



# BULLYING: LET'S WORK ON IT TOGETHER!



**ACTION PLAN TO PREVENT AND  
DEAL WITH VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS  
2008-2011**

Reference Tool

---

The Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport has developed this reference tool on bullying in keeping with Measure 1.1.3, set out in the *Action Plan to Prevent and Deal with Violence in the Schools*. It is designed to support the implementation of effective actions for addressing issues related to bullying in school settings.

## WHAT IS BULLYING?

Like other forms of violence, bullying falls on a continuum from severe to very severe. Whether bullying involves physical, verbal or written abuse or social exclusion, it can take various forms: physical assault, insulting comments, threats, extortion (taxing) or punitive treatment such as ignoring a person, refusing to talk to the person or socially excluding the person (indirect aggression). A pattern of repeated bullying is considered harassment.

Although various forms of bullying are recognized, all incidents of bullying have these characteristics in common:

- an imbalance of power
- intention to harm
- feelings of distress on the part of the victim
- repeated incidents of bullying over a certain time period

Bullying is aggressive behaviour and not a trivial conflict between two individuals. Behaviour that is sometimes described as harmless fooling around, such as jostling or play-fighting, or an isolated insult or threat, does not necessarily constitute bullying. However, these are unacceptable behaviours that may require intervention.

Cyber-bullying is a type of bullying that takes place in the virtual world and therefore has unique characteristics:

- the bully can remain anonymous
- the bully can pretend to be someone else
- the bullying can occur anywhere and at any time
- several types of bullying occur in cyberspace
- words and images can be distributed instantly to a wide audience
- a bully may say things online that he or she would never say face to face

*Like other forms of violence, bullying occurs in all social, cultural and economic contexts. It is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes.*



## Bullies

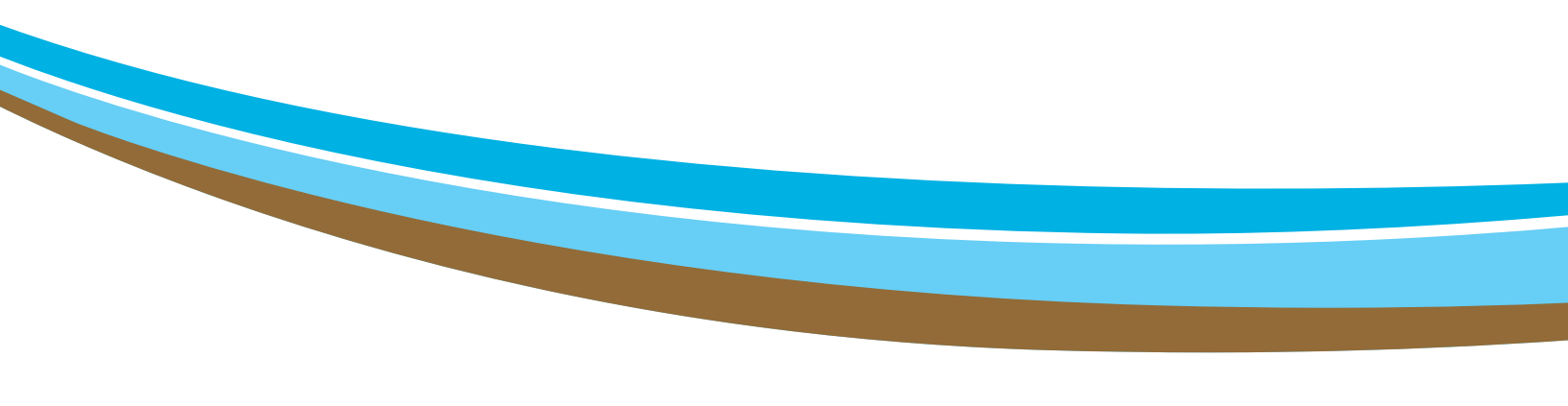
In general, students who bully others:

- lack conflict resolution skills and are not good at expressing themselves or communicating
- tend to misinterpret social information, attribute hostile intentions to others and perceive hostility where none exists
- have a strong need to dominate others
- lack remorse and compassion, and have trouble understanding how others feel
- believe that aggressive behaviour is the best way to settle conflicts
- give a false impression of self-assurance and self-confidence
- may experience an increase in status from acting tough
- are at risk of dropping out of school
- may develop mental health and social integration problems (drug addiction, criminality, spousal abuse, etc.)
- can learn more effective strategies and more suitable behaviours if the bullying situation is resolved quickly

Many bullies admit to having been bullied themselves or rejected by their peers. Their behaviour may reflect a desire for revenge or a desire to have some fun and let off steam. Peer pressure is another reason given for engaging in bullying.

Other aspects—the child's age, cognitive and social development, ability to understand the issues involved and capacity for empathy—should be considered in seeking to determine whether the student is a bully and to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Contrary to popular belief, bullying is not limited to students with behavioural problems. Many students can become bullies, particularly in a group situation. There is an important social component in bullying, as the bully's actions have an effect on the victim's social relationships. Bullying may also be driven by the interactions within a group.



---

## Victims of bullying

Students who are targets of bullying may:

- seem more sensitive, shy, reserved and nervous than other students
- stand out from the rest of the group in some way (unusual attitudes or physical traits, cultural group, physical or intellectual disability, school difficulties, etc.)
- be submissive or passive, or have a tendency to withdraw in situations of conflict
- have few close friends at school
- be clingy and try to stay near an adult
- have injuries, pain, headaches or stomachaches
- come to class with torn clothing or damaged property
- look sad, depressed or unhappy; lack motivation to do school work, resulting in decreased school performance
- experience mood swings, anger, fear, shame, doubt and a sense of guilt
- seem anxious, lonely, isolated or withdrawn and may experience decreased self-confidence, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances
- deny the situation, try to hide what has happened, turn to other friends or escape into the world of books
- miss school or show up late, leave the school or take detours on the way to school
- assume the role of victim, have suicidal thoughts or exhibit violent behaviour

## Witnesses of bullying

Students who witness incidents of bullying may:

- feel anger or a sense of shame, guilt or powerlessness
- worry about being targeted themselves or being associated with the victim, the bully or the bullying behaviour
- worry about being considered “squealers”
- in some cases, over the longer term, exhibit effects similar to those seen in the victim
- actively assist the bully by participating in the assault (active assistant)
- help the bully as an active bystander by laughing and encouraging the behaviour (reinforcer)
- refuse to get involved but may act as a passive onlooker (outsider)
- help the victim by turning to an adult for help (indirect defender)
- help the victim directly by standing up to the bully (active defender)

Bullying can occur among students, between students and adults, or even among adults.

## PREVENTING AND DEALING WITH BULLYING

When it comes to preventing and dealing with violence, there are no magic solutions. No single approach can put an end to aggressive behaviour for good. As a code of silence often exists around bullying, the entire school team needs to be involved in intervention. The implementation of a prevention program, however comprehensive, is not sufficient to prevent bullying. It is important for the school to take a clear stance by establishing an anti-bullying policy or a similar measure. This will reassure victims and witnesses alike and send a clear message to bullies that their actions will have consequences. Students and staff will know that bullying incidents will be taken seriously.

The planning of anti-bullying approaches must be integrated into a local action strategy for preventing and dealing with violence in schools. The strategy will be more effective and easier to implement if it involves a mobilization process, the adoption of a clear position, concerted action, planning, implementation and evaluation. In addition, it must specify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including those of parents and members of the larger community.

To deal with bullying effectively, the school must implement a strategy with the following key characteristics:

- **Good fit with the school**

- Take note of all incidents of violence at the school to determine whether bullying has actually occurred.
- Follow a democratic approach by allowing all students and school personnel to state their views.
- Review the situation periodically.
- Incorporate guidelines and actions intended for all students and adults in the school, including victims, witnesses and bullies.


- **Support of all members of the school community**

- Make sure that everyone is on board and participates in selecting the orientations and in planning and implementing actions, in particular by encouraging teamwork.
- Under the principal's leadership, staff members must be involved at all stages of the process.

- **Shared understanding**

- Provide a clear, concise definition of bullying.
- Make sure that everyone is able to recognize bullying and the effects it has on individuals and on the entire school community.

- Includes proactive measures (educational and punitive) adapted to the students
  - Set up activities or programs designed to help students develop social skills associated with bullying prevention, such as:
    - empathy
    - dealing with emotions
    - conflict resolution
  - Foster a culture of personal responsibility
  - Teach collective values
  - Provide confidential means for students to report bullying situations they experience or witness in school:
    - mailbox
    - Internet address
    - contact information for an adult at the school to whom students can turn
  - Establish mechanisms for handling complaints
  - Establish mechanisms for communication:
    - between staff members
    - between the school and the families of the victim and the bully
    - between the school and the families of any witnesses
  - Provide support services:
    - for students who are the victims of bullying
    - for students who witness bullying
    - for students who bully
    - for parents who believe that their child may be involved in bullying
  - Establish the means to keep track of all incidents involving violent behaviour (physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, etc.) and record them in the personal assistance file of all students involved or affected
  - Consider victims, witnesses and bullies in setting school rules and disciplinary measures and, in particular, support services for suspended or expelled students
  - Establish procedures for managing violations:
    - consequences and restitution
    - conditions for the victim's return to school, if absent, and for the bully, if he or she was suspended
  - Provide support for parents in their role:
    - workshops for parents on child supervision and discipline
    - information to help them monitor their children's activities
    - information on their child's developmental stages
  - Establish procedures for securing the assistance of appropriate professionals
  - Provide training to help school personnel develop knowledge and skills for dealing with an incident or a complaint



Implementing a whole-school program takes time and entails sustained effort. Often, a major obstacle to implementing such a program is the sense that immediate action is required; this may prompt the school to take a reactive, incident-specific approach rather than a proactive, planned approach. An intervention system that is focused on assigning blame and punishment can generate resentment, strengthen group solidarity, increase the desire to continue bullying, label the victim and prompt the bully to develop more subtle strategies. This could make it more difficult to detect bullying and complicate intervention.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BULLYING AND CYBER-BULLYING

- [Vers un agir éthique pour contrer la cyberintimidation, Gouvernement du Québec, 2008](#)
- [Canadian Red Cross](#)
- [Fighting Bullying and Violence in the Schools](#)

## Resources

- [Kids Help Phone](#)
  - [Tel-Jeunes](#)
  - [Cybertip.ca](#) - Canada's national tipline for reporting the sexual exploitation of children
- 