

The DC Office of Human Rights' (OHR) Frequently Asked Questions
About Youth Bullying Prevention Program

I. Purpose

This document, provided by the D.C. Office of Human Rights (OHR), addresses frequently asked questions about the Youth Bullying Prevention Program. It is designed to assist students, parents, and schools in understanding the program and its compliance requirements.

II. General Questions

- **What is Bullying?**
 - Bullying is described as any **severe, pervasive, or persistent conduct that must be reasonably predicted to** place a youth in reasonable fear of physical harm to themselves or their property, negatively affect their physical or mental health, interfere with their attendance or performance, or hinder their ability to participate in services, activities, or benefits provided by an educational institution, government agency, or grantee. Bullying can be physical, verbal, emotional, or electronic and may be based on characteristics such as race, religion, sex, or personal appearance.
 - The official definition can be found in the Code of the District of Columbia § 2-1535.01(2A). [§ 2-1535.01. Definitions. | D.C. Law Library \(dccouncil.gov\)](#)

- **Why does bullying happen?**
 - Children may bully someone else for a variety of reasons, but research tells us that these are the most common:
 - Attention-seeking: The child is experiencing **trouble at home** and uses bullying to gain attention.
 - Modeling behavior: They may be **copying** behaviors they are seeing around them. For example, they were bullied in the past and now think it's ok to do the same to someone else.
 - Intolerance of differences: Bullying may happen, because someone is **unaccepting of differences**. It can sometimes be hard for children to understand differences in backgrounds, identities, or cultures.
 - Low self-esteem: The aggressor may be experiencing **low self-esteem** and choose to bully people they are jealous of to make themselves feel better by making the other person feel worse.
 - Note that these are **not the only reasons** why children choose to bully. It's crucial to understand the underlying reasons for bullying to provide appropriate support and resources.

- **What is the difference between bullying and conflict?**
 - **Bullying** usually includes **repeated** negative actions that are purposeful and pose a **serious threat**. As opposed to conflict, bullying includes an imbalance of power between the youth such as age, popularity, physical size, etc. The aggressor tends to not feel remorse, doesn't have a strong emotional reaction, and doesn't put in effort to solve the problem.
 - Age-appropriate actions, such as mutual teasing, staring, or roughhousing, are not considered bullying.
 - **Conflict** is a normal human interaction; it is accidental, **not serious**, and happens **occasionally**. The youth involved have equal amounts of power and no one is trying to gain anything. All parties have similar emotional reactions, put in equal effort to solve the problem, and responsibility is taken.

- **How do I know if someone is being bullied?**
 - It is difficult to know if a child is being bullied unless they tell you or you see the action happening, but there are physical and mental warning signs to look out for. **Physically**, the student may be fearful of going to school, have unexplained injuries, or they are constantly complaining about their health, such as having a stomachache or headache. **Mental signs** may include sudden failing grades, withdrawing or losing interest in seeing their friends, or displaying uncharacteristic feelings of sadness, anger, or depression.

- **What do I do if I see bullying happen or someone tells me they are being bullied?**
 1. **Gather information:** Ask questions and have the child describe/write down what happened in their own words.
 2. **Create a plan of action:** Ask the child what they would like you to do. It is important to remember that not all children want it to be reported, sometimes they only want to talk about what happened with a trusted adult.
 3. **Report if necessary:** If the situation is severe or the child wants it reported, file a report with your entity's Bullying Point of Contact (POC). The POC is required by law to investigate.
 - Every public/charter school, grantee, or government agency that works with youth is required to have a POC.
 - For schools, the Bullying POC can be found here. <https://ohr.dc.gov/page/knowyourpolicy>

- **It is common for children to never report being bullied. How can I make them feel more comfortable with telling me?**
 - Children often feel embarrassed or may believe adults won't help. As a result, the youth may choose to not tell anyone. To encourage reporting, it is important to **check in frequently** which will make the youth feel more comfortable to share insights about their day and helps to foster trust. Additionally, be an **active and supportive listener**.

Refrain from overreacting or having a negative outburst in response to any negative experiences the youth has disclosed as doing so could cause the youth to shut down. Finally, make sure to **follow through** if the youth ask you for help.

- **I filed a report, when will I be notified of the results?**
 - Once a report is filed, the investigation must be started within 2 days of receiving the report. Findings must be delivered within 30 days to all involved parties.
- **Who receives documentation about bullying investigation outcomes?**
 - All involved parties should receive documentation explaining the investigation's outcome. However, each party will only receive the **outcome pertinent to their specific involvement**. For example, if a parent files a report about their child being bullied, that parent will only receive the outcome related to their child. They will not be notified of the consequences the accused bully has received.
 - This may be frustrating for the parents of children who have been bullied, but it is **illegal** to share information about one student with another student's parent.
- **What are the potential consequences for a student found responsible for bullying?**

Consequences are determined by the **nature of the offense**, the **disciplinary history** of the youth involved, and the **age and developmental status** of the youth involved. The consequences can be both punitive and restorative. **Punitive measures** may include reprimand, deprivation of privileges, or ban/suspension from facilities. **Restorative measures** may include a plan to separate the involved parties, meetings with a social worker, an apology letter, or community service. Entities may also refer students to outside agencies for support.
- **What support can help my child who has been bullied?**
 - Schools are encouraged to implement measures that are **purposeful** and **limit** the likelihood of **additional negative incidents**. For example, your child could be assigned a buddy to be with them in places where the bullying occurred. Some other examples of support include daily check-ins with a trusted adult, weekly meetings with a school psychologist, or early class dismissal to limit potential contact with the aggressor. You know your child best, so it is important for families to communicate with the entity to establish what supports would work best for your child.
- **What if my child is being accused of bullying?**
 - If your child has been accused of bullying, the entity is required by law to **investigate the complaint**. During the investigation, staff will speak to the involved students and any witnesses.
 - It is important to remember that children only share what they want you to know. **Be open** to the possibility that more information may be uncovered during the investigation.

- Within 30 days of the accusation being filed, the outcome of the investigation will be shared. If the investigation finds that your child has exhibited harmful behaviors, whether it meets the legal definition of bullying or not, work with the entity to **create a plan** to address and correct your child's behavior.
- **Why is my child's aggressor not being expelled from school?**
 - The Youth Bullying Prevention Act of 2012 **discourages** schools from **overly relying on exclusionary discipline**, such as suspension and expulsion. Research shows that exclusionary discipline may result in negative outcomes for the student and the school community. Simply expelling students does not deal with whether the student is having trouble at home, mental health issues, etc. However, when necessary and in severe incidents of bullying, suspension or expulsion may be exercised at the entity's discretion.
- **What if I disagree with the outcome of a bullying investigation?**
 - If dissatisfied with the outcome, both the complainant and the respondent can **appeal** within 30 days of the investigation's conclusion. Full appeal procedures can be found in the entity's bullying prevention policy.
- **Is it only bullying if it includes physical harm?**
 - No, bullying can also be social, verbal, cyber, or based on enumerated traits. If actions prevent students from benefiting from the program they are enrolled in, harm their wellbeing, or interfere with their attendance, and are severe, persistent, or pervasive, it is considered bullying.

III. Additional Questions or Comments

If you have any further questions about the Youth Bully Prevention Program or the information in this document, please contact us via:

- E-mail: bullyingprevention@dc.gov
- In-Person: 441 4th Street NW, Suite 570N, Washington, DC 20001
- Phone: (202) 519-3333
- Webpage: Youth Bullying Prevention Program at https://bit.ly/OHR_YBBP

Please note that while OHR is available to answer questions to the best of our ability, any information provided should not be considered legal advice.