



Bullying Prevention

**A Guide for Parents of Students
with Disabilities**



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What is this Guide?



In May 2010, Massachusetts passed the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Law. It defines our legal responsibility and provides an opportunity for Boston Public Schools to enhance our efforts to prevent and stop bullying. Parents and school personnel must work together to ensure that every student comes to school safe and ready to learn.

This guide will help prepare parents and guardians of children with disabilities to talk with their children about bullying. It also provides some strategies for responding effectively when children are bullied. Strategies for preventing or stopping bullying should be included in children's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Working together, parents and school personnel can help create a bullying-free environment for all our students.

If you have questions about this guide or to report bullying, call the Boston Public Schools hotline: 617-592-2378.



What is Bullying?

Bullying is a form of emotional or physical abuse that has three defining characteristics:

- 1. Deliberate:** A bully's intention is to hurt someone.
Students with disabilities may misperceive a bully's hurtful intentions, or they may fail to comprehend the negative social consequences of their own behavior.
- 2. Repeated:** A bully often targets the same victim again and again.
Students with disabilities are at greater risk because they may not fully realize they are being bullied repeatedly.
- 3. Power imbalanced:** A bully chooses victims he or she perceives as vulnerable.
Students with disabilities are often targeted for bullying because they are perceived as vulnerable.

Bullying is different from conflict, fights, or disagreements. It must meet the above criteria.

It causes great harm!

It is not acceptable!

It is against the law!



Warning Signs of Bullying

It may be difficult to know when your child has been involved in bullying. Students with disabilities may have difficulty understanding, talking about, or communicating what happened. As a parent, there are signs you can look for and help you can get.

Warning signs of bullying include:

- Dislike of school or refusal to go to school
- Headaches, stomachaches, or other physical complaints
- Problems with eating and sleeping
- Unexplained damage or loss of clothing and other personal items
- Evidence of physical abuse, such as bruises and scratches
- Negative self-talk, self-harm, or loss of confidence
- Loss of friends or changes in friends
- Sudden (negative) change in behavior
- Depression, anxiety, fear, or panic
- Risky behavior, bullying others, or aggression



Talk to Your Child

If you suspect your child is being bullied, talk or otherwise communicate with your child and then speak with your child's teachers or principal.

When you talk to your child:

- Tell your child that reporting is important and telling is not *tattling*.
- Tell or show your child that this is not his or her fault.
- Ask for details, listen carefully, and watch your child's response.
- If there are physical signs (torn clothes, bruises), take pictures.
- Stay focused on your child and make her or him feel safe.
- Write down what your child tells or shows you.
- Help your child understand what bullying is and what to do to prevent and stop it.
- Get help from school administrators and professionals if needed.



Talk to Your Child's School

When you talk with your child's school:

- Talk to your child's teachers and the principal about the bullying.
- Be specific about where and when the bullying took place.
- Ask about the bullying prevention and intervention plan for your child's school.
- If your child's disability and/or social skills development makes your child a target for bullying, then the school must include strategies to address these needs in your child's IEP or 504 Plan.

Listen, write it down, and get help.

Examples of IEP Strategies:

- Staff supervision and assistance during unstructured times (in the hall, bus, playground, or cafeteria, before and after school)
- Individual or group-based social skills instruction, including communication and self-advocacy training
- Counseling or behavioral intervention plans



Resources

Boston Public Schools Anti-Bullying Resources:

www.bostonpublicschools.org/antibullying

Eyes on Bullying:

www.eyesonbullying.org

Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities:

www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/considerations-bully.html#VI

AbilityPath: Support for Parents of Children with Special Needs:

www.abilitypath.org

Walk a Mile in their Shoes: Bullying and the Child with Special Needs:

<http://www.abilitypath.org/areas-of-development/learning-schools/bullying/articles/walk-a-mile-in-their-shoes.pdf>





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Thank you to the students from the Boston Public Schools who served as models for the photographs in this guide.

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Portions of this guide were adapted from: Storey, K., Slaby, R. G., Adler, M., Minotti, J., & Katz, R. (2008). *Eyes on bullying toolkit*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Retrieved from <http://www.eyesonbullying.org/pdfs/toolkit.pdf>

