

Bullying Prevention Guide

Bullying is incompatible with the principles of Scouting and should be taken seriously whenever and wherever it occurs. Unit leaders should understand how to prevent bullying and be prepared to deal with it proactively and thoughtfully.

What Is Bullying?

Bullying is harassment or aggressive behavior that is intended to intimidate, dominate, coerce, or hurt another person (the target) mentally, emotionally, or physically. It is *not* “just messing around,” and it is *not* “part of growing up.” Bullying is a form of victimization, not conflict. It is no more a “conflict” than is child abuse or domestic violence. *Bullying is prohibited in Scouting. All forms of bullying violate the Scout Oath and Scout Law.*

Forms of Bullying

Bullying takes many forms:

Verbal—Name-calling, belittling, taunting

Social—Spreading rumors; destroying or manipulating friendships; excluding or ostracizing the target

Physical—Hitting, shoving, kicking, using physical coercion, intimidation through gestures

Criminal—Assault; sexual aggression

Cyberbullying—Using digital technology such as social media, cell phones, etc., to engage in these kinds of behaviors

A bullied youth may develop a poor self-image, lose self-esteem, quit Scouting, or begin bullying other youth, thus perpetuating the bullying cycle. Studies indicate bullied youth tend to be future bullies. As a leader, either break the cycle or do not let it start.

How to Spot Bullying

A youth who is being bullied may:

- Be reluctant to join activities or unwilling to participate.
- Avoid activities, arrive late, or leave early (to avoid the bully).
- Avoid certain places or areas.
- Refuse to leave his tent at camp (out of fear).
- Experience nightmares, bedwetting, or insomnia (triggered by fear).
- Seem nervous around certain youth.
- Wait to use the restroom away from the group.
- Appear sad, moody, angry, anxious, or depressed.
- Seek, carry, or hide weapons (for protection).
- Lose money or personal items such as clothing or patches (taken by the bully).
- Feel sick, often with seemingly psychosomatic illnesses.
- Appear lonely, have difficulty making friends, or suddenly have fewer friends.
- Seem reluctant to defend himself verbally or physically when teased or pushed.
- Have bruises, cuts, defensive wounds, or other physical marks.
- Mention or consider suicide.

A Special Note to All Leaders

You are the key to creating a safe, bullying-free environment for Scouting youth. Experts say that leaders can usually tell when a youth new to the unit may become a target and be bullied. Individual factors such as temperament, social competence, physical condition (e.g., overweight/underweight), speaking another language at home, special health-care needs, perceived differences (e.g., sexual identity/orientation, race/ethnicity, religion), or the presence of a disability may put a youth at greater risk of being bullied. Leaders should identify these youth and take measures to help ensure their smooth integration into the unit.

- Support and empower youth who are bullied or at risk to be bullied; ensure they are connected with other Scouts who have things in common.
- Keep an ongoing, open line of communication with parents; keep parents updated on their children’s progress with the unit and provide support.

- Speak with Scouts known to be unreceptive to new Scouting youth; empower them to be good Scouts and welcoming to new youth.
- Set an example by how you integrate these youth into the program; model strong, positive behavior by your interaction with youth and adults.
- Take bullying seriously; reinforce the message, using key points of the Scout Law, that bullying is not acceptable behavior.
- Closely supervise youth in your care and interrupt bullying whenever it occurs; follow up to monitor the results.

Remember, Youth Protection Begins With YOU.

Warning Signs for Suicidal Behavior

Common signs include:

- Talking about suicide
- Getting the means to commit suicide, such as buying a gun or stockpiling pills
- Withdrawing from social contact and wanting to be left alone
- Having mood swings, such as being emotionally high one day and deeply discouraged the next
- Being preoccupied with death, dying, or violence
- Feeling trapped or hopeless about a situation
- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Doing risky or self-destructive things, such as using drugs or driving recklessly
- Saying goodbye to people as if they won't be seen again
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated, particularly when experiencing other warning signs listed above

Suicide Intervention and Response

If a youth mentions suicide, take it seriously.

- Immediately notify parents or guardians.
- Immediately notify the Scout executive.
- Utilize the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available toll-free at 800-273-8255.
- If a youth is in danger of committing suicide or has made a suicide attempt, get emergency help.
- Don't leave the youth alone.
- Don't try to handle the situation without help.
- Call 911 or your local emergency number right away if you believe the youth is at immediate risk. Or, if you think you can do so safely, take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room yourself.
- Try to find out if he or she is under the influence of alcohol or drugs or may have taken an overdose.

How to Address Bullying

These tips can help Scout leaders respond effectively:

- Immediately stop the bullying. Stand between the bully and the target, preferably blocking their eye contact. Do not immediately ask the reason for the bullying or try to determine the facts.
- In a matter-of-fact tone of voice, state what behaviors you saw or heard. Tell Scouts that bullying is unacceptable and against the Scout Law; e.g., "Calling someone names is bullying. The Scout Law states that a Scout is friendly and kind."

- Support the bullied youth in a way that allows him or her to regain self-control, to save face, and to feel safe from retaliation. Follow up with the youth later, but at the time of the incident do not ask what happened or be overly solicitous. Young people often find it uncomfortable to be questioned in front of peers, and a bullied youth may feel embarrassed to be shielded by an adult.
- Do not require Scouts to apologize or make amends during the heat of the moment. Everyone should have time to cool off.
- Speak to bystanders but do not put them on the spot to explain publicly what they observed. In a calm and supportive tone, praise them if they tried to help. If they did not act, or if they responded aggressively, guide them in how to appropriately intervene or get help when they witness bullying; e.g., "Maybe you weren't sure what to do. Next time, please tell the person to stop or get an adult's help if you feel you can't work together to handle the situation."
- Immediately notify parents or guardians of both the target and the youth who bullied of what occurred. Address the parents' or guardians' questions and concerns. Inform them of the next steps.
- Hold Scouts who bully others fully accountable for their actions. If appropriate, impose immediate consequences. As a first step, you might take away program opportunities.
- Increase supervision to ensure the bullying is not repeated and does not escalate. Let the bullies know you will be watching to be sure there is no repetition or retaliation. Notify other Scouters, and discuss the incident at the next unit meeting.
- Do not require Scouts to meet to "work things out." Forced apologies don't help, and a compulsory meeting could worsen the relationship between the parties. Instead, encourage the Scout who bullied to make amends (after follow-up with a parent or guardian) in a way that would be meaningful for the youth who was bullied.

Cyberbullying

A rapidly growing form of bullying, cyberbullying uses the power of the Internet, cellular networks, and social media to harass the target. Cyberbullying encompasses text or instant messages with hostile or degrading comments, embarrassing digital images, and fictitious online posts intended to humiliate, threaten, or coerce. Cyberbullying can devastate the target, whether a lone bully participates or others witness or join the attack. The target may obsess over what is posted, become depressed, avoid school or social activities, or have suicidal thoughts. In extreme circumstances, cyberbullying can lead to suicide.

Parents and adults should talk with youth about their online activities and stay alert to signs of cyberbullying such as sleeplessness, withdrawal, stress, avoidance, declining grades, or lowered self-esteem.

Ways to Address Cyberbullying

- Encourage a child to speak up immediately if he or she is the victim of cyberbullying. Assure that a young person has a trusted adult—whether parent, teacher, or Scout leader—in whom to confide.
- Block cyberbullies by using available privacy controls such as blocked-sender lists and call-blocking.
- Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save them as evidence.
- If the cyberbullying is criminal or you suspect it may be, contact the police. Areas falling under the jurisdiction of law enforcement include threats of violence, extortion, obscene or harassing phone calls or messages, harassment via stalking or hate crimes, child pornography, sexual exploitation, and taking a photo or video image of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy.
- Utilize tools offered by the BSA. To help families and volunteers keep youth safe while online, the BSA introduced the Cyber Chip, developed in cooperation with the content expert NetSmartz®, part of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. (See “Bullying Prevention Resources,” below.)

Seeking Professional Help

Bullying is a form of abuse that can cause psychological, physical, and academic problems. Parents may want to talk with a counselor about a counseling or mental health referral. A professional can assess how much support and assistance a bullied youth needs. If a youth is sick, stressed, not sleeping, or having other problems because of bullying, a health professional should be contacted.

A young person who bullies others will also need the help of caring adults. Scouts who bully may need help recognizing their behavior, taking responsibility for their actions, developing empathy, and finding ways to make amends. Scout leaders can offer guidance in how to interact with others in socially appropriate ways. Assess possible reasons for the bullying behavior, such as lack of self-control, poor social skills, academic problems, or a troubled family life. Depending on the severity of the bullying behavior or the related circumstances, therapeutic intervention might be needed for the bully as well as the target.

Incidents Requiring an Immediate Report to the Scout Executive

The following must be reported to the council Scout executive for action immediately:

- Any threat or use of a weapon
- Any negative behavior associated with race, religion, sexual identity or orientation, or disability
- Any reports to authorities where the BSA's Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse policy or your state's mandatory reporting of child abuse laws apply
- Any abuse of a child that meets state reporting mandates for bullying or harassment
- Any mention or threats of suicide

If someone is at immediate risk of harm, call 911.

If a Scout is bullied because of race, ethnicity, or disability, and local help is not working to solve the problem, contact the BSA's Member Care Contact Center at 972-580-2489, or send an email to youth.protection@scouting.org.

Antibullying Action Plan

- Stop the abuse, bullying, or policy violation.
- Protect the targeted youth.
- Summon assistance from other leaders, authorities, etc.
- Gather factual information about the bullying incident, including details of who was involved, what happened, and when and where it happened.
- Notify parents or guardians of both the target and the youth who bullied.
- Take corrective action.
- Notify the council Scout executive when warranted.
- Check back with the targeted youth to ensure the problem behavior has stopped.

Bullying Prevention Resources

Antibullying and Anti-Cyber Intimidation Programs

Website: learning.learningforlife.org/digital-programs/abc

BSA Youth Protection

Website: www.scouting.org/youthprotection

Bullying Awareness

Website: www.scouting.org/Training/YouthProtection/bullying

Cyber Chip

Website: www.scouting.org/cyberchip

Cyberbullying Research Center

Website: cyberbullying.us

NetSmartz Workshop

Website: www.netsmartz.org

StopBullying.gov

Website: www.stopbullying.gov

