



# **WESTBOROUGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

## **Bullying Prevention Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is bullying?**

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- i. causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- ii. places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
- iii. creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- iv. infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- v. materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

### **2. What is cyberbullying?**

It is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, and the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings. See M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O for the legal definition of cyberbullying.

### **3. What is a hostile environment?**

It is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

### **4. What is retaliation?**

It is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.



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## **5. What is the difference between bullying and other forms of conflict?**

<b>Rough Play</b>	<b>Fighting</b>	<b>Bullying</b>
Usually friends; often will do the same things again	Usually not friends; typically not repeated	Not friends but will be repeated
Power not an immediate issue	Power close to equal	Power is not equal
Not about hurting	Trying to hurt each other	Bully is trying to hurt, humiliate
Affect is friendly, mutual	Affect is negative, angry	Affect varies between the target and bully

## **6. What happens if I suspect there is bullying or retaliation for bullying occurring?**

A school or district staff member is required to report immediately to the principal or designee any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. The requirement to report to the principal or designee does not limit the authority of the staff member to respond to behavioral or disciplinary incidents consistent with school or district policies and procedures for behavior management and discipline.

## **7. What happens if a student, parent or guardian wants to report an incident of bullying or retaliation?**

Reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made orally or in writing and may be made anonymously. The district has made a variety of reporting resources available to the school community including an Incident Reporting Form and an anonymous alert form available on the Westborough Public Schools website.

## **8. How do I make a report?**

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written.



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## **9. Where will Incident Reporting Forms be found?**

The district will: 1) include a copy of the Incident Reporting Form in the beginning of the year packets for students and parents or guardians; 2) make it available in the school's main office, the counseling office, the school nurse's office, and other locations determined by the principal or designee; and 3) post it on the school's website.

## **10. What happens after I file a report?**

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal or designee will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a "safe person" for the target; and altering the aggressor's schedule and access to the target. The principal or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The principal or designee will investigate promptly all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved.

During the investigation the principal or designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.