

civilschools

# Parent Guide to Bullying Prevention & Intervention

A Handbook for Transforming Your School Community



A Supplemental Guide to the  
CivilSchools Parent Guide to Bullying  
Prevention & Intervention Video Series

Learn more at [www.CivilSchools.com](http://www.CivilSchools.com)

# CivilSchools™ Parent Guide to Bullying Prevention & Intervention

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## Introduction

Welcome to the CivilSchools Parent Guide to Bullying Intervention. The fact that you are investing your valuable time into this program is commendable, and we want to highlight how rare it is for parents to invest this sort of time in bullying prevention work. So thank you!

Bullying is one of those loaded words that elicits a number of emotions and reactions from people. Our research shows that the more we can move beyond an oversimplified focus on that word and zoom out at the big picture, the closer we move towards creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students and their families.

Leadership guru Stephen Covey taught us to “begin with the end in mind.” As parents, it is easy for us to get lost in the day-to-day challenges that often seem trivial upon reflection but tend to direct our attention away from what truly matters.

Let’s start there.

We are not raising children; we are raising adults who will be saddled with global challenges beyond our comprehension. The economy they will enter will demand they effectively manage the creative process, collaborate with incredibly diverse teams, simplify, and inspire a global community. The level of focus and social and emotional intelligence that will be required to be relevant in a connection/knowledge-based economy will be greater than what previous generations could have imagined.

Thus, we have to empower our young people with the tools to enter that world prepared to meet its challenges, and bullying is not a challenge that will go away when they leave the confines of a school building.

The majority of parents want the same thing for their children: they want them to feel loved and they want them to live a life of purpose. We designed the CivilSchools Parent Bullying Intervention Program with that in mind; we want to help you equip your child with the critical tools necessary so they can create a life full of love, connection, and purpose.

As you work through our program, please keep the end in mind, it will help you keep the motivation to complete this program and engage in some difficult conversations with people who want the same thing.

## Directions

Each of the following sections corresponds with one of the videos from the CivilSchools Parent Bullying Intervention Program at [www.civilschools.com](http://www.civilschools.com). As you watch the videos, read through the corresponding workbook section and complete the activities for maximum benefit from the CivilSchools programming.

## Video 1: What is Identity-Based Bullying?

Considering that much bullying is identity-based, one of the most important things we can do is to think critically about our child's identity and the ways that their identity is likely to be received in the school.

Now, not all differences in identity or interest are going to be targeted for bullying behavior, but understanding these differences can be a key to understanding what bullying behavior might be targeting your child.

Thus, it is important for us to consider the parts of our child's identity that might be more likely to be targeted for identity-based bullying.

- Does your child have some interests that would make them stick out from other students?
- Are any your child's core aspects of identity very different from the majority or dominant identity in your school (such as race, religion, gender expression, sexual orientation, class/wealth, mental or physical ability, weight or body size, etc)?
- Are any of your child's circumstances likely to set them apart from the rest of the students in school (such as their citizenship experience or family dynamics/makeup)?

Using the box below, consider writing out any of the aspects of their identity that might set your child apart from the others in their school.

Aspects of My Child's Identity that are Different from the Dominant Majority

Aspects of My Child's Identity that are More Likely to be Targeted for Bullying

## Video 2: How Do I Identify When My Child is Being Bullied?

There are 5 common signs that indicate a student is being bullied. Do any of these apply to your child?

1. **Stops doing things they enjoy** – If a student suddenly stops doing something you know they enjoy, there is likely a good reason for it. Talk to them about it! Perhaps they've stopped because they're being made fun of or they are afraid of being made fun of.
2. **Suddenly or Progressively Sad or Sullen** – There are all sorts of things that can cause a young person to be suddenly sad, but one thing may be that they're being bullied. If you notice a sullenness or sadness, investigate!
3. **Suddenly or Progressively Angry or Moody** – Sometimes young people are moodier or angrier because they are sorting through the changing hormones in their bodies. Other times, they are angry because someone is hurting them. If you notice sudden or progressive angry or moody feelings in your child, it's best to talk to them and to their friends or teachers to figure out what might be going on.
4. **Sudden Self Consciousness, Particularly About a Certain Aspect of Their Identity** – Because bullying behavior tends to target specific aspects of identity for regular, sustained mocking or harassment, if you notice that your child is suddenly more self conscious about a particular aspect of their appearance or their identity, there is a good chance this is because of how they're being treated in school.
5. **Sudden Reluctance to Attend School or Activities** – Most kids avoid going to school at one time or another. After all, they don't like waking up early and don't like the homework. Maybe they find school boring! But sometimes it's more than that. Students who are bullied are significantly more likely to skip school or individual classes to avoid experiencing the torment of bullying. Thus, noting that your student suddenly doesn't want to attend school or their activities may be the first step in diagnosing bullying.

If you think your student is being bullied, one of the best things you can do is reach out to them. Show them you care. Remind them that you are there to listen and to love them.

### Consider Monitoring Your Child's Social Media or Internet Use

Since more and more bullying behavior is taking place online and through text messages, it is important for parents to have a high level of engagement with their children's online world. If your child is too young to be using the internet regularly right now, keep in mind that they will be online before you know it, and you will *not be able to keep up with them*.

The older your child is, the more trust you will have to place in them to come to you if there is a problem and to act responsibly in the digital world. But don't be afraid to check up on them. Think about your relationship with your child and decide what level of engagement with their online world makes sense, keeping in mind that it is important to trust our young people but it is also still our responsibility to hold them accountable and look out for them.

Fill out the chart below to get a sense of how much you know about your student's digital activity. For each blank, enter Y for Yes, N for No, or M for Maybe if you're unsure.

Digital Platform	Have Your Heard of This?	Do You Know if Your Child Uses This Platform?	Do You Engage with Them on This Platform (follow them on Twitter, Facebook friends, etc)?	Do You Know Their Passwords or Logins?	Would You Feel Comfortable Knowing Their Passwords or Logins?
Text Messaging					
Facebook					
Twitter					
Kik					
WhatsApp					
Vine					
Instagram					
Snapchat					
Tumblr					
Ask.fm					
Lulu					
YouTube					
Tinder					
Reddit					
Whisper					

First, for any of the above platforms that you haven't heard of, Google them now. It's important that you know what's out there and what platforms your kids might be using now or in the future.

Second, if you've answered "Maybe" to any of the above boxes, there is cause for further reflection, interrogation, or consideration. For instance, if you're unsure if your child has an account on any of these platforms, talk to them about it.

If you're unsure of whether you'd feel comfortable having your child's login information, interrogate why. Do you have a relationship of open, honest communication with your child with a strong foundation of trust built over years? Are you worried about sacrificing their privacy for their safety?

There are no easy answers to how parents should engage with their students' online world, but since bullying takes place in large part online these days, one of the only surefire ways to know whether your child is being bullied (or is exhibiting bullying behavior) is to engage with their use of technology.

What that looks like will have to be up to you, but the more highly-engaged you are with your students' use of technology, the more you will be able to step in if cyber bullying is taking place.

## Engage Adult Allies

Another important strategy for identifying when your student is being bullied is to engage adult allies. Let's face it: your student may not want to tell you about everything that's going on in their life.

But that's why it is important for them to have *other* adults that they can trust who can step in to help them if they are struggling. Does your student have some other adults who they trust and can talk to? If not, how can you help them build relationships with some other adult allies?

Then talk to those allies and help them understand that you trust them to support your student without you needing to be involved all the time, but ask of them that they share with you when your child is in danger.

Who are three people who are or might be good adult allies to your children?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Video 3: How Do I Identify When My Student is Exhibiting Bullying Behavior?

One of the most important things we can remember is that **any student at any time can demonstrate bullying behavior**. Yes, that wonderful young person whom you love completely can be mean and terrible to other kids sometimes.

That doesn't mean they are a bad person or that you've failed as a parent.

**It means you're human, and it means that your child is human.**

Signs that your student might be demonstrating bullying behavior:

1. **Abnormally Angry or Aggressive** – When students are acting out of character, particularly when it comes to anger, it comes from somewhere, and it is likely to affect other young people. Thus, it can be important to talk to them about that and help them deal with whatever is causing them to be so angry.
2. **Vocalized Prejudice Toward Particular Students or Identities** – Since much bullying is identity-based, if your student has started to use oppressive language (such as derogatory language about another gender, race, or sexual orientation), there might be a problem. Or if your child is talking in prejudiced or bigoted ways about another group of students as a whole, there is a good chance that is bleeding into their interactions with said students. Thus, it's time to talk to them.
3. **Throws a Fit When They Don't Get Their Way** – Research indicates that people who struggle with self-control when things don't go their way are significantly more likely to exhibit bullying behavior. If your student throws a temper tantrum now and then, that doesn't mean they are necessarily bullying others, but it's good to check in with your child and their teachers about the impacts of their behavior on others.
4. **Lacks Empathy** – All people are born with the ability to empathize, but it's like a muscle, we have to work it out and practice empathy to continue to empathize easily. Those who aren't practicing empathy as often are more likely to exhibit bullying behavior. Thus, if you're worried that your student has trouble empathizing with the hurt others feel, consider discussing with them examples of empathy in movies, TV shows, books, and other media that provide examples of good empathy.
5. **History of Discipline Problems** – There are a whole host of reasons that your child may have a history of discipline "problems." Some of them may be fair, and others may not (as in cases like where students of Color are more likely to be disciplined for the same infractions as their White peers). However, if your child has a history of discipline problems at school, there is a strong likelihood that they are also exhibiting bullying behavior, and you should talk to their teachers and peers about what they've seen.
6. **Obsessed or Preoccupied with Popularity** – Popularity, as a concept, is built upon power dynamics: some people want to see themselves as above others or better than others, so they take actions that will cause them to have higher esteem among peers. Thus, it is directly linked with bullying behavior.



Now, if your student is considered “popular,” that doesn’t necessarily mean they are bullying others, but it’s important to note when students have a strong preoccupation with popularity or social esteem.

Talk with your student about how they can use their leadership abilities to influence positive change within their community. Their ability to utilize their influence is a very high point of leverage in their life.

**Keep in mind, when students are demonstrating bullying behavior, it is often because they are struggling in some other area of their life.**

Can you think of any areas of your child’s life where they are being hurt, marginalized, bullied? Are there any areas where your student is particularly struggling? Describe them below:

Areas Where My Child is Hurting or Struggling
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### Follow the Truth Wherever It May Lead

Most importantly, don’t get defensive if you think your child is demonstrating bullying behavior. Perhaps one of the best things we can do is **self reflect**.

A hard truth for us to consider is that bullying behavior is learned, and young people learn more from their parents than anyone else in the world.

**Are there ways in which you might be setting a bad example?**

**Are there areas where you don’t demonstrate acceptance or tolerance of all people in their identities?**

**Are there ways in which you are teaching your child bullying behavior?**

Consider taking a moment to reflect on the messages you are sending your child. Are all of those messages aligning with your values?

On the chart below, use the left-hand column to write down a few of your values, particularly ones that relate to tolerance, respect, and acceptance of other people. Then use the right hand column to rate yourself. Describe the messages you're sending your kid about those values and look for areas where you could better align your values with your actions.

The Value I Hold	The Messaging I'm Sending

Now, if there are any areas where your messaging is out of line with your values, that's where some real work must be done.

Some of the hardest work that we as parents have before us is to make sure that the messaging and lessons we are passing on to our young people align with the universal truths in our values. Some of the hardest bullying prevention work we can do is to recognize that sometimes we are part of the problem when we want to be part of the solution.

## Video 4: How Can I Prevent Bullying Before It Starts?

Once bullying has taken its toll on our children, it is a lot harder to fix. That's why we need to focus as much energy as possible on preventing bullying before it starts.

Here are some important things you can do to help prevent bullying in your child's school community:

1. **Build a Relationship with Your Kid's School Early** – By having a proactive and positive relationship with your kid's school before bullying becomes a problem, you guarantee that you have in-roads to those with influence in the community. If you have a relationship with the principal, you can pressure her or him to prioritize bullying prevention. Learn more about building a relationship with your child's school in Video 6.

Who are some of the key people in your school that you could imagine being good allies to you in bullying prevention?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Network with Other Parents** – It's amazing the forms of communication that are available in the age of the Internet. Parents can learn from one another in every area from sports coaching to creative party ideas to creative discipline ideas to bullying prevention.

By building a network with other parents through Facebook or a listserv or a community group that meets regularly, you can not only build positive relationships with other parents, but you can reach out to one another when you are worried. A simple message of "I've been hearing more from my kid about teasing that's happening on the playground; have y'all heard this too?" can help you know if it's a widespread problem and can help you engage others in the work to nip that behavior in the bud.

Who are three parents that you could join with to create a parent bullying prevention network?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

- 3. Support Your Student in Their Identity** – One of the most powerful bullying preventative measures we can take is ensuring that our kids are empowered in their identity. Nothing combats bullying quite like a school full of empowered, self-confident youth. Thus, supporting your student fully in their identity is vitally important to preventing bullying. Highlighting the wonderful aspects of their culture, their level of ability, their body size, their interests, their sexual orientation, etc.

Reaffirming students in their identity does two things: it makes students less likely to lash out at other kids because of their own self hurt, and it makes it less likely that students will internalize mean things that are said to them. Additionally, part of affirming your student in their identity relates to the idea of engaging adult allies from Video 2: **connect your child with mentors who share their identity** so they can see themselves in someone successful who is not their parent.

What are a few aspects of your child's identity that you do a good job of loving and supporting?

What are a few aspects of your students identity that you could do a better job of supporting?

- 4. Talk to Your Child About Web Safety** – Again, a lot of bullying behavior these days is taking place online. Thus, if students have an education from an early age into web safety, they can avoid situations that might lead to bullying. Remind them from an early age that not everyone on the Internet is who they appear to be. Engage with their online world, and keep their Internet-accessing devices in public spaces.

List three things you can do going forward to help your child engage with the Internet more safely:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Advocate for a CivilSchools Community Engagement Plan** – If enough parents are telling school administrators that bullying is a concern and that preventative programming is important, it's far more likely to be taken seriously. Get your parent network to call for educator professional development on bullying prevention or for student UPstander intervention training so that there are people within the walls of the schools who are empowered with tools to address bullying behavior when they see it and create structures where bullying doesn't happen in the future.

Perhaps your school is already on board (which they may be if you have access to this workbook), but it's far easier for a school to put up window dressings about bullying prevention than to put in the hard work of prevention. Lean on them to make sure it is a school-wide process!

In the end, bullying prevention is something that requires *all stakeholders* in your community to be engaged: students, parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and other community members. Thus, in addition to the above steps, bringing more people on board will go a long way.

## Video 5: How Do I Interrupt Bullying Once It's Happening to My Child?

We at CivilSchools get a lot of questions from parents about how they should act to stop bullying once it is already happening. Based on our experience working with parents all over the United States and our research into the nature of bullying, here are some of the most important things to consider when you're trying to interrupt bullying that's already taking place in your community.

1. **Don't Fight Fire with Fire** – When it seems like no one is listening and when we see our child hurting, it's easy to find ourselves encouraging our students to simply fight back. And while we at CivilSchools would never say that your children should never protect themselves, we want to stress that, unfortunately, using the same tactics used against your child is only likely to get them further hurt or even get them in trouble with the school. In short, it won't lead to the most effective ends.
2. **In the Short Term, Ignore the Bullying Behavior** – This is not a satisfying answer, and it is not a long-term fix, but for the short term, while you are getting your resources together to tackle the problem of bullying, remind your student to ignore the bullying behavior. Now, we stress short term because it should not be ignored for more than a week. This is simply a tool to help you get your resources lined up to deal with the problem.
3. **Create a Student-Generated Action Plan** – Once you have identified that bullying is taking place, you should sit down with your student and create an action plan. What are the things they can do and what are the things you can do to begin to solve the problem.

Working through this process will help limit spontaneous emotional reactions that could escalate the problem and complicate successful resolution. If your student is reluctant to work through this with you, remind them that learning how to deal with socially-challenging situations will be a critical skill necessary to live a fulfilled life.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Why do they think they are being targeted? Are other students targeting them because of a particular aspect of their identity?

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Who are some trusted student allies who can help?

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Who are some trusted adult allies who can help?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What do your school's policies and procedures say about bullying that might help you in addressing the problem?

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What has the bullying behavior looked like? Has it happened online? Is it physical violence?

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Who has been involved?

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Do you know any of the parents of kids who are involved? If so, include contact information.

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What are three actions your child can take that they think will help the situation?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What are three actions you can take that you and your child agree would help the situation?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. **Talk to Other Parents Who Have Kids Who Share Your Child's Identity** – As you are able to figure out why your child is being targeted, reach out to other parents whose children share that aspect of your child's identity. Not sure who those parents might be? Engage the allies you have in your school community. This will help you get a sense of whether this is a pattern of wider bullying than just your child, and it will help you figure out what actions they might be taking so you're not reinventing the wheel.
5. **Keep a Detailed Record of Bullying Behavior** – No matter what justice looks like to you in a solution to this problem, perhaps the single best thing you can do to make your case to the school or other authorities is to have a detailed record of bullying behavior. That means that you need your student to help you create a specific account of **times, dates, actions, people involved, and witnesses** to any in-person bullying.

If there's a singular bright spot in the shift of bullying to digital platforms, it's that it makes documentation much easier. **Print emails, messages, screen shots, or other documentation of online bullying, and get copies of all text messages from your cell phone service provider.**

These will be vital to building a case for intervention in your school community.

6. **Reach Out to Parents of Students Who are Bullying Your Child** – This one can be really tricky, as you might get a defensive reaction, and not all parents are as engaged as you are if you have worked this far in the CivilSchools program. However, sometimes reaching out to the parent of the student who is bullying your child can start some important dialogue and can lead to solutions.

As difficult as it may be, try to contact them in a way that will not make them defensive. No one wants to hear that their child is being terrible, but if you approach them in a way they can hear, they might solve the problem for you by addressing it with their child.



One of the best ways to engage a parent who may be sensitive to these conversations is to work from a place of empathy. Chances are they have been approached before and have not had success changing the undesirable behavior. Being that most bullying behavior is modeled, it is an easy conclusion to make that the parents may be the problem. Try and put those thoughts on the back burner for now.

An effective strategy for influencing people is to ask their advice. Here's an example: "I would like to ask your advice as to how to best handle a situation that involves both of our children and may influence their ability to reach their full potential. Would you be willing to help me, so we can best meet our children's needs?"

Whatever you can do to offer your student agency while doing your best to solve the problem will help to bring about a long-term solution to the problem. After all, if your student isn't on board, they won't be telling you the whole story, and as such, it's going to be pretty tough to address the bullying behavior.

## Video 6: How Do I Collaborate with My Kid's School When I'm Concerned About Bullying?

The key to engaging your school in bullying prevention is building a relationship with the people in the school long before bullying ever becomes a problem.

Thus, one of the best things you can do is make a list of your child's teachers and the administrators or support staff on campus who might be important allies for anything from homework help to bullying intervention.

Key School Allies:

My child's teacher(s) and their contact information:

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Administrators and their contact information:

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Key support staff and their contact information:

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From there, be proactive about building a relationship. Maybe you are busy, so you simply send them some emails introducing yourself and offering to help however possible. Maybe you've got a bit more time so you drop in and meet folks or bring by a snack (food seems to go well in bringing most anybody to our side), or you can volunteer some of your time at the school.

It's key, though, to make sure that the first time you interact with these people is not in the height of your frustration or anger over bullying or grades. To be clear: **teachers and administrators should be able to hear you professionally if the only time they ever hear from you is when you're angry.** However, they may not respond as well as they should when they are under the stress of immediately resolving a parent's anger. If a relationship has already been established, it will help you and the staff member you speak to about bullying communicate effectively to work towards a solution.

So remember: **Your emotions are valid. Your emotions are your truth.**

If you find yourself in a situation where you lack the relationships to ensure the school will respond appropriately to ensure your child's safety, it is important to note that schools where bullying is a part of the campus climate often do not recognize it.

In these cases, many times the problem starts with the administrative leadership. These same people tend to be the most sensitive to criticism directed towards school culture and climate because it reflects their ability to effectively lead.

Rather than starting with voicing your concerns, which will take the focus off the problem and direct it towards protecting their reputation, **ask them to explain their approach to creating a bullying free school culture. Ask them about how they have handled situations related to bullying in the past.** Seek to understand their needs; from there you can position your concerns in a way that empowers them to take action on the real problem.

**In the end, don't hesitate to be the squeaky wheel, the persistent person who keeps on the school about their approach to bullying.** Whether that's with calculated kindness or by asserting forcefully what you need, you deserve to have your voice heard and for action to be taken to protect your child.

## Video 7: Final Thoughts

We at CivilSchools want to leave you with one last thought in our series of videos for parents.

Never forget that you and your children are the reasons schools exist. You are the primary stakeholders, and schools have a legal and moral responsibility to make sure that your children are safe and included in school.

Most of the time you'll find that schools want to help, and the people inside care deeply about making sure your child is protected from bullying. Occasionally, though, you will find people who don't see what you see and who don't want to do the arduous work of building a truly inclusive school community.

Don't let them get you down. Don't give up.

Instead, get organized. Get other parents on your side, and work with the allies you have in your school to demand safe and inclusive schools.

It is possible to build bullying-free culture in schools, but that will only happen when all people in a school community step into their responsibility to prevent bullying before it starts.

If this process is testing you and you are feeling frustrated, remember this is much bigger than bullying, this is about equipping your child with necessary life skills to navigate the complex future that awaits them.

Wishing you strength and compassion,

The CivilSchools Team