

BULLYING

PREVENTION & RESPONSE

A Comprehensive Guide for Parents in the Needham Schools

Talk to your child about bullying
Know what to do if bullying happens
Practice cyber-safety

**A publication of the Needham Public Schools in cooperation
with Needham Youth Services.**

http://rwd1.needham.k12.ma.us/student_development/Bullying_Prevention

Adopted from Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center (MARC) materials and
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Direct from the Field: A Guide to Bullying Prevention*, 2007.

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WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Typically, bullying happens over and over, it is unfair, one-sided, cruel, and creates anxiety or fear. Bullying is not conflict among friends or rough play.

WHY DOES BULLYING HAPPEN?

How Do I Know If It's Bullying?

Four helpful markers:

- imbalance of power between the target and aggressor
- intent to harm
- threat of further aggression
- creation of an atmosphere of terror

(Colorado, 2009)

Bullying happens for many reasons – some aggressors see it as a way to be popular or to look tough, some do it to get attention or to play out jealousies, or others may be bullied themselves. Some people think that bullying is a part of growing up, just “kids being kids” or something children should work out among themselves. Research indicates that bullying has negative consequences for all children – the aggressors, the targets and the bystanders. And for some children bullying can lead to emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression, poor social skill development, and poor school performance.

Bullying can also happen online or electronically. Known as cyberbullying, typically the Internet or mobile phones are used to send mean messages, post

nasty pictures, or use someone else's user name to spread rumors or lies.

WHY DOES EVERY PARENT NEED TO GET INVOLVED?

When bullying takes place, it affects the entire school community. Taunting, exclusion, and other acts of aggression contaminate the school environment. It's vital that bullying prevention and intervention efforts involve not merely the individual aggressors and targets, but the school community as a whole.

CURRENT RATES OF SELF-REPORTED BULLYING AMONG NEEDHAM STUDENTS

Almost one in three students has experienced bullying, according to student self-reporting. In addition, one in five students reported having bullied someone else.

The 2012 Metrowest Adolescent Health Survey provides information about 16 school districts and how they are doing in response to student bullying incidents. Compared to 2010, Needham students reported a decreased incidence of bullying victimization and perpetration. The incidence of cyberbullying, however remained steady at the high school and increased at the middle school. The Survey defines bullying behaviors as “being repeatedly teased, threatened, hit, kicked or excluded by another student or group of students”.

	Needham MS 2010	Needham MS 2012	Metrowest MS AVE 2012	Needham HS 2010	Needham HS 2012	Metrowest HS AVE 2012
Been Bullied	30%	22%	32%	28%	20%	27%
Bullied someone else	17%	5%	12%	22%	11%	16%
Been bullied on school property	24%	17%	27%	24%	16%	23%
Been bullied using electronic media	12%	15%	17%	18%	16%	22%

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO PREVENT BULLYING?

- **Talk to your child about bullying**, even if it is not a problem now.
- **Tell your child how you want him to behave.** Be firm, clear, and consistent. For example, “In our family it’s never okay to bully or just stand by and watch others being bullied. Bullying is wrong. If you find yourself bullying others, please let us know so we can help you change your behavior.”
- **Follow through with consequences** if you find out your child bullied.
- **Teach your child to be a helpful bystander.** Research shows that kids who witness bullying feel powerless and seldom intervene. Yet, intervening can make a big difference in helping the situation and empowering the bystander.
- **Practice answers to bullying behavior.** It’s not easy for kids to respond to bullying so come up with some behaviors and lines such as “That’s bullying. Stop!” Encourage your child to avoid giving attention to the aggressor, and then tell an adult.
- **Model respectful behavior.**
- **Help your child make friends.** If your child doesn’t seem to have any friends, encourage your child to join groups or teams to find children with similar interests.

WHAT MIGHT INDICATE THAT MY CHILD IS ENGAGING IN BULLYING BEHAVIOR?

Cyber-bullying peaks at 10th grade

Children who bully others often act as though it’s no big deal. They might say they didn’t mean to hurt anyone using phrases like “I was just kidding. She can’t take a joke”. There may also be a problem if your child:

- Talks about other children in a negative way such as “wimp, loser, or stupid,” or talks as though other children deserve what happens to them, such as “He asked for it.”
- Doesn’t seem to care about others’ feelings or behaves in a rough way towards others
- Shows defiance such as stating, “You can’t tell me what to do!”
- Is easily frustrated when she doesn’t get her own way
- Is accused of bullying or gets in trouble at school or elsewhere for fighting

If you are contacted by your child’s school with concern that your child is bullying others, it’s important to take it seriously and make sure your child gets help if necessary. Children who frequently bully can go on to bully others as adults in their dating, family and work relationships.

WHAT MIGHT INDICATE THAT MY CHILD IS A TARGET?

Some kids will talk, others won’t. Look for these signs:

- Injuries, stomachaches, headaches, or problems sleeping
- Lost or broken belongings or requests for extra money
- Staying away from school activities or doing worse in school
- Not wanting to be in unstructured school spaces (bathroom, cafeteria, recess, bus)

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD IF I THINK HE/SHE MAY BE A TARGET?

- **If your child is not willing to talk to you, find a trusted adult** your child will talk to, such as a teacher, guidance counselor, coach, family friend or relative.
- **Tell your child that this is not his fault**, and that he did nothing wrong.
- **Tell your child she has a right to feel emotionally and physically safe.**
- **Validate your child’s feelings:** “That must really hurt. I remember how hard that was when I was your age.”
- **Role-play** ignoring the bully or walking away. Emphasize that your child should not retaliate or attempt to fight or hit the bully.
- **With your child, make a list of adults in school** he or she can go to for help.
- **Arrange for your child to see friends outside of school**, and plan fun activities with the family.
- **Notify someone at school.** With the school you can make an action plan. Whether or not the bullying is happening on school property it’s helpful for the adults at your school to be aware of a difficult situation. It can be extremely distressing to everyone involved – the aggressor, the target and the bystanders – and can impact the learning environment at school.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CYBER-BULLYING

Studies have found that 30-60% of teens have been cyberbullied online, and 85-90% of those have not told their parents. (MARC)

Cyberbullying is repeated, electronic-based bullying via computers or cell phones. It usually involves abusive or cruel messages, comments, or images posted on Web sites or online profiles that are derogatory or even threatening. Even if children are not “typical” bullies it is possible for them to become involved in cyberbullying as a target or an aggressor. MARC research shows that the most common motives for cyberbullying are anger and the

belief that cyberbullying is a “joke.” Gender differences show up online; girls tend to play out their anger and emotions, often “turning” on friends, while boys are more likely to taunt to get a laugh or look “cool.”

In 2010, approximately 12% of Needham middle school students report having been bullied via electronic media.

Your child’s cell phone may in reality be a hand held computer that occasionally makes phone calls. Mostly it’s a device for Facebook, texting, taking photos, sexting, IMing, making videos, surfing the web and You Tube, and more. It can also be a GPS making it possible for a stranger to locate their position. (Check the phone’s settings.) It **can turn the web into a weapon, at any moment**, in any location, with one simple send. Our kids

understand technology, but not the impact it can have on others; parents understand the impact, but not the technology. Working together, families can make smart decisions.

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO PREVENT CYBER-BULLYING?

Coach your kids to think, think, think before hitting send on all electronic messages. Help them understand the consequences of their actions.

Parent, guide, and coach kids around the power of technology. Be aware of what your child is saying and doing online. Let your child know you are monitoring their online activity. Avoid taking the technology away completely since most likely they will find a technology outlet some other way; instead help kids learn from their mistakes, set limits, and be responsible technology users.

Do you know how to set Facebook Privacy Settings?

MARC has posted 5 easy steps at “Avoiding and Responding to Problems on Facebook”

<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/marc/parpub.html>

With your child, make and enforce cell phone and computer rules. Consider asking your child to deposit his/her cell phone in a basket at a reasonable hour so it does not distract from homework or sleep. With your child, decide what the consequences will be if rules are broken.

Put off Facebook until your child is at least 14, the legal age under Facebook’s “Terms of Use.” Developmentally, kids under 14 aren’t ready for the content and/or consequences that often come with Facebook.

Spend time together as a family. It’s the balancing counterpoint to the social frenzy.

The Internet is a PERMANENT WRITTEN RECORD and can be more permanent than publishing an article in a newspaper. Postings can be forwarded, re-posted, blogged, listed anywhere, a million times over – even after the original posting has been deleted. Facebook and Google now archive everything. Often you are consenting to the sharing of information that you may believe is private when you agree to the “terms and conditions.”

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY CHILD ABOUT CYBER-BULLYING?

- **The Internet counts.** If it's illegal in person, it's illegal online. This includes threats, stalking, and harassment. Joking is not an excuse. If you wouldn't want it on a billboard, don't post it on the Internet.
- **Nothing is private.** Even a profile or Web page set to "private" is not truly private –nothing in an online social networking site is truly secure.
- **Protect your personal information.** This includes your name, photo, phone number, address, town, the name of a team you play on, etc. Avoid sensitive information too – such as posting embarrassing or dumb things you've said or done.
- **Don't let your emotions rule your typing.** If you're upset or mad, log off for awhile.
- **Posing as someone else online could result in criminal charges.** This can be interpreted as identity theft, a serious crime, and can include: posting a fake profile by using someone else's name, photo, or identifying information (no matter what the content of that fake profile); using someone else's name or username or password; using a very similar screen name, plus that person's real name.
- **Online friends are strangers no matter how long you've "known" them.** It's easy to pose as someone else online. Even if you've corresponded with people online, they are strangers. Never agree to meet them or call them. Tell your parents if they want to meet you.
- **Sites such as MySpace, Facebook, or the latest online craze such as Formspring or Honesty Box can be fun, but can also be dangerous.** Honor the age requirements for these sites. Monitor regularly. Let your children know there may be long-term consequences for postings such as school discipline, getting a job or into college. At least 25% of colleges regularly check the online postings of prospective students.
- **If someone cyberbullies you, never respond.** Save the message. Tell an adult. If physical threats or violence are part of the message, call the police.

NEEDHAM'S POLICIES AND BULLYING REPORTING PROCEDURES

HOW SHOULD I REPORT A BULLYING INCIDENT THAT TAKES PLACE AT SCHOOL?

The district expects students, parents/guardians, staff, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation to report it to the school principal or designee without delay.

**Incident Report forms are available at the school offices or
www.rwd1.needham.k12.ma.us/student_development/Bullying_Prevention**

It is helpful to report: what specifically happened, who committed the alleged acts, who was present or may have information about the events, where and when (date, time) the events occurred. The report may be made anonymously, however no disciplinary action may be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report. A student who knowingly makes a false accusation of bullying or retaliation will be subject to disciplinary action.

HOW WILL THE SCHOOL RESPOND?

The school will investigate all reports, giving consideration to the circumstances, including the nature of the allegations and the ages of the students involved. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, a disciplinary response and an educational response will be determined for the aggressor. The needs of the target will be evaluated, and the safety and support for the target will be a priority of the school's principal. The school will notify the parent/guardian of both the target and aggressor, and the school's procedures for responding to it. This notice will indicate what action is being taken to prevent any further acts of bullying or retaliation. If the school principal has a reasonable basis to believe that the incident may involve criminal conduct, the principal or designee will notify the local law enforcement agency.

Specific information about disciplinary action taken will not be released to the target's parents or guardians, unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations. Schools are limited in how much information can be shared; parents of targets often want to know what punishment the aggressor received. FERPA privacy laws prevent the school from sharing that information. For more on school's responsibilities under FERPA go to www.marccenter.org and click on "Why Is It Confidential?"

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO TARGETS, AGGRESSORS

The Guidance staff at each school is responsible for identifying the resources and services needed by targets, aggressors, and their families, and for making referrals for those services. Services may include counseling provided by the guidance staff, and/or resources and services available in the community such as Needham Youth Services and Riverside Community Care. Project Interface, a local mental health referral service is also accessible by guidance staff.

After a bullying incident has been investigated and confirmed, the guidance counselor or the Principal's designee will develop a school action plan to insure the emotional and physical safety of all students.

The action plan, developed in collaboration with the target, and shared with his/her parents or guardians, will specify the following:

- A trusted adult in the school who will be available to the target as needed
- If needed, a "script" that the target will follow whenever he/she feels intimidated or "at risk" from the aggressor for continued bullying or retaliation
- A description of the level of supervision to be provided during identified periods of the day when the target desires protection
- Any other actions that the school will take to insure a safe school environment for the target

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

As required by law, when the Individual Education Program (IEP) Team determines the student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her disability, the Team will consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing. The district has created documents that will guide the discussion of each student's needs in regards to social skills development at the IEP Team meeting.

NEEDHAM'S BULLYING POLICY AND STUDENT HANDBOOKS

Guidelines for conduct have been written for inclusion in Student Handbooks beginning September 2011. All student handbooks are available online at www.needham.k12.ma.us. Click on "schools" to find a particular school's Handbook. Needham School Committee's approved bullying policy and conduct guidelines are also available at the district Bullying Prevention website:

http://rwd1.needham.k12.ma.us/student_development/Bullying_Prevention

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

It is the policy of Needham Public Schools not to discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, national origin, color, homelessness, sexual orientation, age or disability in its education programs, services, activities or employment activities.

THE FOUNDATION OF PREVENTION: NEEDHAM'S SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM

At the Needham Schools we believe that social/emotional learning (SEL) provides the foundation for effective bullying prevention. Needham's SEL program focuses on teaching kids not just about topics like bullying, but skills for learning, working and playing with others that can be applied in high stakes situations such as bullying.

Skill Competencies	Learning & Applying Skills
Skill competencies are defined in three areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decision-making• Self-management• Interpersonal/communication skills	Implementation of the program focuses on three key components: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching skills• Creating the structures and routines that allow students to practice those skills• Creating a school culture that is conducive to positive social interactions

More about SEL at: http://rwd1.needham.k12.ma.us/student_development/

BULLYING PREVENTION LESSONS WITHIN THE SEL PROGRAM

Specific bullying prevention curriculum is layered within Needham's SEL program. Anchor programs at each level include:

- **Preschool:** *Smart Start*
- **Elementary:** *Second Step* for skill-building; *Steps to Respect* for bullying prevention; *Responsive Classroom* for practices/routines/classroom culture
- **Middle:** Advisory (20 minutes per day in groups of around 14 students with an advisor); Bullying prevention curriculum; Health curriculum
- **High:** Mentor Homeroom (10 minutes per day); *Positive Coaching Alliance* for athletics; Health curriculum

ABOUT SECOND STEP AND STEPS TO RESPECT

Second Step provides direct instruction in social skills aimed at reducing impulsive and aggressive behavior while increasing social competence. Through 20-25 lessons per grade level, role-plays, picture cards or videos of children in everyday social situations are used to teach children to:

- identify and understand their own and others' emotions,
- reduce impulsiveness and choose positive goals, and
- manage their emotional reactions and decision-making process when emotionally aroused.

In Kindergarten-4th grades, *Second Step* is supplemented by specific bullying lessons. In 5th grade, *Second Step* is replaced or augmented by its sister bullying prevention program called *Steps to Respect*. It teaches students to recognize, refuse, and report bullying, be assertive, and build friendships. Go to www.cfchildren.org for more information. A sample lesson on bystander involvement may be downloaded at: <http://www.cfchildren.org/media/files/str%5Fms%5Flesson.pdf>

RESOURCES

NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS BULLYING PREVENTION INFORMATION

http://rwd1.needham.k12.ma.us/student_development/Bullying_Prevention

NEEDHAM YOUTH SERVICES

NYS is a mental health resource providing professional and confidential clinical and programmatic services. Services include support, information, and direction to youth and families on issues such as family, social, peer, stress, loss, alcohol, drug, and other youth-related concerns

www.needhamma.gov/youth

MASSACHUSETTS GUIDE TO BULLYING PREVENTION

The guide is a 123 page easy-to-read comprehensive source for a wide range of information for parents and schools.

www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/com_health/violence/bullying_prevent_guide.pdf

OTHER HELPFUL WEBSITES:

www.MARCcenter.org

www.safeyouth.org

www.kidshealth.org

www.stopbullynow.hrsa.gov

www.familyinternet.about.com

www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org

<http://www.preventbullying.org/problem.html>

WEBSITES FOCUSED ON TECHNOLOGY:

www.onguardonline.gov/topics/net-cetera.aspx

www.ikeepSAFE.org/PRC/

www.connectsafely.org

www.netsmartz.org

www.getnetwise.org

www.staysafeonline.org

www.cyberbully411.org

www.netfamilynews.org

In 2010 Massachusetts adopted M.G.L. c. 71, section 370, a bullying prevention and intervention law. The new law requires school districts to develop and adopt bullying prevention and intervention plans. This parent guidebook is intended to inform parents about bullying and engage parents in our bullying prevention efforts.