Merced City School District (MCSD) Anti-Bullying Handbook

Merced City School District

OUR VISION

Our students have the academic skills and personal characteristics to continue their learning journey, pursuing their passions and talents.

OUR MISSION

All students are ensured equitable access to high-quality instruction in environments that value and build from their unique talents. Guiding students toward mastery of academics, we build from our students talents to nurture their continuous academic achievement, critical-thinking skills, and develop the resiliency, perseverance and confidence necessary to excel in learning and life. Our District team provides positive, inclusive environments where all students feel safe, respected, and connected.

OUR PROMISE

All students are empowered and nurtured to build personal success and contribute to society.

OUR CORE VALUES

We are committed to:

- Providing safe, inclusive, and welcoming schools for all our students, staff, and families.
- Developing confidence, curiosity, perseverance, and resiliency to ensure students can excel in their learning and life.
- Engaging our families to help them be part of the school community, support their student's learning, and underscore the importance of learning across their students' educational career Pre-K through eighth grade and beyond.
- Allocate resources to support the vision, mission, and goals for our students.

Handbook Table of Contents

Pages 2 to 7

Purpose and Commitment of MCSD

- Scope of the Anti-Bullying Policy
- Student Concern Form and Stopit App
- Definitions of Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment, Disability Harassment, Racial Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Human Trafficking, Online Harassment, and Hazing
- Notice of Prohibition Against Bullying and Anti-Bullying Interventions

Page 8 to 9

- Reporting Intimidation, Harassment, or Bullying Behavior
- Student and Staff Responsibilities
- Reporting Procedures
- Parental Notification and Follow-Up

Pages 10 to 11

Investigating Intimidation, Harassment, or Bullying Behavior

- Investigation Procedures
- Administrative Roles and Reporting
- Protection Measures
- Documentation and Record Keeping
- Consequences for Bullying
- Progressive Discipline and Interventions

Pages 12 to 13

- Consequences for Knowingly Making False Reports
- Threats of Violence
- Policy and Procedures
- Reporting and Law Enforcement Notification
- Disciplinary Actions
- Why Deal with Bullying?
- Impact of Bullying

Pages 14 to 15

- Bullying Prevention Activities
- Schoolwide Activities
- Classroom Activities
- Individual-Level Activities

Pages 16 to 17

- Warning Signs of Being Bullied

Pages 18 to 19

- Warning Signs That Your Child May Be a Bully

Pages 20-23

- How to Help Your Child Deal with Bullying
- How to Help If Your Child Is Bullying Others

Pages 24

- Student Strategies
- Reporting and Using the Stopit App
- Helpful Bystanders
- Role of Bystanders in Prevention
- Actions of a Helpful Bystander

Pages 25

- Reporting Tools and Support

PURPOSE & COMMITMENT

The Merced City School District is committed to providing an educational environment for all students, employees, volunteers, and families that is free from harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

Our school environments will support a total learning experience that promotes personal growth, healthy interpersonal relationships, wellness, and freedom from discrimination and abuse.

Therefore, harassment, intimidation, and bullying are dangerous and disrespectful behaviors that will not be tolerated by either students, staff members, or parents. This anti-bullying handbook is in alignment to **MCSD Board Policy BP 5131.2** and thus includes acts of bullying committed on campus, off campus at school-related events, and online.

It is of the highest importance to provide a safe environment for all students to be educated academically, to learn appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral skills, and thus become strong, educated students ready to achieve success in all areas of their lives.

We are addressing bullying, harassment, and intimidation districtwide through the following steps:

Implementation of a ‘Student Concern Form’ and Stopit App at each school. The purpose of the reporting form is to provide all students with a tangible and confidential method of reporting incidents of bullying to the administration.

This form will be accessible in all classrooms, counselors' offices, and with building administration. If students need help filling out the form, a classroom teacher, the counselor, or any staff member can support the student.

If a staff member witnesses a bullying incident, they will intervene and they will fill out the form. It is to be returned to the building administrator/program specialist. Staff will follow up with students within 24 hours or during the next school day following receipt of the form. After investigating, the staff will reach out to the student's family.

Implementation of an anti-bullying curriculum for elementary and middle school students. This curriculum will be facilitated by designated staff at each school.

Implementation of support activities for students who are victims of bullying. These activities will include support groups and individual meetings with school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, behavior analysts, and behavior technicians.

Implementation of consistent disciplinary responses across all schools for students involved in bullying incidents. As deemed necessary, responses may include the removal from the school site and access to support services.

Reintroduce MCSD staff to the Stopit App and ensure site leadership presents the use of this app to our students. Counseling and/or skill building for the Target, aggressor, and/or Bystanders will be implemented when needed to improve school climate.

Encouraging mediation and restorative practices gives students practice at solving conflicts with others.The negative actions of some may not be intentional but it is important that the aggressor understand their actions may negatively affect others.

Definitions

Definitions align with California Ed Code 48900(r); which provides guidance on bullying, hazing, and harassment.

1. "Bullying" means any one sided, intentional, repeated, and pervasive written, verbal, electronic online messages, posts, or texts, physical act or gesture, or a pattern thereof, that is intended to cause distress upon one or more students in the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at a designated bus stop, or at school activities or sanctioned events.

Bullying involves an imbalance of strength and/or power between the bully and the target. Bullying includes, but is not limited to, hazing, harassment, intimidation, or menacing acts of a student which may, but need not be based on the student's race, color, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

WHAT BULLYING LOOKS LIKE

1. A reasonable person under these circumstances may experience:

   a. A sense of fear of physical harm or damage to students' property

   b. Physical harming or damaging of the students' property

   c. Insulting or demeaning any student or group of students in such a way as to disrupt or interfere with the school's educational mission or the education of any student

   d. To purposely destroy ones confidence in themselves including but not limited to their appearance, speech pattern, educational development, etc. (Such as defined under "Disability Harassment" below.)

   e. Encouraging others to continue the negative actions, such as cheering on a fight.

2. **"Cyberbullying"** is when someone repeatedly uses digital devices and the internet to hurt, harass, or embarrass another person

3. **"Harassment"** means knowingly pursuing a pattern of conduct that is intended to annoy, alarm, or terrorize another person.

4. **"Disability Harassment"** is defined as intimidation or abusive behavior

toward a student based on disability that creates a hostile environment by interfering with or denying a student's participation in or receipt of benefits, services, or opportunities in the district. Harassment and Disability Harassment includes but is not limited to:

a. Verbal acts, teasing, use of sarcasm, jokes

b. Name-calling, belittling

c. Nonverbal behavior; such as graphic or written statements

d. Conduct that is physically threatening, harmful, or humiliating

e. Inappropriate physical restraint by any member of our district or student.

5. "**Racial Harassment"** consists of physical or verbal conduct relating to an individual's race when the conduct: a. Has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive academic environment; b. Has the purpose or effect of substantially or unreasonably interfering with an individual's academic performance; or c. Otherwise, it adversely affects an individual's academic opportunities.

6. **"Sexual Harassment"** means any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other inappropriate verbal, written, gestures, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment may take place under any of the following circumstances: a. When submission to such conduct is made, explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of obtaining an education; or b. Submission to or rejection of that conduct or communication by an individual is used to factor in decisions affecting that individual's education; or c. That conduct or communication has the purpose or effect of substantially or unreasonably interfering with an individual's education, or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive educational environment.

7. **"Human Trafficking"** the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service, typically in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation. Human trafficking frequently affects school-age children, and traffickers often target vulnerable youth on or around school grounds. Schools are critical in protecting students through awareness programs, staff training, and safety protocols.

8. **"Online harassment" or "cyber harassment"** involves using digital technology to repeatedly target someone with actions like threats, insults, bullying, or the non-consensual sharing of private information to cause fear, distress, or harm. It is a broad term covering behaviors from spreading rumors to sending violent threats and can escalate into cyberstalking when it includes a pattern of threatening behaviors.

9. **"Hazing"** means committing an act against a student, or coercing a student into committing an act, that creates a risk of harm to a person, for that student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student organization, or for any other purpose. Hazing includes, but is not limited to:

a. Any type of physical brutality, such as whipping, beating, striking, branding, shocking, or placing a harmful substance on the body.

b. Any type of physical activity, such as sleep deprivation, exposure to weather, confinement in a restricted area, calisthenics, or other activity that subjects the student to an unreasonable risk of harm or that adversely affects the mental or physical health or safety of the student.

c. Any activity involving the consumption of any alcoholic beverage, drug, tobacco product, or any other food, liquid, or substance that subjects the student to an unreasonable risk of harm or that adversely affects the mental or physical health or safety of the student.

d. Any activity that intimidates or threatens the student with ostracism, that subjects the student to extreme mental stress, embarrassment, shame, or humiliation. This adversely affects the mental health or dignity of the student or discourages the student from remaining in school.

e. Pressuring and/or forcing students to perform acts that they would not otherwise perform.

f. Any activity that causes or requires the student to perform a task that involves a violation of state or federal law, or district policies.

Notice of Prohibition Against Bullying and Anti-Bullying Interventions

1. The prohibition against bullying shall be publicized by including the following statement in the student handbook(s): “Bullying behavior by any student in the Merced City School District system is strictly prohibited, and such conduct may result in disciplinary action, including suspension and/or expulsion from school.

Students and parents may file verbal or written complaints concerning suspected bullying behavior to school personnel and administrators. Any report of suspected bullying behavior will be promptly reviewed. If acts of bullying are verified, prompt disciplinary action may be taken against the perpetrator, up to and including suspension and/or expulsion.”

2. Staff will be reminded to reintroduce the Anti-Bullying Policy at the beginning of each school year; as well as their responsibilities regarding bullying behavior. A copy of the policy will be disseminated annually.

3. The Anti-Bullying Policy will be available on the Merced City School District website, and in all student, staff, and parent handbooks.

REPORTING INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT, OR BULLYING BEHAVIOR

STOP Bullying!

1. Any student who believes he/she has been the victim of harassment, intimidation, bullying, or hazing by a student or school personnel, or any person with knowledge or belief of such conduct that may constitute harassment, intimidation, bullying, or hazing toward a student should immediately report the alleged acts. Students who report should be assured there will be no retaliation for making a report.

2. The report may be made to any staff member. The staff member will assist the student in reporting to the principal or other district personnel.

3. Teachers and other school staff who witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying are required to promptly notify designated staff.

4. Reports should be done in writing using the Harassment, Intimidation, Bullying, or Hazing Complaint Form in the office or submitted utilizing the Stopit App.

5. School principal or designee is required to accept and investigate all reports of intimidation, harassment or bullying.

6. School principal or designee is required to notify the parent or guardian of a student who commits a verified act of intimidation, harassment, or bullying of the response of the school staff and consequences that may result from further acts of bullying.

7. Nothing in this policy shall prevent any person from reporting directly to the office of the Superintendent.

8. Retaliation against an individual who either orally reports or files a written complaint regarding harassment, intimidation, bullying, or hazing or who participates in or cooperates with an investigation is prohibited.

9. The right to confidentiality, both of the complainant and the accused, shall be preserved consistent with applicable laws.

10. If harassment or bullying continues, the perpetrator will be immediately suspended and removed from the school, pending a long-term hearing.

11. To the extent permitted under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) school staff is required to notify the parent or guardian of a student who is a target of bullying of the action taken to prevent any further acts of bullying.

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INVESTIGATING INTIMIDATION, HARRASSMENT, OR BULLYING BEHAVIOR

The Principal, Superintendent, or their designee will appropriately and promptly investigate all reports of harassment, intimidation, bullying, or hazing. In determining whether the alleged conduct constitutes bullying, the totality of the circumstances, the nature of the conduct, the student's history, and the context in which the alleged conduct occurred will be investigated.

1. The administrator will make every effort to inform the parents/guardians of the victim and the accused of any report of harassment, intimidation, bullying, or hazing prior to the investigation taking place.

2. The investigation shall consist of personal interviews with the complainant, the individual(s) against whom the complaint was filed, and others who may have knowledge of the alleged incident(s) or circumstances giving rise to the complaint. The investigation may also consist of other methods or documents deemed relevant by the investigator.

3. The district may take immediate steps to protect the complainant, students, teachers, administrators, or other school personnel pending the completion of an investigation.

4. The investigation shall be completed as soon as possible. The Principal (or investigator/designee) shall make a written report to the Superintendent upon completion of the investigation. If the complaint involves the Superintendent, the report shall be filed directly with the California Department of Education. The report shall include a determination of whether the allegations have been substantiated as factual and whether they appear to be violations of this policy. A copy of the completed report will be maintained by the Superintendent or designee as part of the Safe Schools file.

Consequences for Bullying

1. Verified acts of bullying shall result in intervention by the building Principal or his/her designee that is intended to ensure that the prohibition against bullying behavior is enforced. Consequences will be progressive in nature for bullying of multiple persons and for future bullying offenses.

2. Bullying behavior can take many forms and can vary dramatically in how serious it is, and what impact it has on the targeted individual and other students. Accordingly, there is no one response to bullying. While conduct that rises to the level of "bullying" as defined above will warrant disciplinary action against the perpetrator of such bullying, whether and to what extent to impose disciplinary action (detention, in-and-out-of-school suspension, or expulsion) is a matter for the professional discretion of the building principal. The continuation of bullying others will increase disciplinary action by the site principal.

Consequences for Knowingly Making False Reports

False charges shall also be regarded as a serious offense and will result in disciplinary action or other appropriate sanctions.

Threats of Violence

1. Threats of violence toward other students, school staff, or facilities generally are prohibited and may result in suspension or expulsion, regardless of whether the student has previously engaged in such conduct.

2. All employees and students are required to report evidence of threats of violence to their principal. Such reports shall be investigated by the principal or designee. All such reports shall be documented by the principal.

3. In cases of threats that may constitute a violation of criminal law, the principal, superintendent or designee shall notify law enforcement authorities.

4. Students who are charged with violation of this policy shall be placed on short-term suspension pending

investigation of the charge(s). Those found, through a due-process hearing, to have violated this regulation shall be subject to discipline, including long-term suspension or expulsion. For Special Education students, administrators will consult with the Director of Special Education regarding the appropriate process.

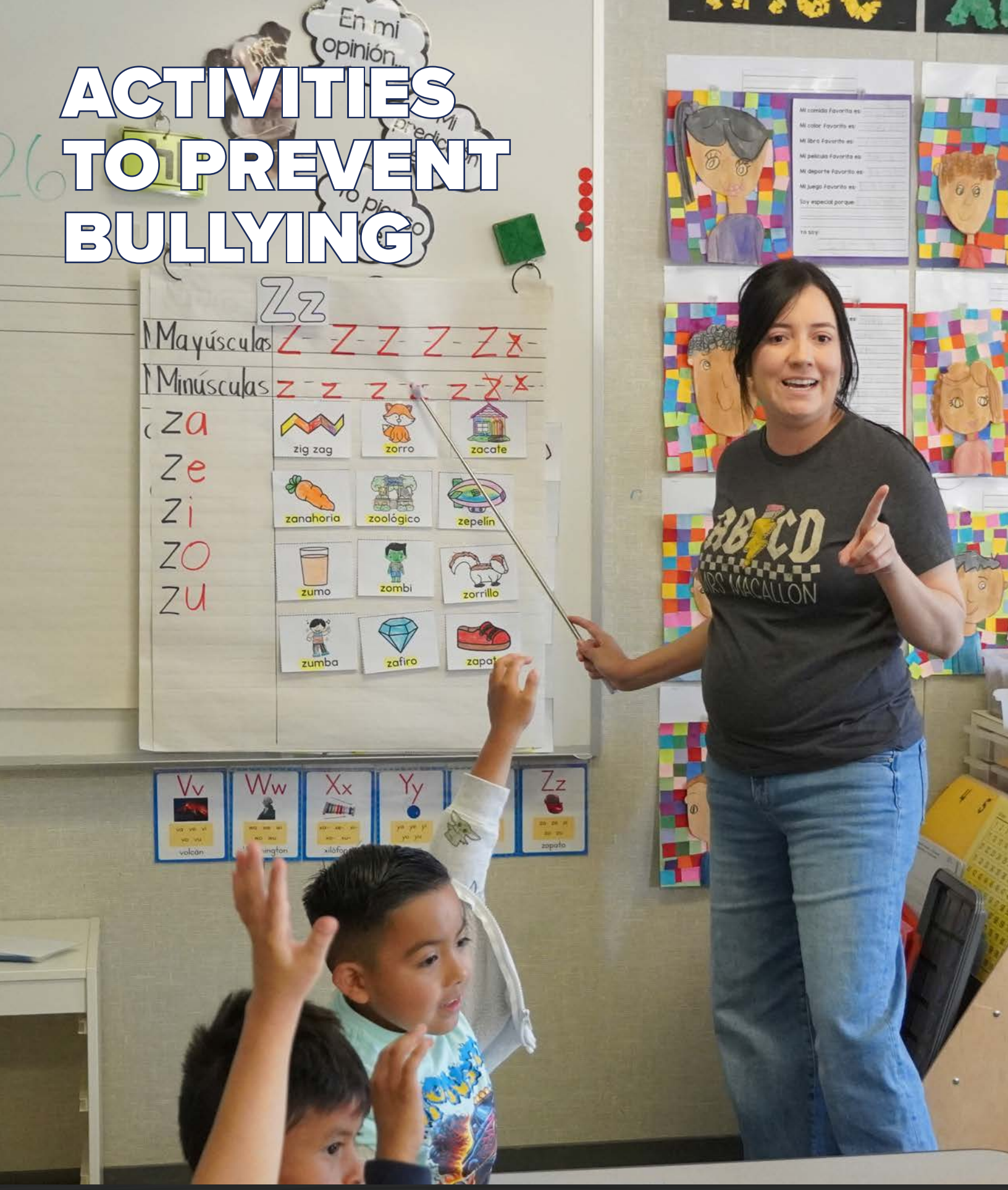
Why Deal with Bullying?

As high-profile cases show, bullying plays a major role in many occurrences of school violence and child suicides. Students who bully have a much greater chance of becoming violent criminals later in life, and some victims of bullying turn to violence as a last resort to escape their torment.

Bullying can leave victims with emotional and physical scars well into adulthood. Put simply - bullying hurts and no one deserves to be bullied.

Students come to school to learn and grow. Bullying seriously damages that process. Adults have a responsibility to ensure that children are protected and schools have an obligation to respond promptly and thoroughly to issues of bullying.

ACTIVITIES TO PREVENT BULLYING



Schoolwide Activities on Bully Prevention

Gather staff and student feedback on the prevalence of bullying. Develop a coordinated system for supervising students during break or transition periods, which is when bullying occurs most frequently at school.

Develop specific plans to convey a consistent message about the school's views and attitude toward bullying. Schedule regular schoolwide assemblies and teacher/staff development to raise awareness and communicate the policy of intolerance for bullying behavior.

Using Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) frameworks to create safe and connected school communities while clearly teaching behavior expectations across all school environments.

Establish a confidential reporting system for students to safely report details of bullying incidents without fear of retaliation. Provide schoolwide and classroom activities designed to build students' self-esteem.

Support events that build a culture of kindness and inclusivity (i.e., The Great Kindness Challenge).

Classroom Activities on Bully Prevention

Establish and enforce rules against bullying. Schedule classroom meetings with students to discuss behavior expectations and prosocial behaviors. Talk about the harm caused by bullying.

Meet with families to expand their involvement both in class and throughout school. Develop an action plan to guide students on how to respond when they witness a bullying incident.

Teach cooperation by assigning projects that require cooperation and teamwork. Incorporate activities that foster mutual understanding and appreciation.

Take immediate action when bullying is observed or reported. Confront bullies in private. Engaging the bully in front of peers may enhance the bully's status and power or lead to further aggression.

Avoid attempts to mediate in that moment with both the bully and target. When someone bullies, the problem is more than a difference of opinion; it is a difference in power.

Bullies may use that mediation process to persuade the targeted person that he/she is somehow at fault for the attack. Instead, talk to students individually in private when possible.

Individual-Level Activities on Bully Prevention

Help students form cooperative buddy or friendship partnerships to inspire personal responsibility to discourage bullying.

Provide support in learning prosocial behaviors when interacting, collaborating, playing and resolving conflicts with peers.

Include school counselors or mental health professionals to deal with more serious incidents of bullying and to help in the larger ongoing task of restructuring the social environment of the school.

WARNING SIGNS OF BEING BULLIED

Possible warning signs that a child is being bullied:

A. Comes home with damaged, or missing, personal items (i.e. clothing, book bag)

B. Has unexplained cuts, bruises, and scratches. Avoids school and/or other activities associated with school

C. Takes a long, “illogical” route when walking to or from school. Has lost interest in school work or has suddenly begun to do poorly in school

D. Withdraws from, or shows lack of interest, in school activities. Appears sad, moody, teary, or depressed when he or she comes home.

E. Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other physical ailments. Has trouble sleeping or has frequent bad dreams.

F. Experiences a loss of appetite

G. Appears anxious and suffers from low self-esteem

H. Appears upset after using a computer or being online

I. Appears upset after viewing a text message on a cell phone

J. May make excuses to not attend school or sign up for school activities.

If a child shows any of these warning signs, it is important to talk with the child. In cases of possible cyberbullying, investigate his or her online presence/cell phone use to determine what is occurring and to offer help when needed.

WARNING SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE A BULLY

Some signs to look for include children who:

A. Have a positive view towards violence

B. Are often aggressive toward adults - including teachers or parents

C. Have a need to control and dominate others and situations

D. May be physically stronger than their peers

E. Are hot-tempered, impulsive, easily frustrated

F. Often test limits or break rules

G. Are good at talking their way out of difficult situations

H. Show little sympathy toward others who are bullied

How Can You Help Your Child Deal with Bullying?

Define bullying for your child. Make sure that he/she understands that it is not just physical. Help your child understand that being bullied doesn't mean there's something wrong with a person. It's the bully's behavior, not that of the victim, that's the problem.

a. Instill pride and positive self-esteem. Help your child to develop his/her own unique abilities, skills, and qualities.

b. Encourage your child to make friends and be friendly. Even extending the hand of friendship to the bully can sometimes diffuse a situation unless it's already too serious for that.

c. Teach your child how to stand up to a bully. Make eye contact. Stand straight with chin high and shoulders square. Breathe. Tell the bully in a calm voice to stop doing whatever it is that they are doing.

d. Be assertive (i.e. "leave me alone"), but not aggressive (i.e. name-calling, hitting). Control your emotions - bullies want to see you get upset so stay calm.

e. Practice standing up to a pretend bully at home.

f. Suggest ways to distract the bully. This might include using humor or making sure that there's always a good friend nearby.

g. Discourage fighting. If your child is being bullied, tell him or her to let the insults go and refuse to fight. Discuss ways to avoid encountering the bully. When that is not possible, tell your child to walk, or run and leave the scene.

h. Report the situation to the counselor or principal. Be patient. While it will be addressed immediately, there is a process.

i. Encourage your child to ask an adult for help immediately when needed. At school there is always an adult nearby to help give strategies or deal with the situation directly. Students should never have to feel as though they are dealing with this alone. Encourage your student to inform a staff member or a parent if this is the case. Encourage the student to speak up for support.

MCSD Is United for Kindness

How Can You Help If Your Child Is Bullying Others?

Talk with your child. Ask for their account of the situation. Be objective and listen carefully. Calmly explain what your child is accused of and ask for an explanation of the incident and their role.

a. Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously.

b. Calmly let them know that you will not tolerate this behavior. Help your child learn that bullying hurts everyone involved.

c. Develop clear and consistent rules for your child's behavior. Praise your child when they follow the rules.

d. Decide on fair consequences and follow through if your child breaks the rules. Spend more time with your child.

e. Carefully supervise and monitor their activities, including when they are online or texting. Be aware of who your child's friends are.

f. Find out how they spend their free time. Build on your child's talents and positive attributes.

g. Encourage him or her to get involved in social activities. Work with your child's school to ensure the bullying does not happen again.

h. Ask the school to keep you informed.

i. Develop strategies together to address bullying.

j. Work together with the school to send clear messages to your child that the bullying must stop.

k. Talk with a school counselor or health professional. They may be able to provide your child with additional help.

Student Strategies

Every student has the right to feel safe, comfortable, and secure. No one has the right to bully you. Here are some tips that have helped some kids stop bullies.

a. Ask for help from an adult. Let an adult know that it is happening. Often bullies are very sneaky which makes it difficult for adults to see it happening.

b. If the first adult you talk to doesn't help, ask another.

c. Assert yourself. Stand up straight, look the bully in the eye, and say, "stop." Walk away from the bully.

d. Join with other friends. Bullies lose power if they are outnumbered.

e. Don't show the bully he/she is bothering you. By not reacting to the bully, it takes away the power that the bully thinks he/she has over you.

f. Respond with simple words. In a neutral tone, respond with words such as "so", "whatever", and "okay." By not showing you are upset, the bully loses power.

g. Self-talk. Remind yourself that the problem is with the bully, not you. Think about all the great things about yourself.

h. Stay near other peers or an adult. Avoid the bully. Don't go near areas where you know she/he will be.

i. Complete a Bully, Harassment and Intimidation Reporting Form and turn it in to the school office, the School Counselor, or Principal.

j. Use the Stopit App. Students are able to make reports from their school devices. Please provide as much information as possible and please include your name.

Helpful Bystanders

Having Helpful Bystanders is one of the best defenses schools have against bullies! A bystander is a person (or group) who sees/hears bullying happening. Be a Helpful Bystander by removing the power bullies feel over a situation:

a. Take a stand against the bully by siding with the target. Help the target be assertive (not aggressive).

b. Help the target remove themselves from the situation.

c. Ignore rumors about other people.

d. Don't laugh or cheer on when a bully teases/taunts/threatens someone.

e. Don't stand and watch when someone is being a bully, it only give him/her more power.

f. Be inclusive.

g. Complete a Bully, Harassment and Intimidation Reporting Form.

h. Use the Stopit App. Students are able to make reports from their school devices. Please provide as much information as possible and please include your name.

With **STOPit Solutions,** students are able to report issues on their devices at school using the Stopit App. Stopit solutions provides anonymous incident reporting and safety technology for a modern workplace via mobile app, web and phone hotline. https://www.stopitsolutions.com

GoGuardian provides student safety and productivity by monitoring devices and alerting if threats occur.

Through the **Swon to Grow app**, Students have easy and engaging student check-ins put student experiences at the center of proactive MTSS. Get real-time, actionable insights to understand and support student needs early.

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