

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO  
**Understanding, Preventing  
and Responding**  
— TO BULLYING —



*The Pathway to the Promise.™*

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

# Understanding, Preventing and Responding

TO BULLYING

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# Letter from Dr. Linda Lane

Dear Families of Pittsburgh Public School Students,

As a part of our efforts to ensure safe and welcoming schools, we have taken additional steps to address a concern that we know we all share, and that is prevention of bullying behaviors.

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**Bullying is defined as** “intentional, aggressive behavior that may be verbal, physical, written or electronic aimed at another student or students, for the purpose of creating fear or intimidation by harming physically, mentally or emotionally. It may be direct or indirect, with face to face interactions or by spreading rumors, sharing inappropriate pictures or demeaning a student using social media.”

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We all share in the responsibility to prevent bullying. This means all our school staff, our community partners, school volunteers as well as our families and students have an important role to play. First, we have to report problem behavior promptly and this Guide developed by family members and community partners describes the process and procedures we all must follow.

I know many of you reading this may be thinking to times when you either were bullied or witnessed it or maybe even behavior you engaged in that you now regret. This is no longer considered, just a part of growing up and our efforts can make a better and more positive environment for our children and young people than some of us may have had. We can work to teach our children respectful and caring behavior, just as we do to help them learn to read and do math.

Thank you for your support in this effort.

Sincerely,



Linda S. Lane  
Superintendent, Pittsburgh Public Schools

## SHARED RESPONSIBILITY MODEL



# Section 1: Understanding Bullying

**Bullying is defined as** intentional, aggressive behavior(s) that may be verbal, physical, written or electronic, aimed at another student or students, for the purpose of creating fear or intimidation by harming physically, mentally or emotionally. It may be direct or indirect, with face-to-face interactions or by spreading rumors, sharing inappropriate pictures or demeaning a student using social media.

Bullying is also prohibited on school buses, walking to and from school and during any and all school activities. Bullying can occur as one or multiple acts that are hurtful or create unsafe circumstances. Bullying on the school bus is reported in writing by the bus driver, and given to the school principal for follow-up.

## How to Spot Signs of Bullying in Your Child

Your child may be a victim or perpetrator of bullying. In either case, schools are required to individually support victims and perpetrators with the appropriate interventions.

### **Make note of subtle changes or shifts in your child's personality, behavior and level of school engagement.**

For example, a once energetic, highly verbal or enthusiastic child begins a pattern of quietness, lethargy, complaints about sore stomach, headache, nausea, aches and pains, with no sensible reason for the ailment. The school nurse can examine your child to rule out an underlying health problem and often during these health office visits, can get to the bottom of something going on socially, emotionally or otherwise. Your pediatrician may also be helpful in ruling out a physical ailment, if the complaints persist.

Conversely, a once quiet child may become the aggressor as a way of retaliating against the bully. Some children may join a new peer group, and become negatively influenced by their new friends. At home, a child may become argumentative, hostile or aggressive, all of which may result from peer influence.

### **Your child may begin a new pattern of school tardiness or absence.**

Perhaps as a school walker, your child suddenly requests that you drive them to school and pick them up. If children are bullied on the school bus, often out of the sight of adults, they may again ask for a ride to and from school. At home, they may appear disheveled, or they may shut down by not doing their homework, preparing/studying for exams, or simply being disconnected from school.

Should any of these situations arise in your home, this is a good opportunity to start a conversation with your child. Many children will show us through the behaviors described above what they cannot put into words.

## Bullying Outside of School

If your child experiences bullying outside of school, it is important to report the incident to the school principal and school social worker or counselor. Although the District is not in a position to address certain off-campus conduct, even if it involves District students, letting school officials know of the incident can help to ensure the behavior does not continue or escalate in school. The District may only initiate a response to off-campus student conduct that:

- does or is likely to materially and substantially interfere with the educational process;
- threatens serious harm to the school or community;
- encourages unlawful activity;
- interferes with another's rights (Policy 212: Student Conduct).

Parents may report the problem by involving their local police or magistrate to file charges for bullying outside of school. This is especially important if your child was physically assaulted or was seriously threatened with descriptive intent. School Police may be of assistance in resolving the problem or collaborating with other law enforcement officials. It is important to document the incident, as documentation of the incident may be helpful in court.

## School Volunteers

School volunteers may witness bullying in different school locations and during various activities, such as on the school bus, outside of school, in hallways, the cafeteria or school playground. While it is not a volunteer's primary responsibility to manage student conduct, sometimes a quick and effective response can stop negative behavior. Report your observations and/or actions to the school principal, or, once information is gathered, report the behavior to the school principal.

### IMPORTANT NOTE

**Any report of adult-on-student bullying should immediately be reported to the principal for investigation.**

**Adult-on-student bullying is considered a critical incident and is handled by school administration and Employee Relations.**

# Section 2: How to Respond to Your Child when You See Signs of Bullying

## Keep open lines of communication with your child.

Talking with and empowering your child is essential when it comes to understanding and preventing hurtful or offensive behavior. By establishing an open line of communication about topics that your child may not know how to pursue in conversation, as their parent, you have set the tone that no conversations are off limits.

Some children may not possess what they believe to be the right words to use to convey their worries or concerns, regardless of their age, while others fear retaliation if they “tell on” someone. Telling is appropriate when it is to protect the student or others in the school community. By initiating the conversations first, you have eased your child’s mind by taking the lead and reassuring them that every person has the right to feel safe and be treated respectfully. By not talking, the problem may grow into a physical or mental health concern.

## Review the District’s Anti-Bullying Policy with your child.

Even though your child may have already reviewed the District’s Anti-Bullying policy with his or her classroom teachers, taking the time to review it with them will remind your child that no form of harassment is acceptable, for any reason. To review the District’s Bullying Policy, please visit [www.pps.k12.pa.us/bullying](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/bullying).

## Use the same messages as our schools— Stop/Walk/Talk to prevent and respond to bullying.

Below is the Universal Response to Bullying that our teachers have been trained to use. By using the same language as your child’s school personnel, you are communicating to your child that you are working with his/her school. By reviewing this information, your child also knows what to expect at school. If they are not supported by appropriate school action, they need to tell you this.

PRACTICE the



**stop, walk and talk.**

3-STEP RESPONSE to BULLYING

## Practice the Stop/Walk/Talk messages.

Review this information with your child so that they hear it again from you as the parent, and know what to expect when they report bullying, or when it is witnessed. Practice the Stop/Walk/Talk messages with them, and continually emphasize the importance of notifying an adult in case of an incident.

For students of any age, bullying may shift into harassment due to race, gender, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and religion. Any form of harassment is prohibited. Remind your child of this.

### THE UNIVERSAL RESPONSE TO BULLYING (FOR ADULTS)

**Ask the Victim:** Did you ask the person to stop? Did you walk away?

**Ask the Perpetrator:** Did the person ask you to stop? And did you stop?

**Note:** *If concerns exist for a child's safety, immediately go to your Principal and/or Student Service Staff for assistance.*

### STRATEGIES TO AVOID

**Mediation or publicly questioning the victim**

**Making judgmental statements**

**Dismissing the concerns without investigating or referring**

### PRACTICE THE STOP, WALK, AND TALK ROUTINE (FOR STUDENTS)



#### Say Stop!

Try to stop the behavior using words, and physically use the hand stop signal for younger children.



#### Walk

Walk away.



#### Talk

Tell an adult.

# Section 3: How to Get Help When a Bullying Incident Occurs

If you determine there is an issue of bullying occurring with your child, getting help is a critical first step. Below are steps to assist you in supporting your child at home and at school.

## STEP 1: Talk it Out with your Child

Talking with your child about what occurred is an important first step in advocating for your child. Children respond in different ways and may not open up immediately. Try using the strategies below to support your child if they report being bullied or you suspect they are being bullied.

- Do not judge or dismiss what your child is saying. It is important to calmly ask questions such as: *Who was involved?*, *What happened?*, *When and where did it happen?* (in school or outside of school), and *What adults were present?*
- If your child does not seem to want to talk about it in much depth or detail, don't pressure him/her, but immediately return to the conversation when the time seems right. We suggest not waiting longer than a day to revisit the conversation.
- If talking is uncomfortable, offer an alternative to talking, such as drawing a picture, or writing down what occurred.
- Ask if the bullying was reported to anyone; if so, when, and to whom?
- Praise your child for telling you what happened.
- Keep notes of the conversation with your child and immediately contact your child's school principal, classroom teacher, or school social worker/counselor to report the behavior. Share the details that have been gathered. If your child shows you e-mail(s), text(s), or any form of social media that indicates bullying or any form of harassment, save the material for future reference; this is critically important documentation.
- Remind your child that bullying is against school policy and school rules, and that they did the right thing by telling you.

## STEP 2: Report the Problem

All principals and school staff are held accountable for addressing misconduct. Hold your principal and others accountable for dealing with the problem. If your child's school has an assistant principal, start there to report a bullying incident. It is important to report the problem early so interventions can occur quickly.



## Report the Problem (continued)

- Provide the school with as many specifics as possible, even if it is difficult to connect the situation to a specific person. This puts the problem on the school's radar.
- When reporting the problem, agree upon a timeframe and method for receiving information back about how the problem was handled, within the confines of what principals are able to share about disciplinary action.
- Give school staff time to investigate the situation that has been reported.

## STEP 3: Investigate the Problem

Once your report is provided to your child's principal, teacher or school social counselor, the school investigation begins. Below are a few steps that are a part of this process.

- Schools are required to prepare a complaint about the situation and actions taken. The complaint is sent to the Central Office Compliance Officer for Bullying and Harassment (Janet Yuhasz, 412-622-3918) for review.
- Once the complaint is received, the Compliance Officer for Bullying and Harassment reviews it. If the matter was not handled correctly, additional guidance will be provided to the school for corrective action.
- Hold the school accountable for solving the problem. If the problem continues or is not resolved, contact the school and inform them. If the problem persists, call the Parent Hotline at 412-622-7920 and make a complaint.
- All complaints are logged through the Parent Hotline with a "call ticket" and triaged for response to the school and our District's Compliance Officer for Bullying and Harassment.
- The school and Compliance Officer for Bullying and Harassment must respond in writing to the call ticket. If additional action steps are needed, the appropriate authorities are consulted for guidance, which is then provided to the school.
- The school is responsible for creating a safety/prevention plan. The plan should be presented to the victim and the perpetrator for support. If the parents of the victim or perpetrator are not satisfied with the prevention plan and actions taken, their input is taken into consideration.
- If in your child's reporting, it was difficult to connect the incident to a specific person, still call and make a general report to the school, being as informative as possible; this information will be given to the appropriate school professional to investigate, and the concern has now been raised at the school. A return phone call from school personnel can be expected in a reasonable amount of time. The principal or school counselor will get a written report of all possible bullying incidents from the supervising staff member.
- As a reminder, all parents are free to consult an attorney or local law enforcement.

*continues on next page*

## **STEP 4:**

### **Checking In for Success**

An important step of the process of supporting your child is checking in on the situation on a regular basis—typically weekly or bi-weekly. It is an important part of a successful intervention program and key to prevention. By checking in with your child’s teacher, school principal or social worker, you can ensure that future bullying incidents do not occur and that your child feels safe.

Below are a few items that you should keep in mind when supporting your child and working with the school.

- Schools are bound by confidentiality laws regarding school discipline and sharing specifics about consequences. However, schools can share information in a manner that allows the parent of the victim to feel reassured that the matter was appropriately handled.
- The goal with early intervention is to prevent the occurrence of future bullying by intervening in a sensible and meaningful way after the first occurrence.
- Prevention, individual student supports, and disciplinary action may come in a variety of forms. Schools use a model of progressive discipline. This means that consequences must match the severity of the behavior, as well as the needs of individual students. The frequency and nature of bullying incidents play a major role in how schools address the problem. In some instances, classroom-specific interventions may occur. Or, individual student interventions may occur whereby students are separated.
- All school personnel can address bullying on some level, and assign consequences, but only principals and vice principals can suspend students out-of-school.
- Actions for the victim and perpetrator may vary and include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Immediately informing parents of involved students
  - Facilitating separate student meetings with the victim and bully
  - Separating involved students in school
  - E-mailing alerts to all staff to keep them aware
  - Loss of privileges
  - Loss of student transportation
  - Individual behavior plans
  - Parent/student conferences
  - Meetings between or among families
  - Referral to the Discipline Committee, SAP Team or other supportive resources
  - Involvement of School Police to file charges
  - In-school suspension or after-school detention
  - Out-of-school suspension
  - Change in educational placement
  - Expulsion or transfer to an alternative school
  - Transfer to a new classroom or school
  - Legal action taken by CYF
  - Referral to the local magistrate

## **Checking in for Success (continued)**

After a plan is in place, school personnel will contact the parent/guardian of the victim and perpetrator to discuss the next steps. The parents of the victim will have the safety/prevention plan presented to them for validation. If the parents of the victim or perpetrator are not satisfied with the prevention plan and actions taken, their input is taken into consideration. A majority of the outcomes are positive, and the school and parents are able to find common ground to ensure their child will be safe at school.

## **STEP 5: School Check-Ins, Additional Reporting and Adjustments if Needed**

Schools should be conducting periodic, random check-ins to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the prevention/intervention plan. The check-ins will be conducted with the victim and perpetrator. Check-ins generally take place with the students involved, however they are not limited to the students. Parents can request a phone call or some form of communication from a designated school staff member to discuss the progress and effectiveness of the plan.

Talking with your child periodically to ensure that the misconduct has stopped is important in ensuring incidents are not going unaddressed. Remind your child to report any recurrences to you, as well as his/her teacher or other school staff. If your child reports a new incident or occurrence, please notify your child's school. School personnel often recommend that students journal their experiences so that during the random check-ins they can refer to their documentation to facilitate a meaningful conversation with school personnel about the bullying situation.

If changes become necessary to any action steps taken, take the time to discuss them with your child's school.

# Section 4: Parent Resources for Understanding & Preventing Bullying

## Additional Actions & Activities

In addition to the support you provide your child through a bullying incident, there are additional actions you can take on behalf of your child and others when it comes to bullying. Below are some activities for parents wishing to play a continued role in understanding, preventing and responding to bullying:

- Use your voice by reporting any problems early and promptly to your child's school.
- Talk with your child about District and school policy and what to do if they are bullied. Discuss the difference between snitching vs. telling (when a person feels unsafe, telling is okay; snitching is intended to simply get a person in trouble).
- Learn about school-based prevention activities (e.g. positive behavior incentive programs) at your child's school.
- Be instrumental in sharing the responsibility for changing school culture and climate about bullying behaviors.
- Share information with your school principal and social worker/counselor about bullying prevention programs for urban youth.
- Suggest a parent workshop/speakers through the PTO, PTA and/or PSCC about bullying prevention.
- Nominate yourself to participate on behalf of your child's school on the District *Excellence for All* (EFA) parent meetings.
- Meet and introduce yourself to all school personnel that play a part in your child's education (i.e. principal, teachers, social worker, counselor).
- Teach the same skills to your child at home as we teach in our schools. This conveys a clear message that we are working together.
- Learn what resources are available at your child's school or on the Internet regarding bullying. A few websites have been provided on the next page.
- Use common language between school and home to promote a healthy relationship. This way, your child will see you as a teammate of his teacher or any school personnel.
- Know the District's policy to enhance understanding about what schools are required to do when bullying occurs.
- Know what's in our Code of Student Conduct, Rules 13 and 17, which explicitly prohibits harassment and bullying, and become familiar with the possible consequences for bullying.

## Additional Actions & Activities (continued)

- Inquire or learn about school-based prevention programs and services through our Student Assistance Program for all students.
- Ask about supports for students affected by bullying or who bully others (parents can easily utilize these school-based services whether their child is a victim or perpetrator). Services may include a skill-building group or counseling by a professional.

## Additional Resources for Parents about Understanding & Preventing Bullying

Parent Resources for understanding and preventing bullying are extensive at all Pittsburgh Public Schools and through the Internet. Parent resources come in a variety of forms to fit your personal needs. Parent resources could be tangible items such as websites, educational articles, books, or conversations. Consult with your school social worker, counselor and teachers to make sure that the information you are seeking is provided to your satisfaction. In addition, the following web-based resources may be accessed:

- <http://internet-safety.yoursphere.com/2012/02/three-good-reasons-why-your-child-shouldnt-be-on-facebook>
- [www.embracecivility.org](http://www.embracecivility.org)
- [www.helpguide.org/mental/cyber-bullying.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/cyber-bullying.htm) *“Dealing with Cyberbullying: Tips for Parents”*
- [www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_What\\_Do\\_About/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_What_Do_About/) *“What to Do About Bullying: Tips for Parents”*
- [www.bullyfree.com/free-resources/tips-for-parents](http://www.bullyfree.com/free-resources/tips-for-parents) *“Tips for Parents”*
- [Kidshealth.org>Parents>Emotions & Behavior](http://Kidshealth.org>Parents>Emotions & Behavior) *“Helping Kids Deal With Bullies”*
- [www.parenthood.com/article-topics/parenting\\_tips\\_on\\_bullying.html](http://www.parenthood.com/article-topics/parenting_tips_on_bullying.html)
- [Healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Tool.aspx?id=25](http://Healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Tool.aspx?id=25) *“Preventing Bullying: Quick Tips for Parents”*
- [www.ncpc.org/programs/circle-of-respect/understanding-bullying-and-cyberbullying/bullying/what-parents-can-do](http://www.ncpc.org/programs/circle-of-respect/understanding-bullying-and-cyberbullying/bullying/what-parents-can-do)
- [www.stopbullying.gov/index.html](http://www.stopbullying.gov/index.html) *“Stop Bullying”*

The following Pittsburgh Public School documents related to Bullying Prevention are available to all parents:

- PPS Code of Student Conduct
- District’s Prohibition Against Bullying/Policy
- District’s Abuse by Employee Policy
- [www.pps.k12.pa.us/Page/481](http://www.pps.k12.pa.us/Page/481)
- School Handbooks
- Parent Organization/Association meetings
- *Excellence For All* Steering Committee meetings

## District Policies & Procedures around Bullying

All school districts in Pennsylvania are required to have a policy prohibiting bullying according to Section 1303.1-A of the Public School Code (see how to access the District's policy in the Resources section of the Guide). Existing policies must be reviewed every three years and integrated into the Code of Student Conduct. While Pittsburgh Public Schools has been in compliance with state law, we determined a need to make our District-wide process more comprehensive, empowering and informative throughout our schools.

During the 2011–2012 school year, school social workers, counselors, and nurses worked with central office staff to assemble a guide for teachers that would enhance their understanding of bullying, heighten awareness of our updated policy and practices, outline a teacher's role in preventing and responding to bullying, and demonstrate where and how to integrate lessons about bullying prevention into our curriculum. In November of 2012, Pittsburgh Public Schools launched *A Teacher's Guide to Understanding, Preventing and Responding to Bullying*, which was presented at all Pittsburgh Public Schools during a training session for teachers.

In addition, all Pittsburgh Public Schools Student Assistance Program (SAP) service providers were informed of our District-wide efforts towards preventing and responding to bullying, and received copies of the Guide for their respective staff members. SAP service providers have been valuable partners in this work for over twenty-five years. As we improve our practices, and given that they are present in all of our schools, they are available for support to Student Services staff and teachers for assisting with classroom prevention lessons and skill-building groups.

In an effort to keep our work on the radar and very visual, school posters were also provided to all schools about preventing and stopping bullying. These posters are found in classrooms and hallways as a constant reminder of what teachers will say and do, as well as what students should say and do in the event of a bullying incident.

As a parent, by teaching, modeling and reinforcing the positive behaviors, habits, and lessons that we teach in our schools, we will be working together to establish and maintain high standards for conduct and character. Ultimately, self-control and respectful interactions, coupled with strong academic and critical thinking skills, will keep our students on the Pathway to the Pittsburgh Promise. (For more details, please see the **Shared Responsibility** section of the Guide. By following our policy prohibiting bullying, promptly catching and reporting bullying and adhering to effective school response, bullying can be reduced significantly. If bullying is not interrupted, we know that it can have lifelong and devastating effects on both the victim and perpetrator's physical health, mental health, personal growth and academic success.



## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS GUIDE

We wish to give a **special thank you** to the following departments who have contributed to this guide:

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**The *Excellence for All (EFA)* Parent Steering Committee**

**Pittsburgh Mifflin Administration & PTA**

**Pittsburgh Public Schools Student Support Services**

**Know the Joys of Love and Respect**

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We would also like to thank the **Heinz Endowments** for making it possible for us to provide this guide to you.



**Pittsburgh  
Public Schools**

**EXCELLENCE**  
FOR ALL

*The Pathway to the Promise.™*

We are an equal rights and opportunity school district.