullied often don't know what to do. Encourage them to talk with their child to get the facts. By having conversations with their child, their child's teacher and the school, families will be able to uncover any problems and find solutions.

Is my child being bullied?

Q: I'm worried that my child may have been bullied. My child doesn't want to go to school and seems sad and withdrawn. What can I do?

A: If you worry your child is being bullied at school, here are some things you can do:

- **Make talking about school** a regular part of your day. Sit down together and have your child tell you everything that went on. Your child needs to get into the habit of talking about the positive things as well as the negative.

- **Ask questions.** Find out who your child sits with on the bus, eats lunch with and plays with at recess.

- **Ask if your child has ever seen any child** being picked on or bullied.

- **Talk with the teacher.** Explain that your child seems sad and withdrawn. Ask what the teacher has observed in class.

- **Contact the school counselor.** Counselors are trained to work with children who need emotional support.

If it turns out that your child is being bullied, explain that you and the school will work together to resolve the issue—it's not a problem children are expected to resolve on their own.