

Practical Steps for Parents/Guardians and Students When They Allege Bullying

Every case is unique, so there is no “one size fits all” in the steps/strategies below. Also, it is very important to note that “bullying” is a label and a conclusion after an investigation at the school level that should be conducted by the Safe School Climate Specialist (principal, or principal’s designee). I always counsel parents/guardians that arriving at the conclusion that what the child is experiencing is a “verified act of bullying” is not what is fundamentally important; what IS important is that regardless of any label, the child deserves to be physically, emotionally and intellectually safe.

Schools are only as good as the information they have so sharing/describing exactly what is happening (without the label of Bullying) as soon as it happens (not waiting until it is repeated) is step 1. And, when I say describing I mean providing as much detail (who, what, when & where) and that detail should clearly portray a picture of the event(s). For example, “John called me names like ‘fatty,’ and ‘loser’ in front of everyone during morning recess.” The chain of command should also be followed and go only as far as is needed to improve the circumstances. Generally speaking in 2016, everything is described initially as “bullying,” and this is unfortunate because saying “I’ve been/my child is being bullied describes nothing and in practice alienates the school. The label matters little compared to the quality of the climate in the classroom and wider school:

In ES...

- Tell the teacher first (or paraprofessional or duty aide)
- Tell the principal
- Tell the Safe School Climate Specialist
- Tell the Safe School Climate Coordinator (district level)
- Tell the Superintendent
- Go to the BOE
- Reach out to the CSDE for help in figuring out the pathway

In MS...

- Tell the teacher and/or Team Leader first, if it is happening in class
- Tell the student’s counselor
- Tell the Assistant Principal
- Tell the Principal
- Tell the Safe School Climate Specialist
- Tell the Safe School Climate Coordinator (district level)
- Tell the Superintendent
- Go to the BOE
- Reach out to the CSDE for help in figuring out the pathway

In HS...

- Tell the teacher first, if it is happening in class
- Tell the student's counselor
- Tell the Assistant Principal
- Tell the principal
- Tell the Safe School Climate Specialist
- Tell the Safe School Climate Coordinator (district level)
- Tell the Superintendent
- Go to the BOE
- Reach out to the CSDE for help in figuring out the pathway

At any point a student and/or parent/guardian can file a formal complaint at the school-level; for parents/guardians this must be done in writing. Some schools have "Bullying Allegation Forms," and other schools have "Incident Reporting Forms." Filing a formal report triggers a formal investigation. If the targeted student's situation improves without filing a formal complaint, that is by far the best pathway, but if a student and/or parent/guardian feels as though "the school is doing nothing," then filing the report may move the educators into action.

Parents/guardians should keep a detailed log that includes all activities pertaining to the allegation(s). The log should contain:

- Dates and times of all alleged incidents
- Description of incidents
- Who is contacted (noting time, day, response, etc.)
- When those contacted returned calls/emails
- Content about what was said in any conversations, meetings, etc.
- Copies of all relevant correspondence
- Screen shots/hard copy prints of any bad behavior happening in the cyber world
- Copies of police reports, etc.
- Anything else that is relevant, such as photographs of injuries

Parents/guardians should never give up their only copy of something. If the school asks for an item in their file (such as a note left on a locker), keep a copy for the personal file.

When the targeted child is being treated inappropriately because of his/her status in a protected class (e.g., race, religion, gender, disability, etc.) then the child and/or parent/guardian should make sure that the district level Title IX Coordinator is also brought into the loop. There is NO complaint filing at the state level for non-protected class allegations. If, however, the complaint involves a protected class, then a student and/or parent/guardian can file a complaint with the CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) and/or the federal Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

Although the five statutes that contain components pertaining to “Bullying” lay out certain requirements, as with most statutes there is wide room for interpretation. Below are the fairly clear requirements that students and parents/guardians should be aware of.

The five CT Statutes that have these components are:

- Public Act 11-232
- Public Act 13-3
- Public Act 14-172
- Public Act 14-232
- Public Act 14-234

Below are the requirements that are within them

- A lengthy definition of “bullying” that calls for subjective determination by the Safe School Climate Specialist; This definition applies to student on student behavior only; Adult (mis)behavior is not covered; This definition changes with each amendment to the statute; currently the definition includes “teen dating violence”
- When inappropriate behavior includes the cyber arena, only students within the same school district are a districts’ responsibility
- Schools are responsible for any/all behavior that happens 24/7, if it impacts the educational environment
- Every school must have a Safe School Climate Specialist
- Every school must have a Safe School Climate Committee (must have at least one parent as a member); the Committee can be a pre-existing Committee
- Every district must have a Safe School Climate Coordinator
- There are no specific requirements about how long an investigation can/should take
- The specifications regarding contacting parents within 48 hours and inviting parents to meetings only pertain when the Specialist has determined that a verified act of bullying has occurred
- All school employees must be trained (this would include bus drivers, duty aides, custodial and cafeteria staff as well a certified faculty/staff and administrators); however, there is no specificity around what would count as training (could be a five minute passing out of the Safe School Climate Plan/Policy and told to read it)
- Every school must have a procedure for filing “bullying” complaints
- Safety plans must be created for targeted students after a determination of a verified act of bullying has been made
- Every local district must have a Safe School Climate Plan (which is really a district anti-bullying policy and can be found among other policies that the BOE keeps; this policy is # 5131.911); This policy reads more like regulations

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