

How to Talk About Bullying at Your Child's School

Project Prevent and Address Bullying (PPAB)

for Students with Disabilities

For Parents

Northern Illinois University | School Psychology Program

It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that students have a safe learning environment. Illinois (and many other states) have passed anti-bullying laws requiring public schools to have an anti-bullying policy and plan in place. Ask if your child's school has a **written policy on bullying and harassment**.

My child told me that he or she is being bullied. How can I talk to the school?

- Keep a *written* record of the incidents your child has reported to you. Include the names of children involved, when/where the incident occurred, and what exactly happened.
- Keep the focus on keeping your child safe – not punishing the bully.
- Contact your child's classroom teacher to discuss whether he or she has noticed any incidents of bullying and how your child gets along with peers.
- Contact the school mental health team if you are concerned about how your child is coping with the bullying.
- Keep evidence (i.e., screenshots) of any cyberbullying that has occurred.
- Inform the school of how the situation is affecting your child (e.g., does not want to come to school or has frequent headaches or stomachaches).
- Remember that schools are bound by privacy laws – they cannot give you details on how a student who has engaged in bullying has been punished.
- Be open to the possibility that your child was involved in the bullying situation. These situations are very complex and often times many students are involved – sometimes unknowingly.
- Establish and continue clear, fact-based documentation and communication with the school as they work to resolve the situation.
- Provide school staff with positive feedback if you feel they have helped your child in the situation, and provide constructive feedback if you feel things could be handled more effectively.

What should I expect school staff to do about reports of bullying?

- Conduct an investigation based on the concerns.
- Meet with your child to ensure their safety, learn more about the bullying incidents, and develop a plan to keep your child safe in the future.
- Meet with the child(ren) involved in the bullying behaviors to review expectations for behavior, reiterate that bullying behavior is not tolerated, and administer appropriate consequences. (Note: School staff should not have a meeting with both your child and the child who bullied them. This is not an effective way of resolving the bullying behavior.)
- If bullying has occurred through electronic means (i.e., cyberbullying), the report may still be brought to the attention of school staff as there is likely an impact on the student's educational environment. Note if the cyberbullying has taken place by means of school-owned electronics and save all evidence.



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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What if my school is not responding appropriately to reports of bullying?

- If your school does not seem to be responding appropriately, here are some strategies to consider when moving forward:
 - Document all conversations on the subject
 - Note what changes (if any) have taken place
 - Request to speak with higher authority (i.e., principal or superintendent)
 - Remember to stay calm, control your emotions, and use "I" statements

What should all schools have in place regarding bullying?

- In Illinois, all schools are required to have a bullying policy on file with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).
- Learn more about your school's policies to understand what the policies are and what consequences exist for perpetrators of bullying.

What if my child's school does not have policies in place regarding bullying?

- If your child's school does not have an official anti-bullying policy or an active bullying prevention program, work with the school to initiate the development of one.
- Engage in ongoing communication with the school to remain updated on current events in the classroom and throughout the school. This can be done by attending school events and meetings, reading newsletters, and checking the school's website frequently.

Find additional handouts on our website at go.niu.edu/PPAB



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