Responding to Bullying

YOUTH MOVE MASSACHUSETTS

What is Bullying?

Massachusetts has a complicated definition of bullying, but it basically comes down to this:

Bullying can be any type of behavior – a gesture, a written note, or something that gets said to you. If that behavior is repeated often or frequently and makes you feel unsafe, fearful, or targeted, you're being bullied.

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is essentially the same thing as bullying, but it takes place online or through text messages.

There are a couple of differences to pay attention to, though:

Cyberbullies might be people you know IRL (in real life), people you've only gotten to know online, or anonymous internet users.

Frequently, cyberbullies will know their victim offline, too, but they may not reveal their identity on the internet. They might create fake accounts to trick you or others.

Are You a Bystander?

A bystander is someone who stands by while bullying happens. If you know someone being bullied, ask yourself: Do you want to be part of the solution or the problem? You don't have to be a hero—just tell a trusted adult what you've seen. It's hard for victims to report bullying alone, so offer to go with them, or speak up yourself.

You NEVER have to accept bullying. Whether it happens in school, online, or in another way, you don't deserve to be a victim.

What Does Cyberbullying Look Like?

Again, the behavior of a cyberbully is really the same as bullying IRL– it's mean stuff that hurts your feelings.

There might be rumors spread through texts or posts, pictures of the victim shared without their consent, or images of the victim manipulated to make them look foolish or that portray the victim in a negative light.

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What to Do If You Are Being Bullied

Ignore the bully. Alright, alright – easier said than done. But the bully's probably looking for a reaction. Not getting one might make them lose interest.

Walk away. If you're approached by someone who repeatedly gives you a hard time, walk away from them. Take a friend along if you want.

Accentuate the positive. Think about something good in your life – an upcoming trip, your pet guppy, the smell of chocolate chip cookies... you get the idea.

Pick a mantra. Try repeating a saying or statement in your head to distract you. Better yet, remind yourself that you're a really great person. Don't fall for a bully's lies.

Make 'em laugh. Well, make yourself laugh. Picture the bully looking silly, or imagine something goofy happening to them.

Be kind. Being nice to a bully will often throw them off track, but be careful about what you say. You don't want to put yourself in danger.

Avoid them. If you know the bully hangs out in the same spot after school every day, don't walk by them. This isn't being wimpy; it's taking care of yourself.

Reporting a Bully

If you're being bullied, someone needs to know. It might be hard to tell someone, but you shouldn't feel embarrassed to ask for help.

Find an adult you trust. There's really no use trying to talk about personal matters with someone you can't be real with, right? Maybe a parent or guardian is a good person to talk to, but if not, try to think of a teacher, counselor, or family friend. Telling your friends might be helpful, too, but it's important for you to find a trusted adult to confide in.

Bring a friend along if you're uncomfortable. Maybe you feel weird or awkward about the situation the bully has put you in. Bringing a friend along to a meeting with an adult might be a good solution to this, especially if they're aware of what's going on.

Bring notes, and take more. Writing down what you want to say in advance is always a good idea. You won't have to worry about remembering all the details or getting nervous and leaving something out. If the bully has left you notes or written to you online or through texts, bring those along, too. Take notes while you're talking – write down any good advice the person has for you and take notes on what they say they'll do on your behalf.

If you're not being taken seriously, find someone else to talk to. Don't stop asking for help until you find someone who believes you, wants to help, and will follow through on what they say.

It doesn't matter what the bully has said or done to you. You are worth more than their lies.

PPAL
Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Inc.
www.ppal.net

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