

### My Child is Bullying Other Children

#### Fact Sheet for Virginia's Parents

#### My Child Is Bullying — Now What?

For many parents, learning that their child has bullied another student comes as a shock. You may feel embarrassed, angry, or even think, “That can’t be my child.” These feelings are normal—but what you do next matters most. Avoid denying or minimizing what happened. Listen first, stay calm, and focus on how to help your child learn from the situation.

#### Understanding Bullying Behavior

**Bullying** is intentional and repeated behavior that harms someone who has difficulty defending themselves. It can be physical, verbal, social, or take place online. Students with disabilities may be involved as the **target**, the **aggressor**, or both. Some children act out of frustration, social misunderstanding, or difficulty managing emotions and behavior.

**Examples of bullying include** but are not limited to: Name-calling, teasing, or spreading rumors, pushing, hitting, intimidating others, excluding someone from activities, posting or sharing hurtful messages or images online.

#### What To Do First

1. **Stay Calm and Gather Facts.** Thank the school for letting you know and ask for details. Who was involved? What happened? Where and when did it occur? Take notes before talking to your child.
2. **Talk With Your Child.** You might say: “Your teacher called today about something that happened. Can you tell me what’s going on?” Avoid yelling or labeling. Encourage honesty. Make clear that bullying is not okay and must stop right away.
3. **Work Together on a Plan.** If your child has an **IEP or 504 Plan**, request a meeting to discuss whether they need additional supports, such as counseling, social skills instruction, or a **Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)**. If the behavior occurred during a meltdown or misunderstanding, the IEP team may need to review goals or accommodations.

#### Why Might a Student With a Disability Engage in Bullying?

Sometimes bullying behavior signals that a child is struggling with something deeper. Students may:

- Have trouble expressing feelings or reading social cues
- Feel powerless or want to gain control in social situations
- React impulsively to frustration or sensory overload
- Copy behavior they’ve seen from peers or adults
- Have experienced bullying themselves

A student’s disability can affect how they communicate, interpret others’ actions, or handle emotions. That doesn’t excuse the behavior—but understanding *why* it happens helps everyone respond effectively.

### Helping Your Child Take Responsibility

Learning from mistakes is part of growing up. When children accept responsibility, they begin to understand the impact of their actions and build stronger relationships. You can help by:

- Setting clear expectations and consequences that are fair and consistent.
- Recognizing and reinforcing positive choices.
- Teaching problem-solving and empathy skills.
- Monitoring your child’s friends, routines, and social media use.

Model kindness and calm problem-solving in your own interactions—children learn from what they see.

### Getting Support

If the bullying continues or your child struggles to control emotions, reach out for help.

- **At school:** Talk regularly with school staff. Ask about progress and supports.
- **At home:** Reduce stress, keep routines, and help your child practice coping skills.
- **In the community:** Seek counseling, mentoring, or social skills programs.

Your child may need help understanding emotions, communication boundaries, or the difference between assertive and aggressive behavior. Coaching and positive behavior supports can make a real difference.

### Remember

Children—especially those with disabilities—are still learning how to manage emotions, relationships, and self-control. Mistakes can become opportunities for growth when parents and schools respond with consistency, compassion, and structure, so stay calm and listen.

- Work with the school as a team.
- Set clear expectations and model empathy.
- Support your child in learning new skills.

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES:

Why Some Youth Bully – [Stopbullying.gov](http://Stopbullying.gov)

Bullying Resource Center - American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Model Policy to Address Bullying in Virginia Public Schools – Virginia Department of Education

PEATC’s mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia’s children by working collaboratively with families, schools and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

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