



Dear Residents of the Northwestern District:

One of the greatest challenges we face in creating a positive and safe learning environment in our schools is the prevalence of bullying. In fact, it is estimated that more than 5.7 million children across the United States (over 30 percent of all students) have been affected by bullying either as a target of bullying, as a bully themselves, or both.

We believe one of the root causes of bullying is the inability to accept difference in others. Building compassion and understanding for children who are different from us is key to preventing a culture of bullying in our schools.

Children who are being bullied, whether through verbal abuse, cyber bullying, or physical abuse, may suffer in silence and at some point are likely to respond and act out themselves. Bullying creates an unsafe and unhealthy school climate for victims of bullying and for bystanders.

We hope this brochure will help you better identify, prevent and respond to incidents of bullying. By working together as a community, we hope that we can foster a climate of zero tolerance for bullying and respect by and for all our children.

Sincerely,

David E. Sullivan

David E. Sullivan

Bullying itself is not a crime, but it may constitute a criminal act if it meets the criteria of any one of a number of crimes. Consult with your local police department if you are unsure if a criminal act has occurred. Some acts of bullying or cyber bullying may also result in investigation and prosecution by the Northwestern District Attorney's Office.

Definition of Bullying

Bullying is defined by the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71 Section 37O as "the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a victim that: 1) causes physical or emotional harm to the victim or damage to the victim's property; 2) places the victim in a reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property; 3) creates a hostile environment at school for the victim; 4) infringes on the rights of the victim at school; or 5) materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school."

The law requires that every school create a bullying prevention and intervention plan. The plan prohibits bullying on and off school grounds if the bullying creates a hostile environment for the victim at school, infringes on the rights of the victim at school, or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of the school.

The Realities of the Cyber World

Instant communications are at a child's or teen's fingertips with the use of cell phones and computers. Cell phones, text messaging, instant messaging, and social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have become the prevalent modes of communication.

These technologies are useful and powerful sources of information and communication. However, the potential for anonymous communication, the rapid transmission of information (including photographic images) and the ability to transform images and data, have contributed to an increase in cyber bullying.

As these technologies continue to evolve, we must educate ourselves and work together to ensure that our children are using these technologies responsibly and safely to avoid instances of cyber bullying.



Possible Signs of Bullying

- Exhibiting changes in behavior, such as being withdrawn and passive, being overly active and aggressive or being self-destructive.
- Crying or showing other signs of depression or anxiety.
- Exhibiting low self-esteem.
- Showing signs of fear when around or asked about certain situations or people.
- Unexplained injuries, torn or missing clothes or damage to personal property, such as toys, games, book bag, etc.
- Demonstrating apparent psychosomatic symptoms such as stomach pains, fatigue and sleep disturbance, which may be caused by anxiety or depression

What Parents Can/Should Do

If You Suspect Your Child is Being Bullied:

- Talk with your child and gather more information.
- Monitor your child's activities and relationships with others, especially at times when observation is not expected.
- Supervise and review electronic communication like the Internet, social networking sites, and cell phones.
- Report any suspected acts of bullying or cyber bullying to your school principal pursuant to your school's bullying prevention and intervention plan.
- Do not attempt to mediate the situation on your own by bringing victim and bully together and/or contacting the parents of the suspected bully.

If You Suspect Your Child Is a Bully

- Address the behaviors openly with your child.
- Let your child know bullying is unacceptable.
- Develop firm and clear rules for behavior.
- Follow up with praise for compliance, and consequences for noncompliance.
- Model appropriate behaviors for your child, LEAD BY EXAMPLE!

Visit us at
NorthwesternDA.org

How We Can Help

The Juvenile Justice, Community Outreach and Education and Child Abuse units of the Northwestern District Attorney's Office are available to help.

Massachusetts State Police attached to the Northwestern District Attorney's Office help investigate and prosecute crimes against children, elderly and disabled as well as cases that involving cyber-crimes.

The Community Outreach and Education Unit, along with community partners, is available to consult with schools about keeping children safe and creating a vibrant environment most conducive to academic success.

To Find Out More

To find out more about the scope of services offered by the Northwestern District Attorney's Office, please contact the **Community Outreach and Education Unit**, at 413-586-9225.



Offices of
Northwestern District Attorney

1 Gleason Plaza, Northampton, MA 01060
(413) 586-9225
13 Conway St., Greenfield, MA 01301
(413) 774-3186



Office of
Northwestern District Attorney
David E. Sullivan

NorthwesternDA.org