



## CHAPTER 6: School Safety & Bullying

### A. What is bullying?

Bullying at a basic level means that someone is being hurt by the words or actions of others, usually more than once. Bullying hurts children and can increase the risk of anxiety, depression, and suicide. Bullying can result in student attendance issues and behavioral problems at school. It can also lower a child's motivation for school and academic achievement. **See Appendix for the legal definition of bullying in the Education Code at 48900(r).**

### B. What are some signs that your child may be experiencing bullying or harassment?

If you suspect your child is being bullied, you may notice some of the following symptoms:

- Visible and long-term sadness, anxiety, or low self-esteem
- Drastic change in their diet
- Isolation from others and lack of friendships
- Noticeable fear in their actions such as avoiding taking the bus to school, walking only certain ways to school and back from school, or avoiding school activities
- A lot of complaints of physical sickness
- Physical damage to clothing, school materials, or the body (such as bruises or cuts)
- An increase in absences
- Lack of motivation and lower grades than usual in their classes

Research shows that students who are discriminated against, harassed, or bullied at school frequently suffer long-term academic, social, emotional, and psychological harm. Efforts to improve school climate, including creating a school-wide culture of inclusion and respect for differences, are most effective in reducing harm.

### C. What must schools do?

Schools must have school safety plans that are the result of a thoughtful planning process and include strategies aimed at the prevention of, and education about, potential incidents involving bullying, harassment, crime, and other violence on the school campus. Schools must create and put out a school safety plan as a part of their overall education plan and must look at the plan every year and make changes as needed.

You can find your school's safety plan by checking your school district's website or requesting it in person at your child's school or the district office.

Under Seth's Law (AB 9), school districts must have local rules dealing with bullying prevention, investigation, and ways to file a complaint. School officials and employees have a responsibility to protect students from unlawful discrimination, harassment, and intimidation, and must get involved when it is safe to do so.

Schools must:

- Have a local anti-bullying policy that prohibits bullying, harassment, and discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics including

immigration status, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation

- Have clear steps for filing complaints
- Prevent retaliation
- Keep complaints confidential

Once a school knows or reasonably should know of possible student on student harassment, it must take quick and effective action to figure out what happened and prevent it from happening again.

If harassment has happened, a school must:

- Take quick and effective steps to end the harassment
- Get rid of any hostile environment and stop it from happening again

## D. What can I do if my child is being bullied at school?

If you find that your child is a victim of bullying, there are different ways you have to solve the problem together, alongside your child, as a team. Here are some of the options you and your child can talk and think about:

- **Tell your child's school what is happening.** A call to alert the principal and set up a meeting with them is enough, but you should not stop there. If you can, it is best to tell the school in writing through a letter. Sign and date your letter. Make a copy of your letter and keep it for your records.

The right response from the school would involve a quick response and clear communication with you, your child, the students who have bullied your child, the school staff responsible for supervising the students, and anyone else who can help stop bullying from happening again in the future.

- **Take notes.** Create a call log for yourself to keep track of who you speak to on the phone when you call the school. Write down what you talked about, including anything the school said it would do next, and the date and time of your call.

You can also use these notes later to write a short letter to the school to confirm and remind people at the school of the conversations you have had and repeat your requests for any updates or answers to your questions. Emails are also a great method of communication, as they can serve as evidence of your communication efforts.

- **Take your problem to the school district.** If you are not happy with how the school has responded to your concerns, take your problem to the school district. Put your concerns to the school district in writing and sign and date your letter. Make a copy of your letter and keep it for your records.
- If the bullying is discriminatory (based on things such as race/ethnicity, color, national origin, immigration status, disability, gender identity, etc.) you may file a complaint with the district using the Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP) process and/or file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights depending upon the basis of the discrimination. **See Chapter 9 on Administrative Complaint Procedures.**
- If you believe your child has been a victim of bullying, discrimination, or harassment at school, consider speaking to an attorney about your child's rights.

## E. Bullying and student discipline

Students who are bullied or harassed may end up acting up or having other problems like poor attendance in school, putting them at risk for suspension, expulsion, or involuntary transfer to alternative education programs. However, research shows that punishment, including suspension and expulsion, are not a good way of creating a safe and positive school experience. If your child has been suspended, or recommended for expulsion or transfer to an alternative school for behaviors or issues relating to bullying, report the bullying to your child's school and school district immediately and ask that they work with you to address the bullying in a way that will keep your child safe, address the underlying bullying issues, and promote a positive learning environment for all students. ■