

Bullying and harassment is harmful to the social and emotional development of children. It can also get in the way of learning. The physical safety and emotional security of children in school is a critical concern shared by parents and educators. Recognizing that concern, in 2007 the Iowa Legislature passed a state law to help prevent and address bullying in schools (Iowa Code §280.28).

Under the law, each school district in Iowa is required to have its own policy to address harassment and bullying consistent with state standards. Each school district's anti-bullying policies must be made available to parents and the general public. They can often be found in the student handbook or on the district's website. If you have a child who has experienced bullying at school, become familiar with your district's anti-bullying/harassment policies.

What is bullying?

Iowa code defines bullying as "any electronic, written, verbal, or physical act or conduct toward a student which is based on any actual or perceived trait or characteristic of the student and which creates one of the following conditions:

- Places the student in reasonable fear of harm to themselves or their property;
- Has a substantially detrimental (harmful) effect on the student's physical or mental health;
- Has the effect of substantially interfering (significantly getting in the way) with a student's academic performance;
- Has the effect of substantially interfering with the student's ability to participate in or benefit from school services, activities, or privileges."

Iowa's anti-bullying law lists the following protected "traits or characteristics": Age, color, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference,

political belief, socioeconomic status and familial status. In addition, the law clearly states that this list is not meant to be exhaustive.

What is required in school policy?

Each school district's anti-bullying policy must include the following elements:

- **No bullying:** A statement that school employees, volunteers, and students shall not engage in harassing and bullying behavior in school, on school property, or at any school function or school sponsored activity.
- **No retaliation:** A statement that school employees, volunteers, and students shall not engage in retaliation, or false accusation against a person who has been targeted by bullying, a witness, or anyone who has information about an act of bullying.

Each school district's policy must also include:

- **How the school will respond:** A description of the type of behavior expected from school employees, volunteers, parents or guardians, and students relative to prevention measures, reporting, and investigation of harassment or bullying.
- **The consequences for violations:** A description of the consequences for someone who violates the anti-harassment and anti-bullying policy.
- **How to report acts of bullying:** A process for reporting an act of harassment or bullying, including the job title of the school official responsible for ensuring that the policy is followed, and the person or persons responsible for receiving reports of harassment or bullying.
- **The process for investigating reports:** A process for the prompt investigation of complaints that identifies either the school Superintendent or a person designated by the Superintendent as the individual responsible for doing the investigation.

The investigators will consider all the circumstances present in determining whether the behavior constitutes bullying.

- **How the anti-bullying policy will be made public:**
A statement of the manner in which the policy will be publicized and made available to parents and others in the community.

What can families do to support anti-bullying?

Parents can support anti-bullying by becoming familiar with school policies, and by talking to their children about appropriate behavior and understanding and accepting differences in people.

Parents can also support programs and activities that strengthen the development of good character among all students, and should report any concerns they have about their child's safety and security in school.

If an incident has taken place, it is helpful to report the important details in writing. See our Related Resources for additional tips for reporting.

Related Resources

Look for the following resource(s) on the ASK website:

- [How to Report Bullying/ Sample Letter](#)

ASK Essential Questions

- What is the bullying policy at my child's school?
- Have I put my concerns in writing?