

BULLYING PREVENTION AND EDUCATION: SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN TARGETS OF BULLYING BEHAVIORS

As outlined in Policy JICDE, Bullying Prevention and Education, Thompson School District believes that a Comprehensive Bullying Prevention Program includes support for students who have been targets of bullying behaviors. This exhibit outlines best practices for staff, administration, and parents/guardians to promote consistency of approach and to create an inclusive and supportive school culture and climate.

This exhibit covers goals of the Comprehensive Bullying Prevention Program outlined in Policy JICDE, including:

1. Increasing awareness of the warning signs that students are being targeted by or are perpetrating bullying.
2. How to recognize, prevent, and respond to bullying behaviors. Such skills are supported through strategies including but not limited to age-appropriate evidence-based best practices for social and emotional learning, school counseling, restorative practices, and peer support practices.
3. Supporting targets of bullying through evidence-based best practices such as, but not limited to school counseling, intervention, and education in prevention strategies, as well as through family partnering.
4. Best practices for handling reports of bullying, including providing support to targets of bullying.

How to Handle Reports of Bullying Behaviors

1. Listen to and focus on the student reporting bullying behaviors.
2. Immediately upon receiving the report of possible bullying behaviors, thank and validate the student for having the courage to report.
3. Assure the student that bullying is not their fault and that they can get help.
4. Assure the student that retaliation for reporting is not permitted and that they can get help.
5. Report allegations to appropriate school administration in a timely manner; see JICDE-R (Publications, Reporting, and Investigations) and JICDE-E1 (Bullying Report Form) for more information.
6. Maintain confidentiality during and after reporting.
7. Work with school administration, students, and parents/guardians to ensure the reporting student(s) feels safe while the investigation proceeds.
8. Follow guidelines in Policies JICDE and JICDE-R for investigation of reports of bullying behavior, as well as next steps depending upon results of investigation.

How to Protect a Student Who Has Been Targeted

Work as a team on the following steps; a support team can include, but is not limited to, teachers, a school counselor or other school district mental health provider, school administration, parents/guardians, and the student who has been targeted.

1. Ask the student who was targeted with bullying behaviors what can be done to help them feel safe during the investigation.
 - a. Remember that changes to routine should be minimized. The student who was targeted is not at fault and should not be singled out. For example, consider rearranging classroom or bus seating plans for everyone. If bigger changes are necessary, such as switching classrooms or bus routes, the student who is targeted should not be required to change.
2. Facilitate ongoing communication as necessary between parties involved, including students, school staff, and families. Discuss the steps that will be taken to help students feel safe, keeping in mind the limitations around what can be done and shared based on policies and laws (refer to JICDE-R for more information regarding confidentiality and due process).
3. Follow up with all students involved about next steps and provide ongoing support to the student who has been targeted. Because bullying is behavior that repeats or has the potential to be repeated, it takes consistent effort to ensure that it stops.
 - a. Communicate clearly to all parties involved that retaliation is not permitted, should be reported immediately, and will result in further consequences.
 - b. Consider a plan for regular, frequent, and confidential check-ins with the student who has been targeted to monitor their safety and well-being.
 - c. Consider involving the school counselor, psychologist, or other mental health supports. Students who have been targets of bullying behaviors may struggle to talk about their experiences.
4. Be aware of common mistakes that can undermine efforts to support students who have been targeted.

Avoid:

- a. Telling a student to ignore bullying behaviors or confront the individuals involved on their own.
- b. Blaming the student for being a target.
- c. Implicitly or explicitly reinforcing that the student who has been targeted can or should physically fight back against the others who are displaying bullying behaviors.
- d. Requiring targets to interact with perpetrators, including accepting apologies.
- e. Requiring conflict resolution or peer mediation; these strategies are often inappropriate or ineffective in responding to bullying behaviors. Bullying is not a conflict between people of equal power who share equal blame. For example, instead of requiring verbal or written apologies, ask the targeted student what they would like to have happen; if they do not want an apology, then do not employ that strategy for restoration.
- f. Suggesting or requiring that parents/guardians contact the other parents/guardians of students involved. It may make matters worse. Communication should come from school staff.

How Bystanders Can Help Prevent Bullying Behaviors

When students see bullying behaviors aimed at other students, there are safe things they can do to help it stop. Adults can teach all students strategies such as:

1. Talk to a parent, guardian, teacher, or another trusted adult if they witness bullying behavior.
2. Be kind to students who have been targeted with bullying behaviors. Show them that others care by trying to include them. Sit with them at lunch or on the bus, talk to them at school, or invite them to do something.
3. Try these strategies to interrupt the bullying behavior:
 - a. Don't laugh when someone is being singled out or targeted by bullying.
 - b. Don't give positive peer attention to bullying behaviors, or join in when someone is being teased or mistreated.
 - c. Speak up and say your disapproval out loud when someone is being treated unkindly, unfairly, or unsafely.
 - d. Support other bystanders when they speak up.
 - e. Invite those being targeted to leave the situation with you to do something else and/or get help.

How All Trusted Adults Can Help Prevent Bullying Behaviors

All trusted adults play a key role in preventing and responding to bullying behaviors, including school staff and family members.

Trusted adults can improve their ability to help by:

1. Opening lines of communication before a child is involved in bullying makes it easier for them to tell a trusted adult when something happens.
 - a. Talk to children about their day on a regular basis so changes to behavior, mood, and routines are easier to notice.
 - b. Ask children directly what they understand about bullying, including what it is and isn't, what they've experienced, what they've witnessed, and how students and staff at their school respond to bullying behaviors.
2. Recognizing the warning signs that a child is involved in bullying behaviors. The child could be a target of bullying behaviors, targeting others, or have witnessed bullying. Although these signs could signal other issues, the trusted adult should check in if they notice any sort of behavioral or emotional changes.
 - a. Children won't always ask for help, so it is important to know what to look for.
 - b. If a child is at immediate risk of harming himself or others, get help right away.
 - c. Some signs that someone may be a target of bullying behaviors:
 - i. Unexplainable injuries.
 - ii. Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics, or jewelry.
 - iii. Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick, or faking illness.

- iv. Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating. For example, children may come home from school hungry because they did not eat lunch due to not feeling safe.
 - v. Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares.
 - vi. Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school.
 - vii. Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations.
 - viii. Feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem.
 - ix. Self-harming or risk-taking behaviors (seek immediate professional help).
- d. Some signs someone may be engaging in bullying behaviors:
- i. Getting into physical or verbal fights.
 - ii. Having friends who bully others.
 - iii. Are increasingly aggressive.
 - iv. Receiving consequences for interpersonal conflict frequently at school.
 - v. Having unexplained extra money or new belongings.
 - vi. Blaming others for their problems.
 - vii. Refusing to accept responsibility for their actions.
 - viii. Being overly competitive or worrying about their reputation or status.
3. Learning what bullying is and what it is not, and teaching children the difference. Non-bullying behaviors require different response strategies. Labeling behaviors incorrectly can increase the likelihood that adults will respond incorrectly to stop the behavior of concern.
- a. Know the difference between being rude, mean, or bullying.
 - i. Rude: Inadvertently saying or doing something that hurts someone else.
 - ii. Mean: Purposefully saying or doing something to hurt someone once or twice.
 - iii. Bullying: Intentionally aggressive behavior, repeated over time, that involves an imbalance of power.
 - b. Bullying involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.
 - i. An imbalance of power: Children who bully use their power—such as physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity—to control or harm others. Power imbalances can change over time and in different situations, even if they involve the same people.
 - ii. Repetition: Bullying behaviors happen more than once or have the potential to happen more than once.
 - iii. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, or excluding someone from a group on purpose.
 - c. There are three types of bullying, which can take place in any setting, including online:

- i. Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying can include teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, or threatening to cause harm.
 - ii. Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying can include: leaving someone out on purpose, telling other children not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors about someone, or embarrassing someone in public.
 - iii. Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying can include, hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping, pushing, taking or breaking someone's things, or making mean or rude hand gestures.
4. Responding to cyberbullying (bullying that takes place through digital devices) often requires different strategies than in-person bullying. Trusted adults can learn how to work with children to prevent cyberbullying, how to notice and respond when it occurs, and teach children how they can prevent and respond to cyberbullying.
 - a. Some of the warning signs that a child may be involved in cyberbullying can include:
 - i. Noticeable increases or decreases in device use, including texting.
 - ii. A child exhibits emotional responses (laughter, anger, upset) to what is happening on their device.
 - iii. A child hides their screen or device when others are near, and avoids discussion about what they are doing on their device.
 - iv. Social media accounts are shut down or new ones appear.
 - v. A child starts to avoid social situations, even those that were enjoyed in the past.
 - vi. A child becomes withdrawn or depressed, or loses interest in people and activities.
 - b. Steps to take immediately:
 - i. Don't respond to and don't forward cyberbullying messages.
 - ii. Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, emails, and text messages. Use this evidence to help report cyberbullying.
 - iii. Block the person who is cyberbullying.
 - c. Report cyberbullying to online service providers, law enforcement, and/or school staff as appropriate.
 - i. For instance, involve law enforcement if the cyberbullying includes threats of violence, child pornography or sending sexually explicit messages or photos, taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy, or stalking and hate crimes.
5. Additional steps trusted adults can take in bullying prevention and intervention:
 - a. Commit to creating and sustaining a positive school environment in your school.
 - b. Form or identify existing team to coordinate bullying prevention efforts.

- c. Regularly assess and monitor prevention efforts (e.g. climate survey and behavioral incident data).
- d. Garner student, staff, parent, and community support and build partnerships.
- e. Establish or revise and enforce school policies and procedures related to best practices in bullying prevention and intervention.
- f. Increase active adult supervision in “hot spots” where bullying occurs.
- g. Intervene immediately, consistently, equitably, and appropriately when bullying behavior occurs.
- h. Dedicate class time to teaching and empowering students in bullying awareness and skills in prevention, appropriate intervention, and reporting using the guidelines in the JICDE policy set.
- i. Utilize culturally responsive strategies, and skills that are inclusive and enhance communication and relationship building
- j. Continue to implement, update, and monitor these efforts over time

Cross refs.:

JICDE, Bullying Prevention and Education
JICDE-R, Bullying Prevention and Education: Publications,
Reporting, and Investigations
JICDE-E-1, Bullying Report Form
www.stopbullying.gov
www.cde.state.co.us/mtss/bullying/resources
8 Keys to End Bullying: Strategies for Parents and Schools by
Signe Whitson