

# Bullying Prevention Initiative

## A Program of Community Outreach and Education

Dear Parent or Guardian:

On May 3, 2010, Governor Patrick signed into law comprehensive legislation to address bullying in public and non-public schools. Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, *An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools*, requires school leaders to work together with stakeholders to create and implement strategies to prevent bullying, and to address bullying promptly and effectively when it occurs. The bullying prevention and intervention plan at each school or district must include age appropriate instruction on bullying prevention that is incorporated into the curriculum of the school district. Schools will be working closely with you to ensure that you are aware of the policies prohibiting bullying, cyber bullying and retaliation and understand the reporting procedures as well as consequences associated with these behaviors. Please take the time to look at the information we are providing you and have a discussion with your child about what they have learned about bullying and how they can contribute to making school a place where everyone belongs. Parents and guardians play a key role in bullying prevention. I encourage you to call your child's school and get involved in the positive behavior strategies being implemented to ensure each child has a safe and happy experience at school.

Best wishes,



David F. Capeless  
Berkshire District Attorney

### Facts: How Prevalent is Bullying?



- An estimated 160,000 children miss school every day out of fear of attack or intimidation by other students.
- Direct, physical bullying increases in elementary school, peaks in middle school, and declines in high school. Verbal abuse, on the other hand, remains constant.
- In surveys of 3rd—8th graders in 14 Massachusetts schools, nearly half who had been frequently bullied, reported that the bullying had lasted six months or longer (Mullin-Rindler, 2003).
- Peers are present in 85 - 88% of bullying incidents, yet only 10% intervene when it happens in the classroom (Atlas & Pepler, 1998) and 19% on the playground (Craig & Pepler, 1997, 2000).
- 72% of teens report “at least one incident” of bullying online (name calling, insults via IM or social networking sites).
- 90% did NOT report the incident to an adult.
- 50% believed they “just need to learn to deal with it” (UCLA 2008 study).

•Bullying is the most common form of violence. Some 3.7 million youth engage in it, and more than 3.2 million are victims of bullying annually.

### Take 15 for Safety

We are aware that your time is valuable, so our Office has produced topic specific video segments in collaboration with Pittsfield Community Television, called “Take 15”. These fifteen minute videos will educate you on important current topics, such as **Bullying and Cyberbullying, Social Networking Sites,** and others. Check the PCTV website ([www.pittsfieldtv.org](http://www.pittsfieldtv.org)) for scheduling information, or go to our website at [www.mass.gov/berkshireda](http://www.mass.gov/berkshireda) and click on **Take 15** to view.

### What is the Impact of Bullying?

#### For children who are bullied:

Children who are bullied are more likely than their peers to be depressed, lonely, and anxious; have low self-esteem; feel unwell; have more migraine headaches; and think about suicide.

#### For children who bully:

Children who bully others are more likely to be convicted of a crime as adults. Research also shows that bullying can be a sign of other serious anti-social behaviors, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and dropping out of school among others.

#### For children who witness bullying:

Children who witness or participate (bystanders) in repeated bullying may also suffer behavioral consequences including feelings of anger and helplessness for not knowing what to do, guilt for not taking action, and fear of certain areas of schools.

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## Adult Response: *Are we holding onto misperceptions of bullying?*

There are many misperceptions about bullying, all of which can lead to minimizing the behavior. A few of them include:

- **Boys will be boys.** The implication is that bullying is okay—it is natural for boys to be physically or verbally aggressive. However, research indicates aggression is learned behavior, not a natural response.
- **Girls don't bully.** Girls can and do bully. While they do not physically bully targets as often as boys, they will often use verbal and social bullying. Bullying for girls escalates during the middle school years.
- **Bullying is a natural part of childhood.** There is nothing natural about being

bullied. Bullying is often considered a normal part of childhood because it is such a common experience. Physical or emotional aggression toward others should not be tolerated as a consequence of childhood.

- **Some people deserve to be bullied.** No child's behavior merits being hurt or harmed in any manner. Instead a child who is different from others deserves to be treated with respect and consideration.
- **Bullying will make kids tougher.** In fact, research has shown it often has the opposite effect—lowering a child's sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Bullying often creates fear and increases anxiety for a child.

• **Telling a teacher about bullying is tattling.** Children need to know the difference between tattling and telling. The secrecy of bullying only serves to protect the bully and to perpetuate the behavior.

• **This can be fixed through conflict resolution or peer mediation.** These programs rely on the students being responsible for solving the problem where each party has equal negotiating power. Bullying, where there is an imbalance of power, is a form of peer abuse. The student who is being bullied needs to be protected from further victimization and therefore needs adult intervention.

*Let's dispel the old myths and help children understand that bullying is not something they just have to "deal" with.*

## Is My Child Being Bullied?

Parents may be overcome with emotions such as sadness, anger, guilt and helplessness and may even bring up feelings that you experienced as a child.

It is important to recognize these emotions; these feelings will not solve the situation for your child. Focus on the issue and develop a plan.

First, you want to be sure that they are being bullied and that it is not routine childhood conflict.

You can help your child recognize bully-

ing behavior by asking them questions about their situation.

**The following questions may be helpful:**

- What happened?
- Was it done more than once?
- Did it make you feel sad or angry?
- Did the child know you were being hurt?
- Is the other child more powerful (i.e. bigger, part of a group, perceived to be more popular) than you in some way?

*"Bullying is when someone repeatedly and on purpose says or does mean or hurtful things to another person who has a hard time defending himself or herself."*

*-Dr. Dan Olweus, Professor of Psychology, University of Bergen, founder of the Bullying Prevention Program*

## Now You Know: *How Should You Respond?*

**Be Supportive:**

- **Never tell your child to ignore the bullying.** Often, trying to ignore bullying allows it to become more serious. If the child were able to simply ignore it, he or she likely would not have told you about it.
- **Don't blame the child who is being bullied.** Don't assume that your child did something to provoke the bullying.
- **Listen carefully** to what your child tells you about the bullying. Ask him or her questions (refer to suggesting above).
- **Empathize** with your child. Tell him or her that bullying is wrong, not their fault,

and that you are glad he or she had the courage to tell you about it.

- **Ask your child** what he or she thinks can be done to help.
- **Let your child know** what you are going to do.
- If you disagree with how your child handled the bullying situation, **don't criticize** him or her.
- **Do not encourage physical retaliation** ("just hit them back") as a solution. Hitting another student is not likely to end the problem, and it could get your child suspended or expelled or escalate the situation.

• **Help your child become more resilient** to bullying by helping them recognize their positive attributes; this helps them to build confidence.

• **Teach your child safety strategies**, like seeking help from an adult when feeling threatened by a bully. Talk about who he or she would go to and role-play what he or she should say. Assure your child that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.

• If you are concerned about how your child is coping with the stress of being bullied, speak to a **mental health professional**.

## Should I Inform My Child's Teacher and Principal?

Parents are often reluctant to report bullying to school officials, but bullying may not stop without the help of adults.

- Emphasize that you want to work with the staff at school to find a solution to

stop the bullying, for the sake of your child as well as other students.

- Ask the teacher about his or her observations. For example, has he

or she noticed that your child is being isolated, excluded from the playground or other activities.

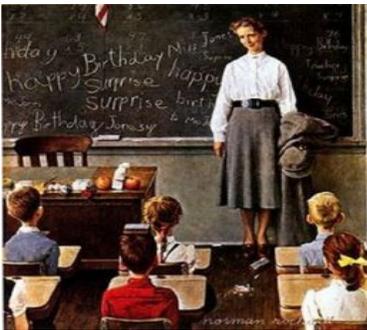
- Work with the school to develop a plan.

## What Can Schools Do?

All children are entitled to respectful treatment by students and staff at school. Preventing and responding to bullying is the work of every administrator, teacher, school staff member, student and parent.

Each individual must recognize his or her role and responsibility in creating a school where bullying is not tolerated. Make sure you have a copy of the school handbook containing policies and protocols for bullying behavior.

Staff will apply these protocols when investigating incidents of bullying by speaking with all students involved, developing an action plan and notifying parents if necessary.



- Give the school reasonable time to investigate and hear both sides of the story. Sometimes a child who bullies will make false allegations about a child. Educators need time to conduct a thorough assessment of the situation.

- School personnel should meet with the children who are suspected of taking part in the bullying, making it clear that bullying is against school rules, appropriate consequences will be administered, and parents will be notified.

- Request a meeting with your school principal or administrator. Document the events to develop a record or history of what is happening to your child. Records can help parents keep a concise, accurate timeline of events and insures emotions alone do not drive the discussion.

- Be persistent. You may need to keep speaking out about the bullying that your child experiences.



*"Encourage your child to join with others in telling bullies to stop, telling adults when they see bullying, and reaching out in friendship to isolated youth. Praise your children when they do these things. Remind them that they have the power to help."*

*-Stan Davis, author of "Schools Where Everyone Belongs" and "Empowering Bystanders in Bullying Prevention"*

## What Should I Do If My Child Has Been Bullying Others?

If you find out that your child has been bullying other children, it will need to be stopped. Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously and that it is not okay.

As the school is trying hard to prevent bullying and to stop it once it occurs, you too can reinforce these expectations.

- Make rules within your family for your child's behavior. Praise your child for

following the rules and use nonphysical and logical consequences when rules are broken.

- Spend lots of time with your child and keep close track of his or her activities. Find out who your child's friends are and how and where they spend their free time.
- Build on your child's talents by encouraging him or her to get involved in posi-

tive activities (such as clubs, music lessons, or nonviolent sports).

- Share your concerns with your child's teacher, counselor and/or principal. Work together to send a clear message to your child that his or her bullying must stop.
- If you and your child need more help, talk with a school counselor and/or mental health professional.

The **Community Outreach and Education Department** works in partnership with schools, offering educational and enrichment programs which address the pressing social, legal, safety, and health issues facing schools, students and families. Community collaboration is a key element of the outreach and educational initiatives throughout the county.

## How Can I Protect My Child From Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, hurt, embarrass, humiliate, or intimidate another person. This form of bullying can take place in many ways. Embarrassing pictures, private IM (Instant Messaging) and hateful or threatening messages can be posted on public sites or those within the social network shared by many.

According to a recent study by UCLA, 70% of teens say they have been the victim of cyberbullying. And most startling is that 90% of them did not report these incidents to an adult.

Your children are “digital natives”, growing up online and connected in many ways, 24/7. You are the first generation of parents to learn how to respond to the problem of cyberbullying, so we want to help you before things go wrong.

We have outlined four areas of concern that can help to protect your child:

1. **Learn:** Educate yourself about the current trends and risks online. Understand that your child's behavior online, can impact your entire family. Social networking and other websites set minimum age requirements for creating profiles. If you allow your child to

create content on a site knowing they are below the age requirement and your child engages in inappropriate or illegal behavior online, **YOU** could be held responsible and may be sending the message that it is ok to lie. *i.e. Allowing your child to create a Facebook page when they are under the age of 13.*

**The resources below can help better inform you.**

2. **Communicate:** Talk to your children about what they are doing online, with whom, and establish rules about expected behavior while online.
- Teach **digital citizenship:** Help youth to understand the risks, to be responsible and ethical, to pay attention to the well-being of others and to promote online civility and respect.
- Do **NOT** overreact or take away your child's online access if they didn't do anything wrong. This may prevent them from seeking your help in the future.
3. **Protect:** Keep the computer in a high traffic area of your home and think about what information you and your child put online such as personal information, pictures, videos. Sometimes pictures



provide information about you that you do not realize. Utilize the parental controls on your computer or available through your Internet Service Provider and consider monitoring software.

4. **Act:** Contact law enforcement and the Cyber-Tipline if you or someone you know feels threatened or in danger.

For more information, check out: [www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)—The **Cyberbullying Research Center** serves as a clearinghouse of information concerning the ways adolescents use and misuse technology. It is intended to be a resource for parents, educators, law enforcement officers, counselors, and others who work with youth.

## More Information and Online Resources

[www.ConnectSafely.org](http://www.ConnectSafely.org)—A non-profit that has all kinds of social-media safety tips for teens and parents, the latest teen tech news and many other resources.

[www.stopbullyingnow.com](http://www.stopbullyingnow.com)—Author and educator Stan Davis' website to help adults prevent bullying.

[www.ikeepsafe.org](http://www.ikeepsafe.org)—Teaches children and parents the importance of protecting personal information and avoiding inappropriate places on the internet.

[www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org)—Dedicated to protecting the online experiences of youth everywhere.

[www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com) (1-800-THE-LOST)—The resource to report cyber-

crimes.

[www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)—The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) Internet Safety resource and education program targeting children K—12, parents and educators.

[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)—The official U.S. Government website devoted to bullying prevention.

[www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org](http://www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org)—The PACER Center (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights) was founded initially for parents of youth with disabilities and now has become the **National Center for Bullying Prevention**.

In addition to student and school staff presentations, many parent workshops are available, including a workshop to inform you on safe social networking practices for you and your child. Contact your school or Parent Teacher Organization to coordinate an event.

Many books and resources are available for loan at the Berkshire District Attorney's Office. For information or resources on the topics of bullying, cyberbullying, internet safety, and more, please contact the Community Outreach and Education Department at 413-443-5951.