

What Youth Can Do If They Are Experiencing Bullying

No matter what form it takes, negative behavior directed at you hurts. If you're pushed, hit, or your things are ripped off or trashed, it hurts. If you're ignored by friends, humiliated by the actions of a classmate, or cruel things are posted about you online, it hurts. If it happens to you, you've probably asked yourself, "Why me?" You know how painful it is to be treated this way.

So seriously, if you think you are being bullied what can you do? A lot! It's not always easy to know what you should do, but it's important to know that you have options. These steps will help you with ideas.

1. Know how bullying is defined

If you ever wonder if you are being bullied, start by thinking about the dynamics of bullying and how it applies to your situation. Hallmarks typically include:

- The person is hurt emotionally or physically with aggressive, unwanted words or actions
- The behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated
- The person being hurt has a hard time stopping or preventing the behavior
- The hurtful behavior is carried out by those who have more real or perceived "power" in ways such as higher social status, is physically larger, has access to embarrassing information, or is emotionally intimidating

Are You Being Bullied?

Access the interactive checklist!

PACERteensagainstbullying.org/advocacy-for-self/are-you-being-bullied

It's important to know that bullying can happen to anyone—and it's not always so easy to recognize. If you are still trying to determine if you're experiencing bullying, take a look at the checklist below. Read each of the following questions and check any boxes you think might apply to your situation.

- Do other students make mean comments about you?
- Have you ever been called hurtful names?
- Are you teased for how you look or act?
- Do you feel alone or isolated at school?
- Has anyone ever spread mean or untrue rumors about you?

- Are you ever purposely excluded from a group?
- Have you ever felt that someone you thought of as a friend is trying to control you?
- Has someone ever touched you in a way that felt inappropriate, demeaning, or threatening?
- Has anyone ever mocked or mimicked the way you talk or act?
- Has anyone ever damaged your belongings?
- Do other students physically hurt you on purpose?
- Are you ever afraid to go to school?
- Do you get anxious about how you are treated by other kids at school?
- Have photos of you ever been posted online without your permission?
- Has anyone ever pretended to be you on social media?
- Have people posted mean things about you online or commented in a mean way on your posts?

The more boxes you check, the more likely it is you are being bullied.

2. Embrace these important points

- No one ever deserves to be bullied
- You have the right to ask for help to stop the behavior
- Your opinion about what to do is important
- You don't have to go through the bullying experience alone

Remember the bullying is not your fault and know that it's natural to feel emotions such as sadness, fear, loneliness, anger, or confusion as a result of it. Sometimes, we have the tendency to minimize how bullying makes us feel, but it's so important to pay attention to and recognize your feelings and how the actions of others affect how you feel. The next step is to start thinking through what you can do.

3. Recognize the issue, think about ways to take action

If you are experiencing bullying, think through some of the issues you may encounter, as well as how you can take action:

The issue: I don't want to tell anyone.

How to take action: Tell someone you trust.

Those who bully depend on their targets being silent, as it allows their behavior to continue without consequences. Your natural reaction to bullying might be to isolate yourself from peers and family; it may be too painful, hurtful, or embarrassing to even talk about. And yes, it can be really hard to talk about what's happening. As difficult as it might be, it's important to connect with someone and share what you are going through. Ideally, you'll talk about it with a parent or an adult whom you trust. If you don't feel comfortable telling an adult, start by confiding in a friend and asking them to help you sort through your situation with a goal of talking to an adult about it.

The issue: I don't want to be called a snitch

How to take action: Recognize that the goal of using that label is to silence you.

Reporting is sharing legitimate information to protect yourself or another person. Tattling is more commonly done with ulterior motives, such as to intentionally get another person into trouble. When you are being bullied, the person bullying you may try to keep you silent by trying to shame you into thinking you are doing something wrong by telling. They want you to be silent so that there are no consequences for their behavior.

The issue: I was told this was just the way it is.

How to take action: Know there are laws designed to address bullying.

There are state and federal laws that provide protections against bullying and harassment. In general, schools will have a bullying prevention policy, which addresses the right to be safe at school. Research your school's policy about bullying prevention, state laws that apply to bullying, and how to report inappropriate behavior to social media. Learn, on your own or with the help of others, how each of these can be used to assert your rights.

You may have additional protections under federal law when the bullying is about:

- Race, color, or national origin
- Sex or gender
- Religion
- Disability

State and local laws may provide additional protections on other bases, including sexual orientation.



The issue: I already told someone and nothing changed.

How to take action: Don't give up; tell another person.

If you told an adult about a bullying situation and it wasn't helpful, continue to be a self-advocate. Know that you have the right to speak up for yourself and let another adult know what you need to feel safe. As a next step, think through who else you can tell, such as a parent, a school administrator, a favorite teacher, a counselor, or another adult in the community whom you trust. Then share important information with them, either in person or in writing. Make sure to include:

- A description of the bullying
- Where and when it happened
- Who is involved
- Steps that you have taken

Sometimes it's helpful to remind the adults you speak with about the laws or school's bullying prevention policy that outline their responsibility in handling bullying situations. Then, ask for advice and their help to address the situation.

The issue: This is only happening online.

How to take action: Document, block, and report.

There are three main action steps when bullied on social media, texting, or other electronic means.

1. **Document:** Your initial impulse might be to delete a harmful post, but once you do that it could be lost. Instead, think through if you want to keep evidence of the bullying, so that the information can be shared with an adult. Take a screen shot and save it to your files or capture the content in a manner comfortable to you.
2. **Block:** Remove the opportunity for the person to contact you.
3. **Report:** Tell someone what's happened. Just as you deserve to be safe at school, you deserve to feel safe online, too. Let someone know, a parent or a trusted adult, and show them the evidence of the bullying. You can also report the individual to the social media or service provider.

The issue: I'm told that I don't fit in.

How to take action: Find others with similar interests. Learn to embrace and nurture what sets you apart. There's so much pressure to try to fit in when you're a teen. Yet, the irony is that no two people are the same. Think through what you like to do, and then seek opportunities to connect with those that share your interests. It might be hard to recognize right now, but the very attributes, talents, or interests that you are being teased about are often the traits that eventually become your strengths. Think about the person interested in technology who could go on to pursue that computer science degree, or the child who spends all their time reading and grows up to write best-selling novels.

The issue: I'm being bullied by my teacher, coach, or another adult.

How to take action: Talk with your parent or guardian.

Bullying is about power and the power dynamic between an adult and a student usually favors the adult. It is generally not helpful, and often not safe, to confront an adult about their behavior. It's important that you share what's happening with a parent or a trusted adult, as their advice and action is critical in this type of situation.

The issue: I'm being bullied outside of school.

How to take action: Do your best to remove yourself from the situation and report it.

Bullying can happen in the neighborhood where you live, at your favorite store, or on a city street. It's important to know that most laws address bullying that happens at school. If you are being bullied, for example, during the summer or on weekends at your local park or grocery store, report it to the adults who are in charge. This might be the store owner, the park patrol, or even a police officer. Most bullying happens outside the view of adults, which makes it very important that you report it, so adults can keep you safe and hold those who are bullying accountable.

4. Address the bullying and be your own (self) advocate

Now that you have a better understanding of the issues, it's time to think about how to be your own (self) advocate and trust that change can happen when action is taken. The very definition of change is that something different happens; trying another approach creates the opportunity for new outcomes. Positive change is much more likely to occur when you practice self-advocacy skills, which means thinking through what you need, sharing that information, and asking for help.

First, being a self-advocate does not mean you have to fix the situation on your own. It means that your ideas and perspective are important. Self-advocacy means learning to speak up for yourself, telling people what you need, and taking action. Start by creating your own plan—either on your own or with a trusted adult—that works for you and your situation. This is an opportunity to develop a strategy to change what's happening to you. In your plan, include:

- What is happening to you, when and where it takes place, and who is involved.
- What you would like to change, how things could be different, and what would help you gain control over the situation.
- Your role in this action plan, who else should be involved, and what they could do.

Once you've created a plan, share it with an adult so they can support you in a way that makes you feel comfortable. Express your ideas and learn to respectfully disagree if you don't feel confident with other options presented. Your voice is important and your opinions on what to do matter.

Next Step

Be a self-advocate, learn how to create your own Student Action Plan.

PACERteensagainstabullying.org/advocacy-for-self/student-action-plan