

## Helping Families to Identify and Help Deal with Aggression & Bullying

### Aggression

Aggression is defined as inappropriate conduct that is repeated enough, or serious enough, to negatively impact a student's educational, physical or emotional well-being. Such behavior includes, for example, bullying, hazing, stalking, intimidation, menacing, coercion, name-calling, taunting, making threats, and hitting/pushing/ shoving.

### Bullying

Bullying is defined as any written, verbal or physical acts, including cyber bullying (i.e. any electronic communication, including but not limited to electronically transmitted acts, such as internet, telephone or cell phone, personal digital assistant (PDA), or wireless handheld device) that, without regard to its subject matter or motivating animus, is intended or that a reasonable person would know it is likely to harm one (1) or more students either directly or indirectly doing any of the following:

- Substantially interfering with educational opportunities, benefits, or programs of one (1) or more students.
- Adversely affecting the ability of a student to participate in or benefit from the school districts educational programs or activities by placing the student in reasonable fear of physical harm or by causing substantial emotional distress.
- Having an actual or substantial detrimental effect on a student's physical or mental health; and/or
- Causing substantial disruption in, or substantial interference with, the orderly operation of the school.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, psychological, or the combination of all three. Some examples of bullying are:

- Physical - hitting, kicking, spitting, pushing, pulling; taking or damaging personal belongings or extorting money, blocking or impeding student movement, unwelcome physical contact.
- Verbal – taunting, malicious, teasing, insulting, name calling, making threats.
- Psychological – spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, coercion, or engaging in social exclusion/shunning, extortion, or intimidation. This may occur in a number of different ways, including but not limited to notes, emails, social media postings, and graffiti.

### **Kids who are bullied are more likely to:**

- Do poorly in school
- Have low self-esteem
- Be depressed
- Turn to violent behavior to protect themselves or get revenge on their bullies

**Kids who bully are more likely to:**

- Do poorly in school
- Smoke and drink alcohol
- Commit crimes in the future

**Parents can play a central role to preventing bullying and stopping it when it happens. Here are a few things you can do:**

- Teach kids to solve problems without using violence and praise them when they do.
- Give children positive feedback when they behave well to help their build self-esteem. Help give them the self-confidence to stand up for what they believe in.
- Ask your children about their day and listen to them talk about school, social events, their classmates, and any problems they have.
- Take bullying seriously. Many kids are embarrassed to say they have been bullied. You may only have one chance to step in and help.
- If you see any bullying, stop it right away, even if your child is the one doing the bullying.
- Encourage your child to help others who need it.
- Don't bully your children or bully others in front of them. Many times kids who are bullied at home react by bullying other kids. If your children see you hit, ridicule, or gossip about someone else, they are also more likely to do so themselves.
- Support the bully prevention program in your child's school.

**When Your Child Is Bullied**

Many kids are embarrassed to be bullied and may not tell their parents or another adult right away. If your child comes to you and asks for help with a bully, take it seriously. Many times, if kids aren't taken seriously the first time they ask for help, they don't ask again. Even if your child doesn't turn to you for help, you can watch for these warning signs that he or she is being bullied.

**Kids who are bullied often experience:**

- Withdrawal
- A loss of friends
- A drop in grades
- A loss of interest in activities he or she previously enjoyed
- Torn clothing
- Bruises
- A need for extra money or supplies
- Child does not want to ride bus, wants to be driven to school

If you think your child is being bullied or if your child has told you that he or she is being bullied, you can help. Parents are often the best resource to build a child's self-confidence and teach him or her how to best solve problems.

**Here are a few ways you can help:**

- Talk to your child's teacher about it instead of confronting the bully's parents. If the teacher doesn't provide action that stops the bullying, talk to the principal.
- Teach your child nonviolent ways to deal with bullies, like walking away, playing with friends, or talking it out.
- Help your child act with self-confidence. With him or her, practice walking upright, looking people in the eye, and speaking clearly.
- Don't encourage your child to fight. This could lead to him or her getting hurt, getting in trouble, and beginning more serious problems with the bully.
- Involve your child in activities outside of school. This way he or she can make friends in a different social circle.
- Some children seem to be bullied all the time, while others rarely get picked on.

Why do some kids seem to attract all of the bullies?

**Kids who are bullied often:**

- Are different from other kids, whether by size, race, sexually, or have different interests
- Seem weak, either physically or emotionally
- Are insecure
- Want approval
- Won't tell on their bullies

**When Your Child Is a Bully**

It's hard for any parent to believe that their child is a bully, but sometimes it happens. Sometimes a student that bullies is acting out in order to receive help. Families are one of the best resources to help their child stop bullying and start interacting positively with their classmates.

**Your child may bully if, he or she:**

- Lacks empathy and doesn't sympathize with others
- Values aggression
- Likes to be in charge
- Is an arrogant winner and a sore loser
- Often fights often with brothers and sisters
- Is impulsive

### **What you can do to stop your child from bullying**

- Take it seriously. Don't treat bullying as a passing phase. Even if you're not worried about long-lasting effects on your child, another child is being hurt.
- Talk to your child to find out why he or she is bullying. Often, children bully when they feel sad, angry, lonely, or insecure and many times major changes at home or school may bring on these feelings.
- Help build empathy for others and talk to your child about how it feels to be bullied.
- Ask a teacher or a school counselor if your child is facing any problems at school, such as if your child is struggling with a particular subject or has difficulty making friends. Ask them for advice on how you and your child can work through the problem.
- Ask yourself if someone at home is bullying your child. Often, kids who bully are bullied themselves by a parent, family member, or another adult.

Please let us know how we can provide support for you and your student. Through various ways, the staff of the Manistee Area Public Schools can support all students in overcoming bullying and provide them with the skills and strategies they need to prevent or respond to aggressive behavior.

Content adapted from Millis Public Schools Bullying Prevention Plan:

<http://www.millisps.org/common/pages/DisplayFile.aspx?itemId=12252387>