

Bullying 101



What parents, guardians and caregivers need to know.

Dear Parents, Guardians and Caregivers:

We take great pride in the Montclair Public Schools to work with you and your children to create a safe learning environment. We hope that all of our students continue to grow academically, socially and emotionally. Our school administrators work hard to keep all schools safe and nurturing places for your children.

As adults, parents, guardians and caregivers, we need to understand the differences in “normal inappropriate” and “sometimes annoying behaviors” that our students may experience as stepping stones in their development as they negotiate through peer conflicts. With this in mind, our goal, as your school leaders is to work with you regarding bullying which is a very serious issue that every school nationwide faces.

Research shows that more than half of all school-aged children will be involved in annoying behaviors, conflicts, and bullying this year as victims or aggressors with many more witnessing these acts on a regular basis.

We request that when your child experiences any of these acts, you discuss all the circumstances with your child to decipher what may be annoying behaviors or normal conflicts. Our goal is to teach students how to request help in the school and accept responsibility for their own actions.

All too often, parents, guardians and caregivers begin the dialogue with school administration, counselors and teachers with the words, “being bullied” as they describe the incident, when a normal conflict may have transpired between classmates or school mates.

Please bring the incidents to our attention. We will do our due diligence to investigate the incident, inform you if bullying has occurred, and provide school based support services for your child.

Please take a moment to read the information in this power point and the website. The information may be helpful when discussing concerns that come up with your child. We will continue to work collaboratively with you to support your child and help him/her acquire and develop the necessary skills to achieve in our supportive learning environment.

Sincerely,

Andrew D. Evangelista

District Mental Health and Anti-Bullying Coordinator

Board Policy-5512:

The Board of Education prohibits acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying of a pupil. The board has determined that a safe and civil environment in school is necessary for pupils to learn and achieve high academic standards, and for staff to educate pupils effectively. Harassment, intimidation or bullying, like other disruptive or violent behaviors, is conduct that disrupts both a pupil's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its pupils in a safe and disciplined environment. Since pupils learn by example, school administrators, faculty, staff and volunteers should be commended for demonstrating appropriate behavior, treating others with civility and respect, and refusing to tolerate harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB);

Definition Types of Behaviors include: any gesture or written, verbal, and or physical act, or any electronic/social media communication, as defined in N.J.S.A. 18A:37-14, whether it be a single incident or series of incidents.

Motivation for HIB Behavior: Any actual or perceived characteristic Examples: race, color, religion, ancestry, nation origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or mental/physical/sensory disability, or any other distinguishing characteristic(s).

Location of Incident: On school property at school sponsored function, on a school bus, off school grounds (including cyberspace).

Must meet one of the following conditions in addition to causing substantial disruption or interference with the orderly operation of the school, or the rights of other pupil ; and that

Has effect of insulting or demeaning student or groups of students or creates hostile educational environment for student by interfering with student's education or severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to students.

HIB: Breaking it Down

Any gesture, any written, verbal or physical act, or any electronic communication.

Verbal:

Name calling, taunting, constant teasing, or making threats.

Physical:

Hitting, pinching, shoving, spitting; or taking or damaging personal belongings.

Psychological:

Spreading rumors, purposefully keeping people from activities and breaking up friendships or other relationships.

Electronic Communication:

“Cyberbullying”: communication transmitted by means of an electronic device, including e-mail, texting, Facebook, twitter, or other social media networking sites.

Do parents have the right to deny school staff the permission to interview their child as a part of an HIB investigation?

NO. The ABS (anti bullying specialist) does not address the issue of parent presence during interviews. **Schools have the right to interview students without parents being present.**

Let's Talk about Conflict vs. Bullying

Conflict is a struggle between two or more people who perceive they have incompatible goals or desires.

- Conflict occurs naturally as we interact with one another. It is a normal part of life that we will not always agree with other people about the things we want, what we think, or what we want to do.
- Can be accidental and a normal part of growing up.
- In a conflict, people may get frustrated and angry. Chances are the amount of emotion each person feels will be relatively equal because both are vying for what they want. In the heat of the moment, emotions can escalate in a conflict. All of us have known of conflicts in which people have said things to hurt one another which they later regret.

Bullying behavior is very different from conflict. It is behavior that is **intended to cause some kind of harm**.

- The person doing the bullying purposely says or does something to hurt the target of his/her behavior.
- There is always an **imbalance of power** (physical or social) or strength between the person doing the bullying and the target of the behavior.
- The person doing the bullying may be physically bigger or stronger, may be older with greater social status or social power than the person being targeted;
- An older student verbally abuses younger students on the bus and does not let them sit where they want to.
- A bigger child threatens a smaller child for his lunch.
- A very popular teenager intimidates others to do what they request.

HIB Reporting and Investigation Timelines:

1. All acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying (HIB) shall be reported verbally to the school principal on the same day when the school employee or contracted service provider witnessed or received reliable information regarding any such incident.
2. The principal shall inform the parents or guardians of ALL students involved in the alleged incident, and may discuss, as appropriate, the availability of counseling, and other intervention services.
3. All acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying shall be reported in writing to the building principal within school two (2) days of when the school employee or contracted service provider witnessed or received reliable information that a student had been subject to harassment, intimidation or bullying.
4. An investigation shall be initiated by the principal or the principal's designee within one (1) school day of the report of the incident, and shall be conducted by a school anti-bullying specialist. The principal may appoint additional personnel who are not school anti-bullying specialists to assist in the investigation.

5. The investigation shall be completed as soon as possible, but not later than ten (10) school days from the date of the written report of the incident. In the event that there is information relative to the investigation that is anticipated, but not yet received by the end of the ten (10) day period, the school anti-bullying specialist may amend the original report of the results of the investigation to reflect the information.

6. The results of the investigation shall be reported to the superintendent of schools within two (2) days of the completion of the investigation. The superintendent may decide to provide intervention services, establish training programs to reduce harassment, intimidation or bullying and enhance school climate, impose discipline, or order counseling as a result of the findings of the investigation, or take or other recommend appropriate action.

7. The results of each investigation shall be reported to the board of education no later than the date of the next board of education meeting following the completion of the investigation. The report will include information on any treatment services provided, training established, discipline imposed, or other action taken or recommended by the superintendent.

8. Parents or guardians of the students who are parties of the investigation shall be entitled to receive information about the investigation, including the nature of the investigation, whether the district found evidence of HIB, or whether discipline was imposed or services provided to address the incident of HIB. This information shall be provided in writing within five (5) school days after the results are reported to the board.

9. A parent or guardian may request a hearing before the board after receiving the information. The hearing shall be held within ten (10) days of the request. The board shall meet in executive session for the hearing to protect confidentiality of the students. At the hearing, the board may hear from the school-anti-bullying specialist about the incident, recommendations for discipline or services, and any programs instituted to reduce such incidents.

10. At the next board of education meeting following its receipt of the report, the board shall issue a decision in writing to affirm, reject, or modify the superintendent's decision. The board's decision may be appealed to the Commissioner of Education, in accordance with the procedures set forth in law and regulation, no later than 90 days after the issuance of the board's decision.

11. A parent, student, guardian, or organization may file a complaint with the Division on Civil Rights within 180 days of the occurrence of any incident of HIB based on the membership in a protected group as enumerated in the "Law Against Discrimination," P.L. 1945, c. 169 (C. 10:5-1 et seq.)

Is my child a target of teasing, conflicts or being bullied ?

- ❑ Reluctance to go to school – complains of illness/headaches before or during school.
- ❑ Does not want to ride school bus.
- ❑ Experiencing a sudden drop in grades, refusing to dress for Physical Education.
- ❑ Coming home hungry (missing lunch), doesn't want to talk about school events.
- ❑ Experiencing nightmares, digressing behaviors; wetting the bed, having difficulty sleeping or excessively sleeping.
- ❑ Refusing to leave home, more clingy.
- ❑ Waiting to get home to use the bathroom.
- ❑ Acting nervous when an unfamiliar child approaches.
- ❑ Showing increased anger or resentment with no obvious cause.
- ❑ Talking about feeling lonely or about difficulty making friends.
- ❑ Reluctant to defend himself/herself when teased or criticized.
- ❑ Bruised, cut, or ripped clothing that are not easily explained.

Parents, guardians and caregivers should be ready to:

Listen. It is the child's story; let him/her tell it their way. They may be in emotional or physical pain about the way they are being treated. Let them vent.

Believe. The knowledge that your child is being bullied can raise many emotions in all of you. To be an effective advocate, parents need to react in a way that encourages the child to trust.

Be supportive, but don't over react. Empower the child by telling them how terrific they are for sharing the information. Avoid judgmental comments about the situation and the participants. The child may already be feeling isolated. Hearing negative statements from parents may only further isolate him or her. Document the facts and share them school officials.

Be patient. Children may not be ready to open up right away. They may also may not feel like telling you their part about the situation. Talking about the bullying can be difficult because children may fear retaliation from the bully or think that, even if they tell an adult, nothing will change. The child might be feeling insecure, withdrawn, frightened, or ashamed. School counselors are trained to help you and your child communicate.

Provide information. Parents should educate their child about bullying by providing information at a level that the child can understand.

Explore options for intervention strategies. Parents can discuss options with their child to deal with bullying behavior. Letting the school know is key.

Is my child being aggressive, teasing or bullying other students ?

- ❑ Gravitate towards violence/ aggression and conflicts.
- ❑ Marked need to control and dominate others and situations, has difficulty being wrong.
- ❑ Manipulates the relationships of others (to be mean).
- ❑ Hot tempered, impulsive, easily frustrated.
- ❑ Often test limits or break rules.
- ❑ Good at talking their way out of difficult situations.
- ❑ Show little sympathy/empathy towards others.
- ❑ Quick to interpret accidents or other neutral events as deliberate acts of hostility.
- ❑ May have two or three friends/acquaintances who are also aggressive and have similar characteristics.

What to do if you have any concerns?

Take the situation seriously. Please do not over or under react.

- Have a conversation about their behavior, seeking the reasons behind why they are acting the way they do. Are they upset, depressed, numb, angry, hurt, withdrawn etc. ?
- Get them to express how they are feeling, and where the behaviors are coming from. Have them write something that may help express how they feel.
- Ask them if they need some support in dealing with the behaviors they are sharing and experiencing.
- Make it clear if they are being aggressive and mean, that conduct must stop immediately.
- If they are hurting, uncomfortable or withdrawing, let them know it's important to share with feelings with a professional that can provide some guidance.


Call the school and get some support and suggestions of interventions and options that are available.

Try to have your child describe the situation(s)... good or bad.

- What would an instant replay of what happened look like?
- Describe what other people saw and heard during the incident.
- Why today? Why do you think this is happening to you?
- Was there something you could have done to avoid the incident?
- What was the most frustrating part of the experience?
- If this happened again, what would you do?

Before calling the school.....

- Get all the information.
- Work with the school. You may have to have a few conversations with your child about the process.
- Once the “B” word is used, an investigation will be started. The administration will assign someone to investigate and gather information.
- Many allegations turn out to be normal conflicts and can be resolved through a mediator, counselor or administrator.



Thank you for working with us to continue to
make
Montclair Public Schools
a safe learning environment for all students.