



National Bullying Prevention Month

October 2021

- ▶ October is National Bullying Prevention Month, and the Department of Education wants to remind you that preventing bullying and harassment in schools takes all of us—from students and families to educators to school, district, and state educational leaders.
- ▶ Bullying can harm students' ability to fully participate in school, and it can harm students' physical and mental health. In some cases, a school's failure to address bullying or harassment can also violate federal civil rights laws.



In this webinar, we'll share information and useful resources from the Department's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and Office for Civil Rights.

- ▶ Promoting a Positive School Climate
- ▶ Preventing and Addressing Bullying, Including Cyber-Bullying
- ▶ Special Considerations for Students with Disabilities
- ▶ Bullying and Civil Rights



School Climate



Readjusting to In-Person Learning

- ▶ A healthy and safe school climate is important to students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development.
- ▶ School climate is a contributing factor in student behaviors.
- ▶ Schools, educators, families, and student peers should be involved in building a safe, supportive, and inclusive school environment together. This includes:
 - ▶ Working as a team in promoting awareness and educating students on different forms of bullying.
 - ▶ Educating, modeling, and encouraging respectful and helpful behavior among students.



Cyber-Bullying

- ▶ Cyber-bullying brings unique issues:
 - ▶ It is hard to notice, often occurring outside of adults' "inner circle."
 - ▶ Cyber-bullying acts are lasting, both in the digital environment and on a student's mental health.
 - ▶ Stress and mental health conditions can be exacerbated by cyber-bullying, especially for students who have experienced emotional abuse and stress in other parts of their life.
- ▶ Best practices for cyber-bullying prevention:
 - ▶ Utilize privacy tools and settings on social media accounts.
 - ▶ Teach students to think about the immediate consequences and lasting impact of social media posts, and to limit their communications with cyberbullies and people they don't know.
 - ▶ Encourage students to report cyberbullies, whether to an adult, their school, or the social media platform where the bullying is taking place.



Positive School Climate

- ▶ Offering and providing open lines of communication
 - ▶ Communication between staff and students should be convenient and accessible to all students. Building trust and confidence to confront bullying together is a powerful way to approach any struggles or issues experienced in person or online
 - ▶ Having private and secure lines available for students to report any issues can create an openness for students who are uncomfortable, fear repercussions, or feel ashamed.
- ▶ Building positive social norms
 - ▶ Promote respectful behavior regardless of ethnicity, country of origin, gender, sexuality, or disability status.
 - ▶ Celebrate in cultivating a positive school culture!



Prevention Methods

- ▶ **Notice** – Recognize a change in mood or behavior and consider the cause
- ▶ **Talk** – Ask questions about what might be happening, who's involved, and where it started
- ▶ **Document** – Keep a record of what is happening and where. Take screenshots of the harmful content if possible
- ▶ **Report** – If a classmate is bullying, report to the school and report the content to the social media platform it is taking place on. If a student has received physical threats, report it to the police.
- ▶ **Support** – In certain situations, adults and peers should intervene publicly to positively influence a situation online. Reaching out directly to the people involved in the incident to support and express concern is also important in some situations of cyber-bullying. Consider speaking to a guidance counselor or mental health professional for additional help.



The Department's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education has several resources on how schools can prevent bullying and harassment and create supportive learning environments:

- ▶ [Creating a Safe and Respectful Environment in Our Nation's Classrooms](#)
- ▶ [Voices from the Field on Addressing Cyberbullying](#)
- ▶ [Social Bullying: Correlates, Consequences, and Prevention](#)
- ▶ [COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2](#)



Students with Disabilities



Free Appropriate Public Education

- ▶ Students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by bullying.
- ▶ A student must feel safe in school in order to fulfill his or her full academic potential. When bullying keeps a student with a disability from receiving a meaningful educational benefit, it is considered a denial of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and the school must remedy the problem, regardless of whether the bullying was based on the student's disability.
- ▶ The Department's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services has provided guidance and resources on the responsibilities of school districts under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to address bullying of students with disabilities.



Bullying, Placement, and IEPs

- ▶ Schools have an obligation to ensure that a student with a disability who is the target of bullying behavior continues to receive FAPE in accordance with his or her student's individualized education program (IEP).
- ▶ When a student with a disability is bullied, the school may not attempt to resolve the situation by changing the frequency, duration, intensity, placement, or location of the bullied student's special education and related services.
- ▶ Certain changes to an educational program of a student with a disability (e.g., placement in a more restricted "protected" setting to avoid bullying behavior) may constitute a denial of FAPE in the least restrictive environment.



The Department's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services has additional guidance and resources on schools' responsibilities:

- ▶ [Dear Colleague Letter on Bullying and the IDEA](#)
- ▶ [Effective Evidence-Based Practices for Preventing and Addressing Bullying](#)
- ▶ [Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports Resources on Bullying Prevention](#)



Civil Rights



Bullying and Civil Rights

- ▶ Bullying and harassment on any basis can be harmful not only to the student being bullied or harassed, but to the campus climate more generally.
- ▶ When bullying or harassment is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation or gender identity), or disability, federal civil rights laws may require the school to take certain steps to prevent or address discrimination.
- ▶ The Department's Office for Civil Rights, or OCR, has several resources explaining how bullying or harassment may be discriminatory under key laws that OCR enforces, specifically, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



Bullying and Civil Rights

- ▶ Title VI protects students from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. This protection includes students who are English learners and students who share or are perceived to share ancestry or ethnic characteristics.
- ▶ Title IX protects students from discrimination based on sex. As OCR recently explained in a public notice, sex discrimination includes discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- ▶ Section 504 and Title II protect students from discrimination based on disability.



What Schools Must Do

- ▶ When a school finds out about possible bullying or harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability, it must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate what happened.
- ▶ If the school finds that bullying or harassment based on one or more of these factors has occurred, it must take action to address the bullying or harassment.
- ▶ Schools must take action regardless of whether a student has made a complaint or specifically asked the school to act.



For more information on when bullying and harassment may discriminate against students under Title VI, check out these resources:

- ▶ [Confronting Discrimination Against AANHPI and MASSA Students](#)
- ▶ [Confronting COVID-19 Related Harassment in Schools](#)
- ▶ [Dear Educator Letter on Discrimination Against Asian American and Pacific Islander Students](#)
- ▶ [Combating Discrimination Against Jewish Students](#)



- ▶ For more information on when bullying and harassment may discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity under Title IX, check out these resources:
 - ▶ [Confronting Anti-LGBTQI+ Harassment in Schools](#)
 - ▶ [Resources for LGBTQI+ Students](#)
- ▶ Students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, nonbinary, or otherwise gender non-conforming may face harassment based on how they dress or act, or for simply being who they are. It is important to know that discrimination against students based on their sexual orientation or gender identity is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by federal law.



- ▶ For more information on when bullying and harassment may discriminate against students under Section 504 and Title II, check out the resources linked in this slide:
 - ▶ [What Are Public Schools Required to Do When Students with Disabilities Are Bullied?](#)
 - ▶ [Dear Colleague Letter: Responding to Bullying of Students with Disabilities](#)
- ▶ In addition to protecting students from disability-based bullying and harassment, Section 504 protects students with a disability when bullying or harassment on *any* basis denies the student with a disability a free appropriate public education, or FAPE, under Section 504.





For even more resources
on how you can help
prevent and address
bullying and harassment,
you can visit
www.stopbullying.gov.

Thank you for your
engagement and
partnership in this
important work.