



# WHAT IS IT AND HOW DO WE PREVENT IT?

Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) mission is to ensure that all students have the academic, creative problem solving, and social emotional skills to be successful in college, career, and community, regardless of their background. Creating and maintaining a safe, supportive environment that is free from bullying is critical to this mission.

## WHAT IS BULLYING?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the United States Department of Education define bullying as unwanted aggressive behavior; observed or perceived power imbalance (e.g., due to popularity, strength, cognitive ability); and repetition of behaviors or high likelihood of repetition. Bullying may be direct (e.g., bullying that occurs in the presence of a targeted youth) or indirect (e.g., bullying not directly communicated to a targeted youth such as spreading rumors).

There also are four broad categories of bullying: physical, verbal, social (e.g., excluding someone, spreading rumors, or embarrassing someone in public), and damage to property. Bullying can happen anywhere and at any time. With the increased use of technology, bullying also can be done via phone, e-mail, or social media and take place anonymously or in the safety of your child's bedroom. Bullying also can fall into criminal categories, such as harassment, hazing, or assault.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND AND PREVENT BULLYING?

### Bullying is Common in Schools

- » 1 in 5 high school students nationwide reported being bullied on school property in the previous 12 months.<sup>i</sup>
- » 1 in 3 students admitted to bullying others.<sup>i</sup>
- » 7 in 10 students and staff members reported witnessing bullying in school.<sup>i</sup>
- » 1 in 3 students who identify as LGBTQ+ reported being bullied at school.<sup>iii</sup>
- » 1 in 6 MCPS high school students reported being bullied in the previous 12 months.
- » 1 in 4 MCPS middle school students reported being bullied in the previous 12 months.<sup>iii</sup>

### Effects of Bullying

**Bullying effects everyone—those being bullied, those who bully, and those who witness bullying. Some of the negative effects include:**

#### Children Who Are Bullied

- » Depression, anxiety, feelings of sadness and loneliness
- » Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- » Health issues
- » Decreased academic achievement and attendance
- » Increased dropout rate

#### Children Who Bully

- » Alcohol and other drug use as adolescents and into adulthood
- » Increased aggression, including fights and vandalism
- » Early sexual activity
- » Increased likelihood of abuse towards romantic partners, spouses, and children
- » Increased criminal activity as adults
- » Increased dropout rate

#### Bystanders

- » Increase substance use
- » Depression and anxiety
- » Poor school attendance

**If you witness or are made aware of bullying (e.g., by a student sharing an incident with a teacher), complete and submit MCPS Form 230-35, Bullying, Harassment, or Intimidation Reporting Form, online or by paper, to your school administrator. Staff members, family members, students, and community members should report all bullying as soon as possible.**

# THE ROLES CHILDREN PLAY

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## THE ROLES CHILDREN PLAY

Children involved in bullying often play more than one role and may bully others, be bullied, witness other children being bullied, reinforce bullying by giving it an audience, or actively defend student who are bullied. Sometimes children may be both bullied and bully others. Children may be directly involved in bullying or actively or passively assist the behavior or defend against it. Understanding the multiple roles children play can effectively prevent and respond to bullying.

It can be easy to call the children who bully others "bullies" and those who are bullied "victims," but this may have the following unintended consequences:

- » Send the message that the child's behavior cannot change
- » Fail to recognize the multiple roles children might play in different bullying situations
- » Disregard other factors contributing to the behavior such as peer influence or school climate

The multiple roles a child may play in bullying highlights the need to engage ALL children in prevention efforts, not just those who are known to be directly involved in bullying.

Focus on the behavior, rather than labeling the children involved.

Instead of saying the child is a "Bully," refer to the child as "The child who bullied."

Instead of saying the child is a "Victim," refer to the child as "The child who was bullied."

## RISK FACTORS

### Children at Risk of Being Bullied

Children who are bullied often have one or more of the following:

- » Are perceived as different from their peers, such as being overweight or underweight, wearing glasses or different clothing, being new to a school, or being unable to afford what children consider "cool"
- » Are perceived as weak or unable to defend themselves
- » Are depressed, anxious, or have low self esteem
- » Are less popular than others and have few friends
- » Do not get along well with others, seen as annoying or provoking, or antagonize others for attention

Even if a child has these risk factors, it does not mean that he/she will be bullied.

### Children More Likely to Bully Others

The following two groups of children are more likely to bully others:

- » Well-connected to their peers, have social power, are overly concerned about their popularity, and like to dominate or be in charge of others.
- » More isolated from their peers, may be depressed or anxious, have low self-esteem, be less involved in school, be easily pressured by peers, or not identify with the emotions or feelings of others.

Children who have the following risk factors also are more likely to bully others:

- » Are aggressive or easily frustrated
- » Have less parental involvement or have issues at home
- » Think negative thoughts of others
- » Have difficulty following rules
- » View violence in a positive way
- » Have friends who bully others

## WARNING SIGNS

### Signs a Child is Being Bullied

Although not all children who are bullied exhibit warning signs, the following changes in the child and his/her behavior may point to a bullying problem:

- » Unexplainable injuries
- » Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry
- » Frequent head/stomach aches, feeling sick, or faking illness
- » Changes in eating habits, like skipping meals or binge eating, or coming home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch.
- » Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- » Declining grades, loss of interest in school, or avoiding school
- » Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- » Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- » Self-destructive behaviors, such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

If you know someone in serious distress or danger, do not ignore the problem. Get help right away!

### Signs a Child is Bullying Others

Children may be bullying others if they:

- » Get into physical or verbal fights
- » Have friends who bully others
- » Are increasingly aggressive
- » Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- » Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
- » Blame others for their problems
- » Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- » Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity



# HOW TO PREVENT BULLYING

**No single factor puts a child at risk of being bullied or bullying others. Bullying happens anywhere—cities, suburbs, or rural towns. Some groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth, youth with disabilities, and socially isolated youth) may be at an increased risk of being bullied. Recognizing the warning signs is an important first step in taking action against bullying. Not all children who are bullied or are bullying others ask for help.**

- » Children do not report bullying for many reasons, including:
- » Bullying can make a child feel helpless, weak, or they fear being seen as a tattletale. Children may want to handle it on their own to feel in control again.
- » Children may fear backlash from the child who bullied them.
- » Bullying can be a humiliating experience. Children may not want adults to know what is being said about them, whether true or false. They may also fear that adults will judge them or punish them for being weak, or their friends will reject them
- » Children who are bullied may already feel socially isolated. They may feel like no one cares or is able to understand them.

## HOW TO TALK ABOUT BULLYING

**There are way that parents, school staff members, and other caring adults can help prevent bullying.**

### Help Children Understand Bullying

Children who know what bullying is can better identify it. They can talk about bullying if it happens to them or others. Children need to know that bullying is unacceptable, ways to safely stand up to bullying, and how to get help.

- » Encourage children to speak to a trusted adult if they are bullied or see others being bullied. The adult can give comfort, support, and advice, even if they cannot solve the problem directly. Encourage the child to report bullying if it happens.
- » Talk about how to stand up to children who bully. Give tips, like using humor or saying “stop” directly and confidently. Talk about what to do if those actions do not work, like walking away.
- » Talk about strategies for staying safe, such as staying near adults or groups of other children.
- » Urge them to help children who are bullied by showing kindness or getting help from an adult.

### Keep the Lines of Communication Open

Children look to parents, guardians, and caregivers for advice and help on tough decisions. It is important to check in with children often, listen to them, know their friends, ask about school, and understand their concerns.

### Stop Bullying on the Spot

When adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior they send the message that it is not acceptable. Research shows this can stop bullying behavior over time. It is important to intervene immediately and separate children involved to make sure they are safe. **Never ignore bullying.** Do not assume children can work it out without adult help and do not make children apologize or patch up relations on the spot.

**Be persistent.** Bullying may not end overnight. Commit to making it stop and consistently support the bullied child.

**Follow-up.** Show a commitment to making bullying stop. Because bullying is behavior that repeats or has the potential to be repeated, it takes consistent effort to ensure that it stops.



# WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

**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. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or e-mails, rumors sent by e-mail or posted on social media, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles.**

## WHY CYBERBULLYING IS DIFFERENT

It can be very difficult to get away from cyberbullying behavior.

- » Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at any time of the day or night, and may reach a child even when he or she is alone.
- » Cyberbullying may be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a wide audience, making it difficult or impossible to trace the source.
- » Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been

## PREVENT CYBERBULLYING

### Be Aware of What Your Children are Doing Online

- » Talk with your children about cyberbullying and other online issues regularly.
- » Know the sites your children visit and their online activities. Ask where they are going, what they are doing, and with whom they are doing it.
- » Install parental control filtering software or monitoring programs as one option for monitoring your child's online behavior (but it should not be the only tool employed).
- » "Friend" or "follow" your children on social media sites or ask another trusted adult to do so.
- » Encourage your children to tell you immediately if they, or someone they know, are being cyberbullied. Reassure them that you will not take away their computers or cell phones if they confide in you about a problem they are having.

## REPORT CYBERBULLYING

When cyberbullying happens, it is important to document and report the behavior so it can be addressed.

- » Do not respond to and do not forward cyberbullying messages.
- » Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying occurred. Save and print screenshots, e-mails, and text messages. Use this evidence to report cyberbullying to web and cell phone service providers.
- » Block the person who is cyberbullying.
- » Threats of violence, child pornography, sending sexually explicit messages or photos, stalking,

## FREQUENCY OF CYBERBULLYING

Nearly one in seven MCPS secondary school students reported being cyberbullied in the previous 12 months.<sup>3</sup>

### Establish Rules about Technology Use

- » Establish rules about the appropriate use of computers, cell phones, and other technology (e.g., be clear about what sites they may visit, what they are permitted to do when they are online, and how to be safe online).
- » Help them be smart about what they post or say (i.e., do not share anything that could hurt or embarrass themselves or others.) Once something is posted, it is out of their control whether it will be forwarded.
- » Tell children to keep their passwords safe and not share them with friends.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- » [Stopbullying.gov](http://Stopbullying.gov)
- » Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - [www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/bullyingresearch/fastfact.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/bullyingresearch/fastfact.html)
- » [StompOutBullying.org](http://StompOutBullying.org)
- » [Anti-Defamation League \(ADL.org\)](http://Anti-DefamationLeague.org)
- » [Parents Guide to Cyberbullying \(www.connectsafely.org/cyberbullying/\)](http://ParentsGuideToCyberbullying.org)