Utah Bullying Prevention

Guidance for Secondary Students

Spring 2026

Utah State Board of Education

Prevalence in Utah

- Approximately **one in five** high school students **(18%)** in Utah report being bullied.
- Bullying most often occurs in unsupervised areas and during unstructured times, as well as online.
- Bullying is considered peer abuse and repeated exposure can lead to negative long-lasting effects on health and well-being.



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Bullying Defined

Bullying is commonly understood as aggressive behavior that follows the following pattern:

- P – Imbalance of Power and Strength
- R – Repeated over time
- I – Intended to cause distress or harm

Bullying can occur between students as well as staff to students.
A single egregious event may also be considered bullying.

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Types of Bullying

There are several different types of bullying. They include:



Verbal: name-calling, threats



Social: spreading rumors, embarrassing someone



Physical: tripping, hitting, damaging property



Cyberbullying: using electronic means

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Related Misconduct

In addition to bullying and cyberbullying, the following related behaviors are prohibited in schools:

- Hazing: subjecting an individual to an activity that poses a substantial risk of physical or emotional harm, often associated with group initiations, regardless of consent.
- Retaliation: taking adverse action against someone for reporting an incident or to influence an investigation.
- Abusive conduct: verbal or nonverbal conduct by a parent or student directed at a school employee that a reasonable person would find hostile and offensive.

Impact of Bullying

Students Who Are Bullied May:	Students Who Bully Others May:
Experience depression and anxiety.	Use alcohol and other drugs.
Express numerous health complaints.	Get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school.
Demonstrate decreased academic achievement and school participation.	Be abusive toward romantic partners or children as adults.

Bystanders
Bystanders are more likely to have increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs, and experience increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.

Bullying vs. Conflict

Peer Conflict	Bullying
Disagreement where both sides express views (between equals).	Negative behavior directed by someone exerting power and control.
Children usually self-monitor and modify behavior if lines are crossed (guided by empathy).	Done with the goal to hurt, harm, or humiliate; continues even when harm is known.
Adults can support by guiding mediation, problem-solving, and critical thinking.	Behavior must be immediately stopped. The bullied student should not have to participate in conversations with the student who bullied them.

Warning Signs

Not all students who are bullied show signs, but families should watch for the following potential indicators.

- **Behavioral changes:** avoiding social situations or expressing a desire not to go to school
- **Physical symptoms:** frequent headaches, unexplained injuries, or difficulty sleeping
- **Eating habits:** skipping meals or binge eating
- **Emotional distress:** expressing feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, or talking about suicide
- **Property loss:** losing or having damaged clothing, books, or materials
- **Device use:** changes in device use and/or hiding screens

Note: Risk factors for being bullied include being perceived as different, being depressed, anxious, or having low self-esteem, or being perceived as weak.

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Bystanders

There are four types of bystanders during a bullying incident:

- **Assistants** help the individual doing the bullying and join in. For example, an assistant may physically restrain or block the target.
- **Reinforcers** support the youth who bullies or the bullying behavior by laughing, encouraging or cheering during or after the incident.
- **Outsiders** witness the bullying situation but stay out of it and do not get involved.
- **Defenders/upstanders** help by intervening or extending support to the person being bullied, either privately or in the moment.

Bystanders have significant influence to make a positive difference!

When bystanders to bullying intervene, bullying stops within **10 seconds 57% of the time.**

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Empowering Bystanders to be Upstanders

A bystander can make a positive difference by becoming an upstander: someone who intervenes, interrupts, or speaks up to stop the bullying.

How youth can be upstanders:

- Question the bullying behavior or shift the focus using humor.
- Intervene as a group to show disagreement.
- Walk with the bullied student to help diffuse potential interactions.
- Reach out privately to check in with the person who was bullied to let them know you care.
- Always report the bullying to a trusted adult, parent, teacher, or administrator.

How Youth Can Protect Themselves from Bullying

- Speak up: In a calm voice, ask the student bullying to stop.
- Seek help: Seek assistance from an adult, friend, or classmate when a potentially threatening situation occurs.
- Be assertive: Be assertive (not aggressive, fighting back, or teasing back) when possible.
- Use deflection: Use humor to deflect a potential threatening situation.
- Walk away: Avoid unsafe places or walk away before a potential bullying encounter occurs.
- Stay calm: Avoid getting emotionally upset, as this may encourage the person bullying.
- Find your group: Walk with friends or a small group of friendly peers.

Protection from Cyberbullying (1)

Cyberbullying presents unique challenges due to the permanence and reach of electronic content.

- Never accept friend or network requests from unfamiliar people.
- The "Mom Principle”: do not post or share photographs or videos that you would not be willing to share with your mother, father or another important caregiver.
- The "Forever Principle”: assume that everything online will be there forever.

Protection from Cyberbullying (2)

- The "No Privacy Principle”: assume that everyone can access information about you in cyberspace.
- Do not reply to or retaliate against incidents of cyberbullying.
- Block threatening or questionable people from viewing profiles and personal information.
- Regularly change passwords and immediately delete hacked profiles.

Relationship with Suicide (1)

The relationship between bullying and suicide is complex.

- Bullying can exacerbate feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, and despair.
- Bullying and suicide share common risk factors, such as underlying mental health issues.
- Students who are bullied, who perpetrate bullying, or who are both bullied and bully others are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Intersection of Bullying and Discrimination

If bullying is so severe or pervasive that it creates a hostile environment and is based on certain protected traits, schools have a legal obligation to end the harassment, prevent its recurrence and eliminate the hostile environment that limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from school programs or activities.

Bullying may be considered harassment when it is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, or disability.

Keep Our School Safe!

- All students and staff must follow the school rules
- If you see something, say something!
- Report bullying to a trusted adult or Safe UT



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Thank you!

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