

## **Bullying Definition**

**Bullying** is defined by state law as engaging in written or verbal expression, expression through electronic means, or physical conduct that occurs on school property, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, or in a vehicle operated by the district and that:

1. has the effect or will have the effect of physically harming a student, damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of harm to the student's person or of damage to the student's property; or
2. is sufficiently severe, persistent and pervasive enough that the action or threat creates an intimidating, threatening or abusive educational environment for a student.

*[Act of June 17, 2011, 82<sup>nd</sup> Leg., R.S., H.B. 1942 § 7 (to be codified at Texas Education Code § 37.0832)]*

Conduct is considered bullying if it...

1. exploits an imbalance of power between the student perpetrator and the student victim through written or verbal expression or physical conduct; and
2. interferes with a student's education or substantially disrupts the operation of a school.

*[Act of June 17, 2011, 82<sup>nd</sup> Leg., R.S., H.B. 1942 § 7 (to be codified at Texas Education Code § 37.0832)]*

The Miles Independent School District prohibits bullying as defined by state law. The District also prohibits retaliation against anyone who makes a bullying complaint. For more information about retaliation, you may look under "Issues Related to Bullying."

## **Bullying Behaviors**

**Bullying or Normal Conflict:** Normal conflict can occur any time or place and is generally accidental or resolved by the parties in the conflict. Bullying behaviors occur where the person bullying feels safe engaging in power-seeking behavior which is intentionally harmful and directed at someone who is considered weak or vulnerable. Bullying is generally resolved by third party intervention.

**Bullying or Harassment:** Harassment behaviors share the common themes found in the definition of bullying. Harassment is typically directed toward a protected class of individuals. For example, specific types of harassment could include sexual harassment or racial harassment. Harassment is discussed in more detail below.

**Bullying:** Bullying, including cyberbullying, occurs when a student or group of students directs written or verbal expressions or physical conduct against another student and the behavior results in harm to the student or the student's property; places a student in fear of physical harm or of damage to the student's property; or, is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment. [Miles ISD Student Handbook]

**Types of Bullying:** Bullying behaviors may be direct or indirect and include verbal and nonverbal behaviors that cause physical, social/relational, or emotional/psychological harm. Bullying can include:

- **Written aggression**—harm to person through written word. Written bullying can occur through a hand written communication or through information or communication technology.  
*Examples: slam books, graffiti, texting*
- **Verbal aggression**—harm to a person through spoken word. Verbal bullying often occurs when there is an unfair match between the bully and the victim, and can range from repeated taunting to threats of harm. *Examples: taunting, intimidating phone calls, verbal threats against possessions or of inflicting bodily harm*
- **Physical aggression**—harm to person or a person’s property. Physical bullying often involves a smaller victim who is easily harmed by a larger bully; physical bullying demonstrates the bully’s power to others. *Examples: shoving, spitting, kicking, hitting, ruining property, stealing, physically humiliating, locking in a closed space, physical violence against friends or family, threatening with a weapon, inflicting bodily harm*
- **Social/Relational aggression**—harm to a person’s group acceptance. Social bullies often isolate a victim by spreading rumors or lies about the victim or encouraging other to shun the victim. *Examples: spreading rumors, ethnic slurs, setting up to take blame, publicly humiliating (reveal personal information), manipulation of situation to ensure rejection, threaten with total isolation of peers*
- **Intimidation**—harm to a person through pressure or fear. Intimidation demonstrates the bully’s power to others and disempowers the victim. *Examples: extortion, threaten to reveal personal information, graffiti, publicly challenging to do something, playing a dirty trick, threats of coercion, threatening with a weapon*

(Adapted from: Bonds, Marla and Sally Stoker, (2000). *Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools*. Sopris West).

## Issues Related to Bullying

**Dating violence** occurs when a person in a current or past dating relationship uses physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse to harm, threaten, intimidate, or control the other person in the relationship. This type of conduct is considered harassment if the conduct is so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it affects the student’s ability to participate in or benefit from an educational program or activity; creates an intimidating, threatening, hostile, or offensive educational environment; or substantially interferes with the student’s academic performance. Examples of dating violence against a student may include, but are not limited to, physical or sexual assaults, name-calling, put-downs, threats to hurt the student or the student’s family members or members of the student’s household, destroying property belonging to the student, threats to commit suicide or homicide if the student ends the relationship, attempts to isolate the student from friends and family, stalking, or encouraging others to engage in these behaviors.

**Discrimination** is any conduct directed at a student on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, disability, or any other basis prohibited by law, that negatively affects the student.

**Harassment** is conduct so severe, persistent, or pervasive that it affects the student's ability to participate in or benefit from an educational program or activity; creates an intimidating, threatening, hostile, or offensive educational environment; or substantially interferes with the student's academic performance. A copy of the district's policy regarding harassment is available in the superintendent's office. Examples of harassment may include, but are not limited to, offensive or derogatory language directed at a person's religious beliefs or practices, accent, skin color, or need for accommodation; threatening or intimidating conduct; offensive jokes, name-calling, slurs, or rumors; physical aggression or assault; graffiti or printed material promoting racial, ethnic, or other negative stereotypes; or other kinds of aggressive conduct such as theft or damage to property.

**Sexual harassment** of a student by an employee, volunteer, or another student is prohibited. Sexual harassment of a student by an employee or volunteer does not include necessary or permissible physical contact not reasonably construed as sexual in nature. However, romantic or other inappropriate social relationships, as well as all sexual relationships, between students and District employees are prohibited, even if consensual. Examples of prohibited sexual harassment may include, but not be limited to, touching private body parts or coercing physical contact that is sexual in nature; sexual advances; jokes or conversations of a sexual nature; and other sexually motivated conduct, communications, or contact.

**Retaliation** against a person who makes a good faith report of discrimination or harassment, including dating violence, is prohibited. A person who makes a false claim or offers false statements or refuses to cooperate with a district investigation however, may be subject to appropriate discipline. Retaliation against a person who is participating in an investigation of alleged discrimination or harassment is also prohibited.

**Cyberbullying** is when a person is threatened, harassed, humiliated, or embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another person using information or communication technology. Examples include e-mail, cell phone, pager, text messaging, instant messaging, defamatory personal web sites or blogs, sending or posting photos via cell phone or web sites.

## **Who is Involved in Bullying?**

### **The person who exhibits bullying behaviors (*bully, perpetrator*)**

**Characteristics:** displays power in some form (*size, popularity, athleticism, knowledge, numbers, etc.*), thrives on feelings of dominance; lacks empathy; uses blame; does not accept responsibility; craves attention; may have a small network of friends; without intervention, could continue to exhibit bullying behaviors which may escalate to other types of antisocial or more aggressive behaviors.

### **The person who experiences the bullying behaviors (*target, victim*)**

**Characteristics:** may lack social skills such as friendship and assertiveness skills; may be passive (*withdraws appearing weak*) or provocative (*restless with pesky behaviors or taunts*); may experience isolation, frustration, hopelessness or fear leading to inability to concentrate, loss of interest in school, and, in more severe situations, suicide or violence toward others.

**A person may be involved as both**—*one who exhibits bullying behaviors and one who experiences bullying behaviors*

**Characteristics:** high levels of depression; punishment and zero tolerance are not effective; needs one-on-one therapeutic model in order to break the cycle of bullying/victimization.

**The person who observes or knows about the bullying behaviors (*by stander, witness*)**

**Characteristics:** feelings of empathy yet seldom stepping forward; feels powerless to defend support the target; actions (*not reporting, joining in, etc.*) protect self from becoming a target; may begin to think the bullying behaviors are the 'norm'; may feel guilt for not acting to stop the harmful behaviors; can successfully prevent or intervene if given instruction and practices intervention strategies (*not join in, involves peers, assertive statements, report procedures, friendship and other social skills*).

## **Bullying Prevention and Intervention—Students**

**Student strategies to prevent bullying:**

- Choose to not participate in bullying behaviors.
- Report any incidence of bullying to a teacher, administrator, or counselor.
- Practice skills and strategies to take a stand.
- Encourage your friends and classmates to take a stand against any bullying they observe.
- Take an individual stand.
- Be friendly toward another student that is a target of bullying.
- Be a friend to new or needy students.
- If you hear bullying, change the conversation or help the student being bullied walk away from the situation.

**Student strategies if you are being bullied:**

- Walk away with confidence, even though you may not be feeling it at the moment.
- Be calm.
- Tell the bully to stop.
- Use appropriate language.
- Do NOT argue or fight back.
- Have friends around and stay in a safe place.
- Tell a responsible adult that you trust (parent, teacher, counselor, administrator).
- Keep telling until the bullying behavior stops.

## **Bullying Prevention and Intervention—Parents**

### **Parent strategies to prevent bullying:**

- Teach your children to respect others and their differences.
- Model respectful behavior.
- Use the “teachable moments.” When watching TV, or witnessing an event in public that is clearly bullying, talk to your child about that incident. “How would you feel?” “What could you have done?” “Why is this not a good (nice) way to behave?”
- Let your child know that inexcusable behavior by others (other children or even adults) is NOT an excuse for their bad behavior.
- Teach empathy. “How do you think that person feels?” “Why?” “Would you want someone to treat you or members of your family or friends that way?”
- Talk with your child about what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior when using communication and information technologies.
- Be aware of your child’s time on the computer and cell phone and the web sites he/she visits.

### **If your child is being bullied:**

- Help him/her learn coping skills.
- Alert the school if it is happening on campus.
- Continue to monitor what is happening.
- Help your child understand the need to tell.
- Don’t let fear of retaliation keep you from reporting any incident.
- Know the district’s policy about intradistrict transfers (FDB Legal) (Education Code 25.034).

## **Bullying Prevention and Intervention—Schools**

### **If bullying or harassment is suspected and/or reported:**

- School staff takes appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what has occurred. The specific steps of the investigation will vary depending on the nature of the allegations, the source of the complaint, the age of the students involved, and other factors including the availability of staff to investigate the complaint.
- The inquiry should be prompt, thorough, and impartial.

### **If school staff members believe bullying or harassment has occurred:**

- If an investigation reveals that discriminatory action has occurred, a school should take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the harassment, eliminate any hostile environment and its effects, and prevent harassment from recurring.
- Appropriate steps to end harassment or bullying may include separating the accused harasser and the target, provide counseling for target and/or harasser, and/or taking disciplinary action against the harasser.