



Study Guide for “Is Your Child a Target of Bullying?”

Section 5

In order to develop intervention strategies, bullying behavior first needs to be defined. One or more of these characteristics needs to be present in order to distinguish a behavior as bullying:

1. **Intentional behavior toward the target.** The target does not knowingly provoke the bully; the target may have made it clear he or she resents the behavior.
2. **Repetitive.** Actions are generally carried out repeatedly over time; but they can also be a single incident.
3. **Hurtful acts, words, or other behavior.** An oppressive or negative act carried out against another with the *intent* to hurt or harm.
4. **Committed by one or more persons against another.** Bullying can be the act of a single person or can be done by groups.
5. **Presence of real or perceived “imbalance of power.”** A child without power cannot bully. Power can be defined as either physical strength, social status, or a higher sense of self-esteem.

The United States Department of Education (DOE), the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) developed and sent a letter to school principals, superintendents, and college and university presidents on July 25, 2000 known as the “Dear Colleague” letter. This letter provides an overview of legal and educational principles involved in harassment based on disability, and defines *disability harassment*.

Section 7

There are many reasons why children bully, but the most predominant is a child’s inability to channel his or her anger or frustration in an appropriate manner. Bullies can be aggressive, physically stronger, remorseless, and intentional in wanting to harm others. They often cannot distinguish between fear and respect, and they frequently have an inaccurate sense of self-worth.

Section 8

Children who are bullied are often referred to as “victims.” This term implies that the child is powerless to change his or her situation or that he or she is somehow responsible for the actions of another. A victim is seen as acted upon, hurt, wounded, or picked on at random. However, children who are bullied are really “targets”, and they do have power to change what is happening to them. By using the word “target” instead of “victim”, we can change how individuals perceive bullying situations.

Sometimes children are willing and able to talk with their parents about bullying, but other times children may be reluctant to talk about it to anyone, as they may fear that if they do, the bullying may become worse or that nothing will change. Parents whose children who are not willing to communicate about being bullied, or whose children do not have the skills to effectively communicate, need to watch for changes in their child’s behavior, because they may be indicators that a child is being bullied. Some of these indicators might include: the child wants to stay home from school, the child withdraws, a change in sleep routine, or a change in temperament.

Section 11

To better recognize verbal bullying, adults need to understand the difference between playful and hurtful teasing. The difference between playful teasing and hurtful teasing is in the *intent* of the child initiating the behavior and the *reaction* of the target.

- **Playful teasing:** The target reacts with a smile or a laugh, and both parties are building social contact and awareness. The parties are engaged in mutual interaction and have equal power.
- **Hurtful teasing:** The target becomes hurt, angry, or sad. The child initiating the action may be familiar with the methods that “push the buttons” of the target.





Section 12

Talking about bullying can be hard for some children, and parents need to help their child feel comfortable and secure in discussing bullying situations. Some strategies for helping a reluctant child discuss bullying can include: reading stories with the child about bullying situations, talking about recent events in the news, or discussing bullying incidents on TV or in a movie. When a child does open up about bullying, parents need to remember and practice the following:

- **Listen.** It is the child's story; let him or her tell it.
- **Believe.** To be an effective advocate parents need to react in a way that encourages the child to trust.
- **Be supportive.** Tell the child it is not his fault and that he does not deserve to be bullied. Parents need to empower their child by telling him how terrific he is. Parents need to avoid judgmental comments about their child or the child who bullies.
- **Be patient.** Children may not be ready to open up right away. Talking about the bullying may be difficult as they may fear retaliation from the bully or think that even if they tell an adult that nothing will change.
- **Provide information.** Parents should educate their child about bullying by providing information at a level that the child can understand.
- **Explore options for intervention strategies.** Parents can discuss with their child options they may have in dealing with bullying behavior.

Even though a child may not be the target of bullying right now, research indicates that as a child grows older the dynamics of bullying can change and their potential for becoming a target may increase. It is important to recognize a child's potential for becoming a target and develop a plan to provide them the skills and strategies to avoid bullying behavior.

Section 14

Intervention strategies for a child who is the target of bullying are dependent on not giving the bully the desired response of causing hurt or harm. When a child is a target of bullying behavior he or she needs to have methods to react to the bullying situation; these reactions can be either indirect or direct.

Indirect:

- **Disregard the bully.** Try not to give the bully an emotional response; try not to cry, become angry, act scared, etc. Let the child know they cannot control what others say, however they can learn to control their own reactions.
- **Use self-talk.** Practice with the child, methods to think through the situation. Instill the importance of acknowledging that just because someone says words about you or unfairly does something to you, that you still have choices.
- **Practice role playing and problem solving.** Work with the child to develop established responses to situations; then practice the responses until the child is easily able to do it on their own.
- **Move away from the bully and/or the situation.** As soon as a child recognizes the potential for bullying, he or she should move away from the situation. Help the child make a plan for where to go.
- **Stay away from areas or situations where the bullying occurs.** When a child knows that bullying occurs in certain places, help them develop a plan that enables them to avoid those places. The child should always stay in the view of an adult.
- **Stay with another child, friend, peer, or sibling.** Research shows bullies are more likely to target children when they are alone.





Direct:

- **Educate the bully.** Provide the bully with information. Tell the bully a brief statement about your disability or difference. For example, when a child with a learning disability is called stupid, they can respond by telling the bully, “*I have difficulty reading, but I am working hard to improve.*” This is best done one-to-one, not in a group situation.
- **Agree with the bully.** Tell the bully, they are absolutely correct, and you agree with everything they are saying. For example, when a child with a limp is teased, they can tell the bully “Yes, I do walk with a limp, you are right in noticing that.”
- **Seek the help of an adult.** Locate the nearest adult, attract their attention and let the adult know you need assistance.
- **Do something the bully doesn’t anticipate.** Yell out so that another child or adult looks your way or keep a whistle with you and blow it loudly.
- **Ask the bully to stop.** Let the bully know that you want them to stop and tell them they should not bully you. This is most effective when there are other children near you.

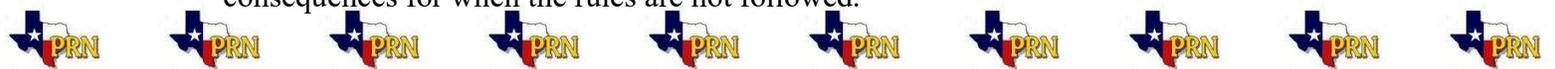
In situations in which the bullying is very intense, relentless, or the child feels physically threatened, strategies that involve direct interaction between a bully and the child should, when possible, be avoided. It is generally not a good idea to respond physically (i.e., fight back) as this only perpetuates the behavior and can lead to other issues such as suspension or increased physical violence. Calling the parent of the bully should be discouraged. The better recourse is to work with school administrators to address the issue of consequences for bullying behavior and to encourage school wide awareness that bullying will not be tolerated.

Section 16

Participation in adult-monitored activities provides a child the opportunity to increase peer interactions and build their self-confidence, while ensuring a level of adult supervision and safety. They can also help children who have difficulty understanding social norms develop their skills for appropriate peer interaction. Some of these activities can include school clubs and committee, after school programs, activity classes such as dance, and community involvement groups such as scouts.

Parents can advocate for school wide programs that promote bullying awareness through:

- **Initiating a school wide assembly to introduce and discuss bullying issues.** Invite speakers to educate the student body about bullying behavior and how to intervene if they witness bullying behavior and how to react if they are a target.
- **Promoting disability awareness.** Create an atmosphere in the school that is accepting of the differences of others.
- **Encouraging peer interaction.** Promote peer relationships. Options include developing a buddy system in which class members are assigned a buddy for the week and they share in class activities or create a mentor program in which a child from an upper grade mentors a child from a lower grade.
- **Providing Safe Zones.** Create areas that are heavily monitored by adults trained on how to recognize all types of bullying behavior and methods for safe, effective intervention. These areas could include places that are heavy traffic areas or those not normally monitored by adults such as segments of the playground, the elevator, a designated bathroom, or an area of the lunchroom.
- **Developing conflict resolution programs.** Students need to be educated about methods of how to resolve their differences with others.
- **Developing a Class Contract.** Work with the students to establish a set of rules about how to behave in the classroom, on the playground, in the hallway, etc. The contract should also include consequences for when the rules are not followed.





Section 17

Adults can educate and empower children to act against bullying behavior by defining the difference between telling and tattling and providing assurance that there will not be retaliation for their actions; they should let children know that adults do not accept bullying behavior!

There are many ways parents can be involved in and work with their child's school to help prevent bullying behavior; some of the strategies include:

- ***Talk with your child's teacher.*** The teacher needs to know you are concerned about your child's safety and welfare. Discuss options for the teacher's involvement, and how he or she can help with your child's plan to respond and react to bullying behavior.
- ***Talk with school administrators.*** Encourage school personnel to adopt a bully awareness and bully reduction program.
- ***Ask to speak to the class about the child's disability.*** Awareness can alleviate some of the misconceptions students may have about a peer with a disability and lead to greater understanding and empathy.
- ***Be a part of your child's school; volunteer or visit.*** Take an active role in your child's school; your child needs to know you are interested in what happens at school. Let students, teachers, and other parents know who you are. Those familiar with your child and family are more invested in making sure their peer is included and protected. Volunteer for bullying awareness events, act as parent mentor, or offer to monitor the playground or hallways, or volunteer to read an age-appropriate book to the class that addresses the issues of bullying.
- ***Join the local parent teacher organization.*** Raise the level of bullying awareness. Become the "bullying expert" of the group by researching information about current issues and trends with bully prevention programs.
- ***Offer to speak before the school board.*** Discuss the issues and concerns surrounding bullying in the school.

There are a variety of ways parents can find professional help for their child and their family; such as checking the yellow pages, networking with other families, searching the internet, and contacting your local parent organization. Some of the different service options available can include:

- ***Talking with a counselor or therapist.*** Counseling can be beneficial for the target and the parent as they may be dealing with conflicting emotions about the bullying. Schools offer some in-school counseling also.
- ***Consulting with violence prevention organizations.*** Violence prevention organizations specialize in preventing abuse in schools and may be able to provide valuable information on how to protect a child.
- ***Learning more about community support groups.*** Children who are bullied can benefit a great deal from talking with peers who share similar experiences. Group discussion can help a child understand that his or her situation is not unique and also provide opportunities for problem solving and forming social relationships. Some domestic abuse organizations offer support groups for children who are targets of abusive behavior.
- ***Seeking the advice of organizations that specialize in the child's disability.*** Organizations specializing in the child's disability may be more familiar with the characteristics and circumstances unique to the child's disability and might offer specific interventions tailored to the child's disability.

Section 19

Federal laws protect the rights of a child with a disability against bullying behavior that is based on the child's disabilities and that interferes with or denies the child the opportunity to participate in or benefit





from the educational program. These laws include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). OCR enforces Section 504 and Title II of ADA, while OSERS administers IDEA.



Section 20

School policy must establish procedures for notice to parents of a bully and the target(s), for actions a student should take to get help or intervention in response to bullying, set out procedures for counseling options for targets, bullies, & witnesses, establish a procedure for reporting, investigating & determining whether bullying occurred, and prohibit discipline against a victim who was found to have used reasonable self-defense.



School districts have a legal responsibility to respond to disability harassment allegations. OCR and OSERS recommend the following measures to prevent and eliminate harassment:



- Encouraging parents, students, employees and community members to discuss disability harassment and to report it when they become aware of it.
- Widely publicizing anti-harassment statements and procedures for handling discrimination complaints. This information makes students and employees aware of what constitutes harassment, that such conduct is prohibited, that the institution will not tolerate such behavior, and that effective action, including disciplinary action, where appropriate, will be taken.
- Providing appropriate, up-to-date, and timely training for staff and students to recognize and handle potential harassment.
- Counseling both person(s) who have been harmed by harassment and person(s) who have been responsible for the harassment of others.
- Implementing monitoring programs to follow up on resolved issues of disability harassment.
- Regularly assessing and, as appropriate, modifying existing disability harassment policies and procedures for addressing the issue, to ensure effectiveness.



Section 21

When a child becomes a target of bullying, parents need to develop a record, or history, of the event(s). This record is useful when talking with school educators, law enforcement personnel, or other individuals who may need to assist parents in intervening against bullying. Records help parents keep a concise, accurate timeline of events and can help determine if the bullying behavior has increased or decreased in frequency or duration. Parents should remember-*if it is not in writing, it does not exist!* Content of the documentation should include:



- written information about the bullying incidents
- the date of the event
- the persons involved
- the child's account of the event
- all communication with professionals (teachers, administrators, etc.)
- the date of the communication(s)
- summary of the discussion of the event and the responses of the professional
- the action(s) taken
- reports filed by the school in accordance with the school district policy



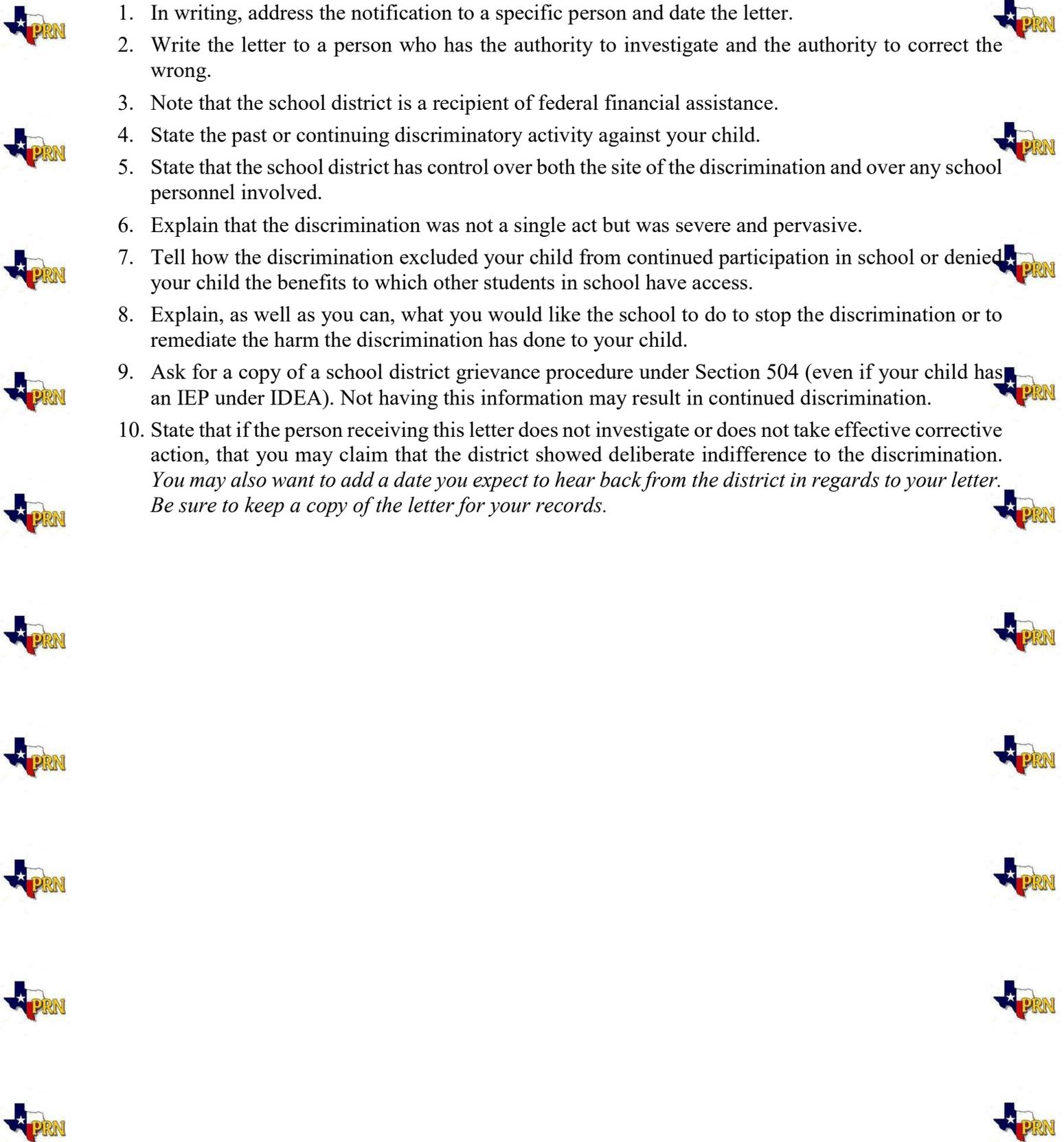
Other methods for recording events should include taking pictures of the child after a bullying incident to document any physical evidence, health care records that indicate bullying, or a tape recording of the child talking about the bullying.





The following are 10 suggested steps for parents to follow when they choose to formally notify school administrators about their concern of disability harassment.

1. In writing, address the notification to a specific person and date the letter.
2. Write the letter to a person who has the authority to investigate and the authority to correct the wrong.
3. Note that the school district is a recipient of federal financial assistance.
4. State the past or continuing discriminatory activity against your child.
5. State that the school district has control over both the site of the discrimination and over any school personnel involved.
6. Explain that the discrimination was not a single act but was severe and pervasive.
7. Tell how the discrimination excluded your child from continued participation in school or denied your child the benefits to which other students in school have access.
8. Explain, as well as you can, what you would like the school to do to stop the discrimination or to remediate the harm the discrimination has done to your child.
9. Ask for a copy of a school district grievance procedure under Section 504 (even if your child has an IEP under IDEA). Not having this information may result in continued discrimination.
10. State that if the person receiving this letter does not investigate or does not take effective corrective action, that you may claim that the district showed deliberate indifference to the discrimination. *You may also want to add a date you expect to hear back from the district in regards to your letter. Be sure to keep a copy of the letter for your records.*



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