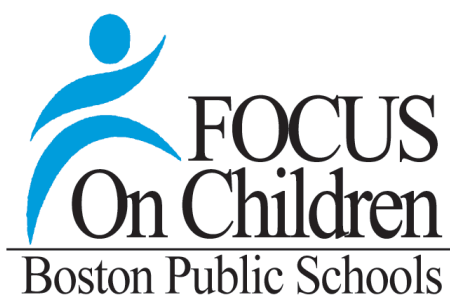


# **Bullying Prevention and Intervention:**

## **A Guide for the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team**



**Dr. Carol R. Johnson  
Superintendent**

Boston Public Schools  
26 Court St.  
Boston, MA 02108-2528  
[www.bostonpublicschools.org](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org)  
617-635-9000





# Introduction

*In school settings, students with disabilities more often experience bullying, harassment, and teasing than other students.*

Students with disabilities may also become involved in bullying others. Massachusetts has passed legislation about bullying in schools. One section addresses the specific needs for bullying prevention and intervention for students with disabilities identified in an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**In this guide, you will find:**

1. **Information on Bullying Legislation in Massachusetts** and its relevance for students with disabilities
2. **Parents’/guardians’** rights and expectations about bullying prevention and intervention for students with an IEP, including questions parents may use to prepare for IEP Team meetings
3. **School personnel’s** roles and responsibilities for helping students with disabilities who are on an IEP develop social and emotional skills for bullying prevention and intervention

Parents and school personnel may have questions and concerns about what should be included in the IEP to help develop the student’s abilities to understand, prevent, and stop bullying. The IEP Team will work to make sure that the student has an Individualized Education Program that addresses his or her particular needs.

# 1. Bullying Legislation and Students with Disabilities



In 2010, Massachusetts passed legislation that addresses bullying, harassment, and teasing in public schools. One section specifically addresses the needs of students with disabilities:

*. . . Whenever the IEP Team evaluation indicates that a student's disability affects social skills development, or when the student's disability makes him or her vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing, the IEP must address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.*

*. . . For students identified with a disability on the autism spectrum, the IEP Team must consider and specifically address the skills and proficiencies needed to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.<sup>1</sup>*

According to this legislation, if the student is vulnerable to bullying, the IEP Team will determine what accommodations, services, and interventions may be needed to help the student develop skills to prevent and stop bullying. Parents should expect to contribute to this process as outlined in this guide.

More information is also available on the Massachusetts Department of Education website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/considerations-bully.html#VI>.

## Sample IEP Student Objectives

The student will:

- Learn to identify bullying behaviors and situations and what actions to take to report them
- Increase personal skills, such as self-awareness and confidence, to enable the student to say “no” or “stop that” when confronted with bullying
- Improve social skills such as sharing, taking turns, assertiveness, and thinking before acting

<sup>1</sup> M. G. L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010. Cited in *Technical assistance advisory SPED 2011-2: Bullying prevention and intervention*. (2011, February 11). Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Retrieved from [http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/advisories/11\\_2ta.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/advisories/11_2ta.html)



## What is bullying?<sup>2</sup>

Bullying is a form of emotional or physical abuse that has three defining characteristics:

- **Deliberate:** A bully's intention is to hurt someone.  
Students with disabilities may misperceive a bully's hurtful intentions, or they may fail to comprehend the negative social consequences of their own behavior.
- **Repeated:** A bully often targets the same victim again and again.  
Students with disabilities are at greater risk because they may not fully realize they are being bullied repeatedly.
- **Power imbalanced:** A bully chooses victims he or she perceives as vulnerable.  
Students with disabilities are often targeted for bullying because they are perceived as vulnerable.

*Bullying is different from conflict, fights, or disagreements. It must meet the above criteria.*

Bullying occurs in many different forms, with varying levels of severity. It may involve:

- **Physical bullying:** Poking, pushing, hitting, kicking, beating up
- **Verbal bullying:** Yelling, taunting, name-calling, insulting, threatening to harm
- **Relational bullying:** Ignoring, excluding, spreading rumors, telling lies, getting others to hurt someone
- **Cyberbullying:** Sending or posting hurtful, embarrassing, or threatening text or images using the Internet, cell phones, or other digital communication devices

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: Storey, K., Slaby, R. G., Adler, M., Minotti, J., & Katz, R. (2008). Eyes on bullying toolkit. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc. Retrieved from <http://www.eyesonbullying.org/pdfs/toolkit.pdf>



## 2. Parents' Rights and Expectations

The IEP Team brings together school personnel, parents or guardians, and students (students participate if they are age 14 and older) to develop an effective educational plan.

**If a student's disability affects social development or makes him or her vulnerable to bullying, the IEP must include strategies to help the student develop appropriate skills to prevent or stop bullying.**

Specialized instruction and supplementary services are some of the options that can be considered.

*Parents are encouraged to discuss their concerns about bullying, harassment, and teasing with the IEP Team.*

They may also provide information about incidents of bullying their child may have experienced and how it has affected him or her. They may also provide information and express concerns about behaviors or language their child has shown that may put him or her at risk to engage in bullying, or that could be wrongfully perceived as bullying others. Sample questions are provided at the end of this section that parents may use to prepare for the IEP meeting.

As part of this process, parents can expect school personnel to propose goals and objectives for their child regarding bullying prevention and intervention in the student's IEP or 504 plan. These objectives may include helping the student improve his or her social skills or identifying bullying behaviors that may be directed toward or performed by the student. Parents' approval is required before services can begin.

Once objectives have been established, school personnel will schedule the types of services and instruction the student may receive to achieve them. Progress made on each specific objective is assessed and documented through Progress Reports mailed to parents. Parents have a right to question if reported progress is inadequate and to ask for a team meeting to address the issue.



## Preparing for the IEP Meeting

- Does your child feel safe at school? If no, why not, and how do you know?
- Does your child understand what bullying, teasing, and harassment are?
- Are you aware of any bullying involving your child? Where did it happen (e.g., in class, at lunch, on the bus)? How often was it repeated?
- Are you aware of any bullying involving your child that has occurred through electronic media, including texting, social networks, YouTube, etc. (called *cyberbullying*)?
- Does your child display behaviors (verbal or non-verbal) or have a disability that may make him or her a target for bullying?
- Given the specific nature of your child's disability, is he or she able to conform to the school's code of conduct?
- Does your child show verbal or physical behavior that puts him or her at risk for becoming a bully, or for being perceived as a bully?
- Does your child have the communication skills to say "No!" or "Stop that," to get help, or to inform anyone if he or she is being bullied?
- Does your child have friends at school?
- Does the school promote opportunities for all children to interact socially, including children with disabilities?
- Is there an adult at school that you and your child trust?
- What supports or accommodations may be needed to help protect your child from bullying or to refrain from behaviors that others perceive as bullying?



## 3. School Roles and Responsibilities

School personnel support and implement the IEP. They provide the services, accommodations, and instruction the student needs to meet these goals, and they regularly assess the progress the student makes in achieving specific objectives. Age-appropriate, developmental, social skills instruction may include a variety of approaches in different settings within the school.

Services such as counseling or speech therapy are designed to help students interact effectively with others. The IEP may focus on particular social skills such as sharing, taking turns, making and responding to requests, being assertive, or thinking before acting. Other strategies may focus on relaxation techniques, stop-and-think exercises, positive affirmations, journal writing, and art projects. See the section on *IEP Team Roles and Responsibilities*.

Teachers and staff may provide additional support throughout the school day. Cafeteria staff and playground monitors provide additional supervision during unstructured times and can assist students with disabilities and others vulnerable to bullying. These adjunct staff should also receive bullying prevention training specific to their important roles.

### **Examples of Accommodations In and Out of the Classroom**

- **Allowing a student to leave class early to avoid hallway incidents between instructional periods**
- **Setting up a procedure to allow a target of bullying to discretely leave or avoid a bullying situation by going to a “safe room”**
- **Seating a student near friends or peer mentors and away from potential bullies**





## 3a. Principal Roles and Responsibilities

### The principal:

- Creates and models a culture of caring and respect for all students, including students with disabilities
- Conveys to the entire staff, including nonteaching staff, that they share responsibility to prevent bullying in the school
- Understands and conveys to staff that students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to bullying
- Allows time for general education and special education teachers to discuss the bullying concerns of children with disabilities
- Ensures that bullying prevention and intervention policies and procedures are inclusive of students with disabilities
- Directs school personnel to include the student's IEP Team in addressing instances of bullying

Not all students with disabilities have an IEP; some may have a 504 plan. They too may be vulnerable and a target for bullying or at risk for bullying others. Schools should include appropriate accommodations in a student's 504 plan.



## 3b. Teacher Roles and Responsibilities

### The teacher:

- Fosters a climate of acceptance, respect, cooperative learning, and an understanding of abilities and disabilities
- Ensures his or her instruction takes into account students' different learning styles
- Includes age-appropriate messages about bullying prevention in his or her lessons
- Designs the bullying prevention and intervention curriculum with the needs of students with disabilities in mind
- Provides opportunities for students to learn safe and realistic strategies, as victims or bystanders, to help prevent bullying
- Is prepared to assist students, including students with disabilities, to report instances of bullying
- Provides daily opportunities for students with disabilities to demonstrate the social skills required to develop friendships



## 3c. IEP Team Roles and Responsibilities

### The IEP Team:

- Considers the student's non-academic strengths (e.g., music, art, sports) as ways to bolster his or her self-esteem and social skills
- Distributes this guide, *Bullying Prevention and Intervention: A Guide for the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team*, to parents
- Values and encourages parental involvement
- Considers whether a student is vulnerable to bullying
- Addresses the issue of bullying by developing appropriate goals and benchmarks
- Includes necessary services and supports in the student's IEP, either in PLEP A, PLEP B, or Additional Information sections. Such services *may* include:
  - ◇ Instructional personnel or supplementary aides during identified times of the day when bullying is likely to occur
  - ◇ Direct one-on-one instruction using stories, role play, communication, or social pragmatic skill-building that will improve the student's ability to prevent bullying
  - ◇ Direct one-on-one instruction by a school psychologist, counselor, speech and language pathologist, or other appropriate professional to help the student learn how to reduce his or her vulnerability to bullying
  - ◇ Opportunities to practice and generalize skills learned
  - ◇ School-based counseling, using cognitive behavioral approaches, with the school psychologist, guidance counselor, or other appropriate professional
  - ◇ Functional behavioral analysis and development of a behavioral intervention plan for students who bully that identifies behaviors that lead to bullying and ways to reduce and/or avoid these behaviors
  - ◇ Assertiveness and/or self-advocacy training
  - ◇ Modifications, accommodations, or specially designed instruction to encourage exposure to the school's bullying prevention and intervention curriculum

# 3d. School Personnel Roles and Responsibilities



## School personnel are trained to:

- Help students with disabilities form successful relationships and participate fully in school and extracurricular activities
- Appreciate how students with disabilities may have difficulty in protecting themselves from bullying or in refraining from behaviors that others perceive as bullying
- Understand different disabilities and how these might relate to bullying victimization or perpetration
- Promote feelings of empathy among the general student body for students with disabilities

## In addition, school personnel:

- Provide enough supervision throughout the day to prevent bullying, especially during unstructured times (e.g., in the hall, at lunch, on the playground)
- Provide access to counseling about bullying both for the victims and the students who bully
- Provide access to skills training for students who bully—whether typical or with disabilities—to replace bullying behavior
- Involve families in reinforcing and/or coordinating the school's bullying prevention and intervention efforts for students with disabilities
- Communicate regularly with families about the specific skills and strategies to avoid bullying that have been developed for the student and the school



# Resources

## **Boston Public Schools**

Anti-Bullying Resources

[www.bostonpublicschools.org/antibullying](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/antibullying)

## **Eyes on Bullying**

[www.eyesonbullying.org](http://www.eyesonbullying.org)

<http://www.eyesonbullying.org/pdfs/toolkit.pdf>

## **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

Addressing the Needs of Students with Disabilities in the IEP and in School Bullying  
Prevention and Intervention Efforts

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/bullying/considerations-bully.html>

## **Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center**

Bullying: Taking It Seriously

<http://www.matrixparents.org/pdf/packetsArticles/BullyingArticle.pdf>

## **The National Alliance for Parent Centers, PACER Center, Inc.**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Bullying

<http://www.pacer.org/publications/bullypdf/BP-4.pdf>



# Notes





## **Bullying Prevention and Intervention: A Guide for the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team**

Created for  
Boston Public Schools  
by  
Bullying Prevention and Research Institute  
Education Development Center, Inc.

**Ed Donnelly, MEd; Kim Storey, EdD; and Ron Slaby, PhD**  
With assistance from Patricia Cameron, Kimberly Dash,  
Kathryn Huse, and Susana Valverde

Photo by Burt Granofsky

Thank you to the student from the Boston Public Schools who  
served as a model for the photograph in this guide.

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