

## The *Stepping On Up* Guide to Bullying (and what to do about it)



While bullying is a persistent and pervasive problem in our schools, it is not an intractable or permanent one: we all can take steps to reduce and eventually eliminate it from our school communities. The Colorado Trust launched an initiative to help students and adults in school districts, schools and community-based organizations intervene to prevent bullying. Although bullying was prevalent in schools that were evaluated during the initiative's first year, findings from an evaluation show the initiative had a positive impact over time. Study highlights include:

- "A reduction in bullying occurred in schools where teachers and students are willing to intervene, treat each other fairly and demonstrate that they care."
- "Adult and student intervention in bullying is critical from elementary through high school."
- "A positive relationship with adults and students at school and a school culture of trust and fairness are key to reducing bullying."
- "Schools with lower levels of bullying report higher scores on statewide tests."

### **What is Bullying?**

By definition, a student is bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. Bullying takes place when *someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort on another.* (Olweus). It can be physical, verbal or emotional:

- **Physical bullying** includes: hitting, kicking, or pushing someone (or threatening to do it), stealing, hiding or ruining someone's things, making someone do things he or she don't want to do
- **Verbal bullying** includes: taunting, teasing, name calling, insults, threats or hate speech
- **Emotional bullying** includes: rejection or exclusion of others, refusing to talk to someone, social isolation, rumors and gossip

### **Signs of Bullying**

Children often find it difficult to talk about bully. They may feel ashamed or embarrassed or blame themselves. As a result many bullying victims suffer in silence and some research indicates that 20% of victims say nothing about it. It is important that parents and teachers know how to spot the signs that bullying may be occurring.

Possible warning signs that a child is being bullied include:

- torn, damaged, or lost pieces of clothing, books, electronics, jewelry or other belongings
- unexplained injuries: cuts, bruises, and scratches
- reluctance to go to school, loss of interest in or sudden dislike of school
- avoids school bus rides or changes walking route to school
- avoidance of after-school activities and school-based social gatherings
- unusual difficulty in concentrating or lack of focus
- being listless, unenthusiastic, remote or showing a lack of interest in favorite activities
- a sudden drop in academic interest and declining grades
- mood swings (tearfulness, withdrawal, bursts of anger, anxiety attacks, depression)
- unusual headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments
- difficulty sleeping, nightmares, bed wetting
- change in eating habits, a loss of appetite or overeating
- rarely talks of friends and seems socially isolated
- significant change friendships and relationships
- having more conflicts or discipline issues at school, acting out at home
- self-destructive behaviors such as cutting, talk of suicide

**Every incident of bullying involves the victim, the bully and the bystanders. To stop bullying, every member of the school community must play a part.**

### **Things victims can do while bullying is taking place:**

- Ignore the bully whenever possible
- Try not to respond emotionally: don't cry, get angry, or show that you're upset
- Respond to the bully evenly and firmly
- When appropriate, use humor to diffuse the situation
- Turn and walk away

**Things victims can do after bullying takes place:**

- Talk to your parents or an adult you trust such as a teacher, school counselor or principal
- Don't blame yourself for what happened
- Avoid situations and places where bullying can happen
- Stay in a group: don't walk alone, travel with other people whenever you can
- Sit near the bus driver on the school bus
- Don't bring expensive things or money to school
- Label your belongings with permanent marker in case they get stolen
- Act confidently: hold your head up, stand up straight and make eye contact

**Things bystanders can do:**

- Be a part of the solution
- Speak up and offer support to the victim
- Walk away: bullies enjoy an audience
- Do not instigate or encourage conflicts and fights
- Refuse to join in if someone is being bullied
- Report bullying to an adult

**Things the school community can do to prevent bullying:**

- Talk about what bullying is and identify bullying behaviors
- Develop clear school rules and sanctions regarding bullying
- Protect victims from retaliation: provide a wide range of safe and effective interventions so victims are not left alone to deal with aggressive behavior
- Encourage bystanders to make positive interventions that diffuse violence
- Create clear, easy and confidential ways to report incidents of bullying
- Increase supervision to protect victims
- Promote a climate of inclusion and respect for all students
- Teach tolerance and empathy
- Develop school-wide activities that create an awareness of bullying; discourage bullying behavior and identify effective strategies to stop it
- Support local bullying prevention programs



## **What Parents can do to prevent your child becoming a victim of bullying or cyber bullying**

- Talk about what bullying is and help your child identify bullying behaviors
- Look for signs that your child is being victimized or bullied
- Stress the importance of reporting all incidents of bullying at school.
- Identify teachers and/or staff your child is comfortable talking to about this and other problems they confront.
- Role play reporting an incident of bullying with your child
- Brainstorm ways your child can report bullying confidentially
- Monitor your child's internet use on computers and mobile devices.
- Install filtering software on your computer to safeguard you child from fining objectionable material on the web.
- Place student/family computer in a common room, not the bedroom.
- Discuss internet etiquette (link to etiquette section)
- Have a family meeting about internet use and brainstorm good ways to use of the internet safely
- Teach tolerance and empathy
- Learn about the anti-bullying campaigns at your child's school and become involved in making it a central part of the school culture.
- Support local bullying prevention programs in your community

## **What Parents can do if they think their child is being bullied at school or online.**

If your child or student shows signs of being a victim of bullying or cyber bullying and is in serious distress or danger, don't ignore the problem. Get help right away and follow the suggestions posted at: <http://www.stopbullying.gov/get-help-now/index.html>.

The site outlines a number of responses depending on the severity of the situation. Here are a few suggestions which follow their guidelines.

### **Talk with your child:**

- Express your concern and understanding
- Let them know you want to help and support them
- Encourage them not to be embarrassed or blame themselves for what has happened.
- Gently try to get as many details about the events as possible
- Underline that they can always talk to you about difficult things



**Talk with staff at your child's school. Contact the:**

- Teacher
- School counselor
- School principal
- School superintendent
- State Department of Education

**If someone is feeling hopeless, helpless, thinking of suicide:**

- Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline online or at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The toll-free call goes to the nearest crisis center in our national network. These centers provide 24-hour crisis counseling and mental health referrals.

**If there has been a crime or someone is at immediate risk of harm:**

- Call 911

**If the school is not adequately addressing harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion, contact:**

- School superintendent
- State Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights
- U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division

