



STEPS TO TAKE IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

PARENT CHECK-LIST

□ FIRST, TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Your emotions may be high when you find out that your child is being bullied or cyberbullied, and that is normal, but please remember that your child may also be upset and scared too. They will monitor your reactions when they tell you what is or has happened. Children worry about the perceived pressure that they put on us as parents. All of this means to take a deep breath, do your best to speak and act calmly while empathizing with them and validating their feelings.

□ GATHER INFORMATION

Talk with your child about their experiences, actively listen to them, and thank them for opening up to you. Being vulnerable is incredibly difficult. You will want to gather specifics around the situation including:

- ✓ Who is/was involved?
- ✓ What has happened?
 - Verbal?
 - Physical?
 - Social/Relational?
 - Cyber?
- ✓ What days and times did the bullying incident(s) take place?
- ✓ Where did the bullying take place?
- ✓ Did you tell a trusted adult in the school? If yes, who?

□ CONFIRM BULLYING IS TAKING PLACE

Bullying is an *aggressive behavior* that involves an *imbalance of power*. Bullying is *repeated over time* and can take many forms, such as hitting, punching, or shoving (physical bullying); teasing, taunting, name-calling, or sexual remarks (verbal bullying); intimidation using gestures, spreading rumors, or social exclusion (psychological or social bullying).

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites.

Your child may be experiencing harassment if bullying behaviors are based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or religion.

□ CREATE A WRITTEN RECORD

Build a timeline outlining all bullying incidents, including dates, individuals involved, and your child's account of the event. If applicable, be sure to include any screen shots/pictures, medical records of any physical injury, psychological assessments from a mental health provider, police reports or tape recordings.

*Note: Tape recordings may be inadmissible in a court hearing depending on the state you live in.

□ WORK WITH YOUR CHILD

Sometimes children are fearful of adult intervention because they believe (justifiably) that it will “make things worse.” Validate those concerns and listen nonjudgmentally to any feelings your child is experiencing. Additionally, talk about what can be done to help make school a safer, more comfortable learning environment for them. Discuss with your child what bullying is and practical ways handle these situations when they occur. Consider role playing.

□ PROTECT YOURSELF & YOUR CHILD ONLINE

If your child is being cyberbullied, be sure to block the online aggressor by updating privacy settings and blocking phone numbers/users. Should the behavior continue, consider changing your child’s email address, account/user name, or phone number. Report all abuse to online services providers.

As a parent, please avoid taking your concerns online. By posting about your child’s situation on your own personal social media, you may unknowingly worsen the situation. Try finding support by working with the school and other agencies who can better assist you and your child during these difficult times.

□ WORK WITH YOUR CHILD’S SCHOOL

If the situation cannot be safely resolved or continues to worsen, then you may need to talk to the school. Be sure to include your child in this decision and discuss how much involvement they’d like to have. When meeting with the school, you’ll want to follow the chain of command, typically in this order:

1. Child’s Teacher
2. Child’s School Counselor
3. Assistant or Grade Level Principal
4. Head Principal
5. Superintendent
6. Board of Education

If your child is experiencing harassment, you can get additional support through the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division.

*Note: Parochial or private schools do not have the same chain of command as a traditional public school.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL

1. Prior to the Meeting

Write a letter or email to the appropriate person regarding your child’s current bullying situation with a request to meet in person. Be sure to outline all efforts to help your child, while being assertive about your child’s needs.

Organize all information and pertinent questions prior to your meeting. You will want to decide if anyone else will be asked to attend the meeting (ex. spouse, friend, teacher, and/or counselor).

2. During the Meeting

Ask: *What can be done to keep your child safe in school physically and emotionally so he/she/they can learn?*

Explain the impact this is having on your child (i.e. unable to attend school due to fear, physical aches, withdrawn socially). Discuss any and all work you have done with your child. Depending on the situation and your child, he/she/they may be able to write a letter sharing some of their feelings.

Share all recorded information including documentation, including the timeline of events, witnesses, medical notes, psychological assessments, police reports, cyberbullying online report, etc.

Either bring a copy of the schools written bullying policy or ask for it there.

Bring your state’s laws and/or policies.

StopBullying.Gov at www.stopbullying.gov/laws/index.html

Work together, to determine an appropriate plan of action with school staff to ensure your child has support while at school. Your child's opinions and feelings when making this plan matter!

Keep written record at this meeting, including who was present, what was discussed, any decisions, outcomes, plans and solutions to ensure accountability as well as any additional follow-up commitments.

3. Following the Meeting

Send a follow-up letter or email that summarizes the discussion and any resulting actions.

Should the situation not improve or worsen after several weeks (or after the determine amount of time required to put supports in place), you may decide to move up the chain of command (i.e. from the principal to superintendent).

□ WORKING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OR LEGAL AID

If your child has been physically assaulted or has been seriously threatened, contact the police immediately. Be sure to keep a written record of all offenses committed against your child and any time you have contacted the school in case you contact law enforcement officials.

If the problem persists or escalates and school is unable to stop the bullying, you might consider consulting an attorney.

□ WORKING WITH HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

If there are any signs that your child is hurting themselves or poses a threat to their own safety, please take them seriously and seek professional help immediately. For crisis support, call 9-1-1, go to the nearest emergency room, or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Bullying can be extremely traumatic and require additional social and emotional support. Consider therapeutic opportunities such as counseling for your child. Their health and wellness is priority.

To find a mental health provider:

- Parents can start by asking for a referral from your child's pediatrician or search online.
- Schools and MMF staff can provide parents with community agency information with relevant counseling services.

Warning signs that your child is in a psychological crisis might include the following:

Verbal Cues

- "Life isn't worth living"
- "I'd be better off dead"
- "I feel there is no way out"
- "My family would be better off without me"
- "Next time I will take enough pills to do the job right"
- "You can take my (prized collection/valuables) - I don't need this stuff anymore"
- "I won't be in your way much longer"

Behavioral Cues

- Getting affairs in order (ex. paying a debt)
- Giving away prized possessions or money
- Signs of planning a suicide (ex. buying a weapon)
- Making funeral plans
- Increase in self-destructive or violent behaviors (ex. drinking alcohol/drug use)
- Social Withdrawal
- Increased impulsivity & taking unnecessary risks

Emotional Cues

- Unrelenting low mood
- Pessimism
- Hopelessness
- Desperation
- Anxiety, psychic pain, and inner tension
- Rage or anger