

Together, anything is possible!



A Parent Guide for Addressing Bullying in New Brunswick Schools

This is the first in a series of brochures that will be made available to you.

Introduction

In this brochure, the main focus will be on bullying, which is one form of hurtful behavior. Bullying is a problem in homes, schools and communities. Importantly, it is not only a problem of youth but is one that spans all ages. It is a complex social issue requiring passion, leadership and courage to address.



The Key Components of Bullying

- It involves intentionally hurting another person.
- There is a power imbalance between the people involved.
- Bullying behavior is often repeated.

Various Forms of Bullying

Verbal Bullying: Repeated verbal attacks that take the form of insults, racist remarks, homophobic slurring, taunting, belittling, cruel criticism, and sexually suggestive/abusive remarks are some examples.

Physical Bullying: This can include unwanted touching in the form of slapping, hitting, choking, punching, kicking, twisting of limbs, spitting, etc.

Social/Relational Bullying: This form of bullying is often difficult to detect as this takes place in the form of isolation, shunning and exclusion and is used to alienate and reject a peer or intentionally ruin friends through the use of rumours.

Cyber/Digital Bullying: The use of technology to verbally, socially, or psychologically attack someone.

Facts About Bullying

Fact 1: Bullying is a community problem, not just a school one. As a main institution in children's lives, schools can play a leadership role in addressing bullying problems.

Fact 2: Without intervention, a significant proportion of youth who bully others in childhood will continue to use their power negatively through adolescence and into adulthood.

Fact 3: Given the power imbalance that exists between the child who bullies and the child who is victimized, it is incredibly difficult for children who are being victimized to remove themselves from this destructive relationship. Children need to be encouraged to report bullying and be given multiple strategies to make these reports. Adults must convey the message that they want to know about children's experiences and that it is their job to make the bullying stop.



Conflict vs. Bullying

It is important to distinguish between conflict and bullying. While the two seem similar in some instances, there are actually distinct differences.

Conflict is:

- Occasional.
- Uncomfortable but is not intended to hurt.
- When there is no power imbalance between the people involved.
- Where there is an effort to solve the problem.
- A normal part of human interaction.
- Can often be worked through by the individuals involved and school staff should only intervene if the people involved cannot resolve it on their own.

Bullying is:

- Often repeated.
- Intended to hurt.
- When there is a power imbalance between the people involved.
- When there is no effort to solve the problem by the person who bullied.
- A part of unhealthy relationships.
- Should always be reported to school staff.

Signs That Your Child May Be Getting Bullied

- Acts moody, sullen, or withdraws from family interaction.
- Loses interest in school work or grades drop.
- Loses appetite and has difficulty sleeping.
- Arrives home with torn clothes, unexplained bruises.
- Asks for extra money for school lunch or supplies, extra allowance.
- Refuses to go to school.
- Possible depression, anxiety.

Why Reporting Bullying is So Important

It is crucial that parents make their children aware that when they see bullying occurring, they need to report it to a trusted adult at the school. Children need to be aware that if they don't report it, they may be allowing the person engaged in bullying to continue to hurt the victim and potentially others as well. If your child is not comfortable reporting on their own, encourage them to do so with a group of students that they trust or to do so with you present. Find out how bullying can be reported at your child's school and encourage your child to speak up when it does occur.

What You Can Do to Make It Easier for Your Child to Report Bullying To You

- Tell them you're proud and glad that they came to you; then ask your child to walk you through the incident.
- Don't ignore the problem. Ask the school for help and ensure you have all of the facts about a situation before moving ahead with any course of action.
- Be as neutral as possible when addressing the incident with your child by being aware that your verbal and non-verbal reactions need to remain positive towards the school.
- If you do not agree with the school, avoid expressing that to your child. When in disagreement, meet with the school discretely.
- Work closely and positively with the school involved and avoid directing your concerns and frustrations to the media or social media.
- Create a safe environment for your children to tell you about being bullied.
- Reinforce the idea that if they are being bullied, it is not their fault.
- Encourage your child to have a trusted adult at school that they can talk to and report to.
- Talk to your child and his or her friends about the importance of using social skills such as empathy, assertiveness, self-regulation, communication, etc.
- Remember that schools are limited in what they can tell you about another child –don't expect to get information about what happens to the person/people who engaged in the bullying behaviour. The school cannot tell you.

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Ways of Developing Healthy Relationships With Your Child's School

Introduce Yourself to the Teacher - Don't wait for a problem before making contact. Find a way to say hello, to help the teacher attach your face to your name, and to make a cordial connection.

Be Honest and Open - When discussing your child's behavior with school staff be open to their considerations and concerns and be honest about your own experiences with your child's behavior.

Think "Harm Reduction," Not Zero Tolerance - Work with school staff to develop a positive and realistic set of steps or action plans for your child who may be misbehaving. Don't assert "zero tolerance" for their misbehaviours but instead work with staff on ways of reducing the harm the child is doing to him/herself and/or others. Encourage and model corrective behavior instead of simply meting out punishment for misbehavior.

Get the Whole Story in Regards to an Incident - When your child makes you aware of his/her misbehavior or that of some other child, do not assume that you have all of the information. Work with the school to ensure that you have all of the information related to the misbehavior and assist them in coming up with positive solutions.

Be involved in Some of Your Child's School-related Extracurricular Activities - A wonderful way to promote positive and healthy relationships with school staff is to volunteer for a before or after school program where you can have opportunities to get to know school staff away from the classroom.

Remember the Golden Rule - Always assume good will on the teacher's part. People go into this profession because they like kids and they love the process of teaching and learning. Don't go by anyone else's (including your child's) opinion – especially if it's negative.

Make Regular Contact - When contacting your child's teacher, don't call him or her during the school day and expect to be put right through to him or her. Also, don't say to the person who answers the phone "Tell her John Jones called" and expect the teacher to know who you are and that you would like a return call. Leave a message identifying whose parent you are and leave as much detail as you feel comfortable sharing about why you are calling. If you would like a call back, make sure to mention that in your message.

Please note that it may take a few different strategies to solve the issue, so please do not give up on the school if the hurtful behaviour doesn't stop immediately. Instead keep reporting incidents and be in contact with the school so the school knows if their strategies to stop the behaviour are working.

What If Your Child Is Engaging in Bullying Behaviour?

- Report your child's difficulty to school staff.
- Support the consequences taken by the school at home.
- Discuss the short term and long term impact of your child's behaviour.
- Ask the school for assistance to help build supports to change negative behaviour.
- Help your child develop relationship/social skills.
- Support your child in learning how they can make restitution for the harm they have caused.
- Stay in touch with the school and ask about the steps they are taking so they can be reinforced and supported at home.
- Communicate with the school appropriately and participate in the solution.



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What You Should Expect From School Staff:

- To develop and implement a shared school wide definition of "respect".
- To build and maintain positive relationships with you and with your child.
- To build resiliency in your child through increasing positive connections with school and developing cognitive skills.
- To respond effectively to negative peer actions.
- To keep you informed of positive and negative behaviours that your child is engaging in while at school.
- To follow-up with you when negative behavior that involves your child is reported to the school
- To have a clear set of response and report protocols that include the following: strategies to help targets of negative behavior gain emotional support, strategies for helping those who engage in negative behavior correct their behaviours and strategies that involve positive supports for those who are bystanders to the behavior.

List of Other Available Resources:

PREVNet:

<http://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/parents>

Kids Help Phone:

<http://org.kidshelpphone.ca//en/bullying-awareness>

Stop Bullying Now:

<http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/parents.htm>

Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center:

<http://marccenter.webs.com/parents>

Canadian Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.ca/what-we-do/violence-bullying-and-abuse-prevention>

For further information please contact:

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References:

About.com-Child Parenting

PREVNet

Stop Bullying Now

York Region Anti-Bullying Coalition

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