

## Addressing Bullying at School

Bullying of LGBTQQIA+ students, Black and Brown students, and neuroatypical and disabled students is unacceptable. You can ask for a GLSEN advocate to come with you and your child to meet with administration and work for better treatment. In the interest of supporting underrepresented students, we have compiled some recommended steps you can use to help you in these interactions.

**Step 1: Thank your child** for coming to you. It takes trust and courage to address bullying directly. Sit with them, listen, and attend to them. Ask them what they need short term and long term to feel safe. They might need some time away from school to process what has happened.

**Step 2:** When it feels appropriate soon after the incident, help them **draft a written statement** about what took place. This written account can then be sent to a teacher and administrator by email to memorialize what has happened and the steps you would like to see the school take to address it. Bullying can significantly impact your child's wellbeing and **the initial goal must be to stop the behavior.**

### What to write?

- Ask your student to write down all of what was said (as much as they can remember now) while the incident is fresh in their minds. Make sure that they include their part in the interaction where appropriate.
- Use exact wording, including swearing or slurs as this can often determine how the incident is addressed. Did it get physical?
- Were other students involved? If your student cannot name those involved, give as many details as you can, and the school may be able to fill in some details by using their cameras or from knowing kids that associate together.
- Were there witnesses to the incident? This can be a janitor or teacher. It can be another student.
- Where did the incident take place? Outside the school? Inside near the lunchroom? On the bus? The more specific they can be at this stage the better about the details.
- Was it a first incident? If this is not the first incident, ask them to recount prior interactions to help with addressing what may be a pattern of behavior. It is important to **report each incident** as repeated bullying incidents are dealt with more seriously and often sent to the school district for remediation.
- Trauma-informed practices suggest that the fewer times you are required to relive a traumatic incident, the better. This is the reason to have a written account. The administration can look it over and may ask follow-up questions in person.
- **\*Special Note:** memory is a challenging thing during a traumatic event. Recognize that more details will occur to your student after the fact and leave room for additional information to be added to the statement.

**Step 3. Request a meeting.** If there was a physical aspect to the incident, please do not wait to email the teacher or administration. Reach out directly by phone and ask to meet right away. If the incident took place in class, it may be important to start communicating with the teacher and copy the administration on your email. Think of this as a chance to **gather additional information and context about the incident.** Be open to understanding the role of each person in the interaction. You can send an email or bring the written report with you to an in-person meeting. This is your chance to ask for

what you think needs to happen in the situation. The school will have their own policies in place, but it's important to speak up for what you feel is appropriate. One note to consider is that if your child were the bully in this situation, what do you feel would be the best way to handle it. **Put together a plan** that you and your child feel can stop the bullying. Set a time to meet or communicate before you leave the meeting; to follow up.

**Step 4. Follow up the meeting immediately with a written email to memorialize the plan** you have put in place to address the bullying and the actions you feel are necessary to make that happen. It is crucial to have a paper trail of what was talked about and decided at each step in the process.

**Step 5.** After making a plan to address an incident with your school, if the behavior occurs again, the administration can treat the offense more seriously. **Ask your child to report every offense.** Repeat offenses will often be moved up to the District where a harsher punishment may be given. We recommend that you start with the teacher and administration and give the action plan a good chance to work, but if that fails, you do have other options open to you. The goal should be that if the student who is bullying can make a change, they should be given a chance to do so. But if that is not working after a reasonable amount of time, the District can and should take a stricter stance. Talk through what you and your child feel is reasonable.

#### **Next Steps:**

**How the school may act upon learning of the incident.** It is likely the school will invite the parties involved to come and talk separately about the incident. You can ask that your child have a parent with them when this happens. Many schools have cameras and depending on where the incident took place, they may be able to find the *visual* evidence on film. This often does not include sound, and so a written account of what was said is extra important; as are witnesses statements.

**Title IX Coordinator:** Every district has a Title IX coordinator, whose role is to ensure equal access and opportunity for your child. **Your child has a right to a safe environment to learn** and this person at the district can help you fill out an incident report and understand your options. You can fill out an incident report at the same time as you are working with the school. The form is available on the district website. If you feel the school and the district have not addressed the issue adequately, this option is open to you. Be aware that it can take some time, but if it produces enduring change; it is worthwhile to report this on the federal level. The other students involved will be given a chance to respond to your Title IX incident report, so plan on that being part of the process.

**Other Place to Seek Help:** If the incident involves threats of physical harm or has reached a level of physical or verbal assault, **you can fill out an incident report at your local police department.** This can happen at any point in the process. Your child will need to recount what took place, but you can bring a written account and you can ensure a child advocate is present when they talk to your child.

**Documenting the incident is so important.** It is a way to ensure a record is kept if things should escalate further. Be advised that the police decide what to follow up on. If they don't deem it serious enough to prosecute, they can still provide a record of what took place. This is a serious step and should be thoughtfully considered and reserved for a serious event.

**Legal Support.** You can seek your own legal advice by contacting an attorney or **contact your local American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) office.** They will have you fill out an intake form on their website

where you can attach a written report of the incident. This will help them know who the best advocate is to take your case. It's important to know the legal remedies open to address bullying. If your case rises to the level of assault or a credible threat, you have rights and remedies. If a bullying situation becomes severe it is important to look at the laws in your state that protect you. Follow this link to get a sense of how Utah law views these more serious incidents **{Insert Kristen's Document}**

Knowledge is power and you can be your child's best advocate by thoughtfully considering which steps are the right ones for their situation.