



For Parents of Teens

Understanding Bullying in Ohio's Schools

Because of the prevalence of bullying in today's schools and the negative consequences of this behavior for students, Ohio law requires that by Dec. 30, 2007, all Ohio public school districts adopt policies prohibiting bullying, harassment and intimidation. The law outlines a specific definition for these negative behaviors and requires that districts adopt procedures for documenting, investigating and reporting complaints. Parents who understand the law and local school policies about bullying are better prepared to play a role in any potential bullying situation involving their children.

This fact sheet features:

- Guidance for parents of bullied students;
- Tips and facts to help prevent and understand bullying; and
- Additional resources on bullying.

What is bullying? Bullying in Ohio schools is defined in Ohio law [Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3313.666(B)(E)] as any intentional written, verbal, graphic or physical act that a student or group of students exhibits toward another particular student more than once, and that 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 law. This definition also appears in the State Board of Education's Anti-Harassment, Anti-Intimidation or Anti-Bullying Model Policy, section 3.1.

The State Board 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.

As children grow older, bullying behavior may become complicated by other factors. Sexual harassment, bias or hate-motivated bullying, and the aggressive and humiliating hazing done as part of tradition or initiation into a club, sports team or other group may come into play.

What should parents do if their child is bullied at school or at school events?

- Be aware of their child's experiences at school;
- Ask to see the school district's official anti-bullying policy and learn about bullying's consequences;
- Report bullying problems to school officials immediately; and
- Call local law enforcement if they believe a child is in danger.

If a child has experienced a confrontation with a bully, parents can build the child's confidence with reassurances that:

- He or she is not at fault; the bully's behavior is the problem;
- Everyone is entitled to respect; he or she does not deserve to be bullied; and
- The parent will work with the child's teacher, principal, school counselor and school staff to ensure that the bully's behavior is addressed and that the victim will be protected.

What are the responsibilities of school administrators when bullying occurs?

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. For more information, see the model policy and school personnel fact sheet on the Ohio Department of Education's Web site listed at the conclusion of this document.

What can parents of teens do to prevent bullying? Even when children reach their teenage years, their parents are still powerful teachers. When parents remain a strong force in their children's lives, they reinforce the values that guide their actions and decisions. Here are specific steps that parents can take to help their children develop positive social skills:

- Observe the ways in which children manage decisions, rules, responsibility and authority.
- Be aware of how children relate to friends and cope with popularity and personal and social power.
- Although teens push for independence, remain active and involved in children's lives and reinforce respectful behavior.
- Keep communication lines open with children, teachers and staff.
- Serve as positive role models by:
 - Refraining from using foul language or "put-downs;"
 - Maintaining friendships with others based on trust and respect; and
 - Acknowledging and accepting diversity, and resolving disputes peacefully.

Facts to know about bullying:

- **Bullying is disrespectful** and can be dangerous, humiliating and life threatening.
- **Bullying of a sexual nature** constitutes sexual harassment.
- **Bullying includes electronically transmitted acts**; "cyber bullying" occurs when a perpetrator conveys his/her message through the Internet or a cell phone, personal digital assistant (PDA) or other wireless hand-held device.
- **Bullying on the basis** of race, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation is a form of bias or hate and should not be dismissed as teasing.
- **Bullying behavior that continues** into adulthood may turn into violent behavior toward strangers, friends and family.
- **A lifetime of consequences** may follow both the target and the bully.

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/>