



A parent guide for dealing with
bullying in elementary schools

2003 Edition



BCCPAC

This guide is for parents of elementary school students and Parent Advisory Council (PAC) leaders. It will:

- ✓ answer some of the questions you may have about bullying, and give you information on what you need to know and do to help your children
- ✓ provide information that your PAC can use to work with your school to help ensure that the school is safe.

This guide is also useful to others who wish to understand parents' views on bullying, and help to raise awareness and promote effective programs.

In this guide, “child” or “student” means any person under the age of 19; “Parent” is used as it is defined in the *BC School Act*:

- a) the guardian of the person of the student or child,
- b) the person legally entitled to custody of the student or child, or
- c) the person who usually has the care and control of the student or child.

This guide is also for others who may be acting as parents, including members of the extended family or friends.

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What is bullying?

Some examples of bullying

Physical:

- **slapping, hitting, pinching, punching, kicking**
- **locking in a confined space**
- **unwelcome touching**
- **extortion**

Verbal:

- **name-calling**
- **unwelcome teasing**
- **taunting**
- **spreading rumours, gossiping**
- **racist or homophobic comments**

Social:

- **Excluding from a group**
- **threatening or insulting graffiti**
- **threatening notes, letters, emails, telephone calls**
- **threatening words, actions or weapons**

Gail and her friend Jane have spent a few minutes after class finishing some work and are gathering their belongings. When they reach the classroom door, they discover that a group of girls has gathered there. The hostile group glares menacingly at Jane. As the two friends pass through, Gail hears “Look at her pants. Isn’t she a loser”, and other derogatory terms leveled at her friend. Unnerved, she and Jane leave as quickly as possible.

Students and parents expect schools to be safe, where students can learn and teachers can teach in a warm and welcoming place, free from bullying, intolerance and violence. Teachers and support staff have the right to a safe and harassment-free workplace under their collective agreements.¹ Students, however, have no special protection and must rely upon adults to keep them safe.

Bullying is a pattern of aggressive behaviour meant to hurt or cause discomfort to another person. Bullies always have more power than victims. Their power comes from physical size, strength, status, and support within the peer group.

There are three types of bullying:

- ✓ *physical*, where a person is harmed or their property damaged
- ✓ *verbal*, where a person’s feelings are hurt through insults and name-calling
- ✓ *social*, where a person is shunned or excluded from groups and events.

Bullying may be obvious or hidden. Children who are being bullied...or are bullying others may:

- ✓ complain of being poorly treated
- ✓ change their behaviour (for example, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, angry outbursts, being sick in the morning, become more aggressive towards siblings)
- ✓ be unwilling to leave the house, change their route to school, or skip school
- ✓ come home with torn clothes, unexplained bruises, new clothes or other items, or money not accounted for
- ✓ talk about responding to others in a way that may result in the school taking disciplinary action
- ✓ start doing poorly in school.

¹ Article E.2.2 of the Teachers’ Provincial Collective Agreement (PCA) defines harassment as:

- sexual harassment; or
- any improper behaviour that is directed at or offensive to any person, is unwelcome, and which the person knows or ought reasonably to know would be unwelcome; or
- objectionable conduct, comment, materials or display made on either a one-time or continuous basis that demeans, belittles, intimidates, or humiliates another person; or
- the exercise of power or authority in a manner which serves no legitimate work purpose and which a person ought reasonably to know is inappropriate; or
- such misuses of power or authority as intimidation, threats, coercion and blackmail.

Children who are bullied frequently do not know how to respond to aggressive behaviour. They struggle with name-calling, put-downs, or being excluded, and think that school is an unsafe and distressing place. Left unresolved, bullying can:

- affect their school work
- lead to skipping school
- affect them physical, emotionally, and mentally
- lead to retaliation.

In many cases, the problems continue outside the school setting into the greater community. In the extreme, suicide and other forms of serious violence can result. It is important for students, parents and families, school and district staff and the members of the community to recognize bullying and work together to deal with it.

Who bullies?

Anyone can bully. Bullying can occur in and out of school, and may involve:

- students
- other youth (not attending school)
- adults (e.g. school and support staff, volunteers, parents).

Bullying is learned behaviour that can be replaced with more positive behaviour. Recent research suggests that boys and girls engage in bullying at about the same rate, although the type of bullying behaviour can differ. About 30% of children in a school bully 20% of the other children (*Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities*, pages 6-13).

Bullying can start at an early age, even among 2-3 year olds. If left unchecked, it will get worse as the child gets older. It is important for parents to act as early as possible.

To understand more about who bullies and why, refer to the BC Ministry of Education's guides, *Helping our kids live violence free: A parent's guide (for students in grades K-7)* and *Focus on Bullying*, referred to above. (See *Recommended Reading and Viewing* on page 17 of this guide).

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/live_vf/

The Ministry of Education's Statement of Education Policy Order describes the following as one of the goals of public schooling that is shared among schools, the family and community:

- ***Human and Social Development—to develop in students a sense of self-worth and personal initiative...(and)...to develop a sense of social responsibility, and a tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others.***

The Ministry has developed Performance Standards for Social Responsibility. See page 17 of this guide.

Jamie, a 10 year old boy, arrived home from school for the third time in a week with his clothes covered in mud and his T-shirt ripped. His mother asked whether this was another touch football game and expressed concern about the state of Jamie's clothes.

Jamie just muttered and went to his room. At the dinner table, he ate very little and was not talkative. Later that evening, his mother noticed him sprawled across his bed with his homework untouched. Upon questioning him, she discovered there was a group of boys who were taking his lunch money every day and pushing him around. Jamie said he hated school and didn't want to go there anymore.

What parents can do

“The best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with parents.”

United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Article 7, 1959

Our children need to be safe emotionally and physically. Addressing the signs of bullying early, before the behaviour and its impact get worse, is important to creating a safe school.

As a parent, you can help to prevent bullying by teaching your children how to be caring of others, get along, deal with angry feelings, and be assertive without being aggressive in standing up for themselves. Children need to understand how important it is to report bullying. Parents can help by showing them where to go for help when something goes wrong at school, and what action to expect.

Listen carefully to your child

Young children may be reluctant to report bullying, or may not even recognize it. They may think:

- ✓ they will suffer retaliation
- ✓ the problem isn't that bad, it's part of life
- ✓ they can handle the problem themselves
- ✓ they do not want to be seen as a ratter or tattler
- ✓ you, as the adult, will make the situation worse
- ✓ even with your help, they will not be protected
- ✓ the bullying is their fault.

Greg is called “gay” by a group of students in the school yard because he doesn't play sports or have many friends. He doesn't talk to his parents or teachers about this because he doesn't want to admit it is happening, and doesn't think they would do anything about it anyway.

After several weeks of this, he finally stands up to the taunters and gets into a fight. He is blamed and gets suspended. He begs his parents to let him change schools.


Children will talk about bullying when they know you will listen and help. As you listen and talk to your child, you will be able to determine what level of involvement is needed. Consider the following questions:

- ✓ How can I help my child stay safe?
- ✓ Does my child need help to stop bullying others?
- ✓ What information do I need?
- ✓ Who has the responsibility to take action?
- ✓ Where can I go for help?

Decide how you can help

Intervention is vital. *How* you intervene is just as important. When talking to your child about an incident, explain that “rattling”, “tattling” and “snitching” are negative labels that may be used to discourage children from reporting. It takes courage to report. Reporting is done to help keep someone safe.

As adults, we have a responsibility to ensure that incidents of bullying are reported and action is taken. If nothing is done, the problem will likely get worse.



Work with the school

Whether your child is the victim, a bystander, or bully, there is a basic approach to working with the school and district to achieve a positive resolution of the problem. First, contact the appropriate school staff member and report the situation. In most cases:

Contact the teacher if the problem occurs in an area supervised by the teacher, e.g., in the classroom or gym changeroom.

Contact the principal if the problem occurs on the playground, in the hallway, at lockers, at the bus stop, during extracurricular school activities, on the way to or from school, or if the problem persists in the classroom.

Contact the next level of authority, which may be a district principal, assistant superintendent, or the district superintendent of schools, if the problem continues.

In working towards a positive resolution, discuss the following:

- ✓ Who will look into your complaint, and when?
- ✓ When will that person get back to you, and what information can you expect?
- ✓ How will the school, now that it is aware of the problem, keep your child safe while the problem is being investigated (for example, supervision of the alleged bully)?
- ✓ How will your child's identity and privacy be protected to prevent retaliation?
- ✓ What services are available in the school or school district should your child need emotional or psychological support?

*"The principal of a school is responsible for administering and supervising the school including the general conduct of students."
School Act Regulation 265/89*

Approaching the school system can be intimidating. If you are not comfortable approaching the appropriate staff at anytime, go to their supervisor.

Don't forget to keep detailed notes. Use the self-help guide on page 10.

When advocating for your child, you want to know how and when the people in positions of responsibility are going to take action. If you need assistance, call the Advocacy Project toll-free line at 1-888-351-9834.

You may want to look in your community for groups or services to support you and your child. See the Resources section of this guide for some suggestions.


Use the right procedures

The BC Teachers' Federation Code of Ethics states:

"1. The teacher speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities."

The code is a model for professional and ethical behaviour.

When you need to address the behaviour of an adult, it is important to follow the complaints process available in your district. In the case of suspected child abuse, you have a duty under the law to report the matter promptly to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (see page 18 of this guide).



*"When should a school report student misconduct to police?
...school officials have a duty of care to protect students. This may include a duty to involve police in circumstances where student safety is threatened...
Involvement of the police can emphasize that criminal misconduct at the school is a serious matter and is of concern to the community as a whole."*

Keeping Schools Safe: A practical guide for principals and vice-principals, page 144

Knowing the policies and procedures in your school district will help you understand what is appropriate for your child's circumstances.

Each school district should have policies and procedures to deal with bullying. They are often linked to multiculturalism, anti-discrimination, anti-violence policies, and/or school codes of conduct.

These policies provide the framework for building a school community that:

- demonstrates dignity, respect, and understanding of all people
- does not tolerate bullying or discrimination
- values the diversity that exists within the community.

Ask for copies of the relevant policies in your school and district. Use them to support your efforts to help your child.

Gather support outside the school

The school has the primary responsibility to act on your child's concerns about safety at school. When and how the school involves outside agencies depends upon how the school views the seriousness of the incidents.

Police in many communities in BC are working with schools and youth-serving agencies to prevent bullying. It is appropriate for parents to ask how their school and local police are working together to ensure child and youth safety.

If you believe your child is unsafe, you are strongly encouraged to make a report to your local police as well to your school. It helps to have a written record of what happened and what you have done to solve the problem. As well, your report will help the police determine whether your child's difficulties may be related to those being experienced by others.

When your child is the victim

Children who are bullied have often tried many ways to deal with the problem. While it is important to listen and problem-solve with your child, it is not enough to then send your child back to school to handle the situation alone. Your intervention, through contact and working with the school, is important to achieving a long-term positive resolution.

When your child is the victim of bullying, contact the teacher or principal as soon as possible, keeping in mind the steps outlined on page 4 of this guide. You may request:

- ✓ immediate investigation of the situation
- ✓ a commitment that retribution for making the complaint will not occur, or will be dealt with immediately should it occur
- ✓ a plan of action to prevent further bullying of your child and others
- ✓ if a transfer becomes necessary, your child remain at the school and the bully be transferred to another setting
- ✓ appropriate counselling for your child to deal with the effects of the bullying
- ✓ information about outside agencies (e.g. police, mental health) if referral is appropriate
- ✓ a transfer, if the fear of bullying is preventing your child from attending school.

You and your child may also request (and will want to request in more serious cases):

- ✓ a person of your choice to accompany you to all meetings, including interviews
- ✓ information on how the investigation will be kept confidential
- ✓ a recording or transcript of the interview or written statement if your child is interviewed by an investigator.

“To implement an effective school-wide bullying-prevention program, the school community must first realize the seriousness of the issue and encourage collective responsibility in addressing the problem. The school must secure the support of the parents and the “caring majority” of students to counterbalance peer power relationships.”

Focus on Bullying,
Ministry of Education and Ministry of
Public Safety and Solicitor General, page 13

As an example of process and protection, this is how teachers’ work environment is protected:

Article E.2, PCA:

“The employer shall investigate the complaint. The investigation shall be conducted by a person who shall have training and/or experience in investigating complaints of harassment. The complainant may request that the investigator shall be of the same gender as the complainant, and where practicable the request will not be denied.

Remedies:

d. If the harassment results in the transfer of an employee it shall be the harasser who is transferred, except where the complainant requests to be transferred.”

The Youth Against Violence Line is a safe, confidential way for youth to pass on information, prevent crime, or ask for assistance. The number (within BC) is 1-800-680-4264. The Youth Against Violence Line is also available online through secure e-mail at www.takingastand.com

“... we know now that peers spend a large proportion of their time passively observing... they are reinforcing the bully and giving the message that they approve of his or her actions.”

Paul O’Connell et al., “Peer involvement in bullying: insights and challenges for intervention.” *Journal of Adolescence*, 1999, 22: 437-452

“While anti-bullying interventions need to set clear consequences for those who bully, we believe that attention on only the individual is inadequate. Based on the potential influence that the bully has on peers, a larger goal of intervention is to reduce the bully’s influence on the audience and help peers perceive the inappropriateness of aggression.”

Paul O’Connell et al., “Peer involvement in bullying: Insights and challenges for intervention”. *Journal of Adolescence*, 1999, 22: 437-452

When your child is the bystander

Work with your child to develop the skill and courage to report bullying. Explain that a bystander who does not report a bullying incident can become part of the bullying behaviour.

Many elementary school students are reluctant and fearful to step in when they see someone else being bullied. Whether it is they, or their parents or families, who become involved, they may believe:

- the bully will turn on them
- they will make it worse for the victim
- the situation may get worse and they will get into trouble
- there will be no support or action from other students or staff.

Bullying affects everyone. It is up to everyone to create safety at school. Silence only makes the problem worse.

When you encourage your child to report bullying, make sure the same safeguards are in place for your child as for the victim. Refer to the steps on pages 4 and 6 of this guide.

When your child is the bully

Your child and the school need your support to effectively address bullying, and to provide a safe place for all students and staff. You can help by remaining calm and working with the school to find out why your child bullies others. You may also work with your child to find ways to make amends to the victim. Remember, it is not your child who is unacceptable; it is the behaviour. Support your child in seeking fair treatment during any investigation or discipline process.

Your school district and district parent advisory council (DPAC) have received a copy of *Focus on Suspension: A Resource for Schools*, published in 1999 by the Ministry of Education. *Focus on Suspension* is intended to help schools find alternatives to out-of-school suspensions, and includes prevention and intervention strategies and information on programs for improving behaviour.

- ✓ If an investigation or discipline (including suspension) take place, you should know that:
 - The school district must provide an education program to suspended students under 16 years of age. The school district may provide that program in a variety of ways.
 - There may be services available to your child, such as psychological assessment or referral to an outside agency, that will help your child recognize the seriousness of the behaviour and keep it from happening again.
- ✓ Your child can choose a parent or other support person to be present at all meetings and interviews.
- ✓ You should be informed of any appeal procedure available to you. (See *Your Right to Appeal* on page 9 of this guide).
- ✓ If the school believes the police should be involved, you or your child may wish to call a lawyer or legal aid.
- ✓ If your child is arrested and detained under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act April 2003*, the police must notify you.
- ✓ If your child is questioned by the police or other person in authority (e.g. the principal) about a bullying incident, your child has the right to have an adult present and to choose who that person will be.

Section 76 (3) of the BC School Act requires that the discipline of a student, while attending school... “shall be similar to that of a kind, firm and judicious parent, but shall not include corporal punishment.”

Whether your child is a victim, bully or bystander, programs may be available in your school district to help. These may include:

- bully prevention
- anger management
- conflict resolution
- restorative justice (refer to *Focus on Bullying*, page 76)
- mentoring
- school counselling
- peer counselling
- peer mediation
- social responsibility programs.

Ask questions about the programs you are considering, and decide if they are suited to your child’s needs. These programs are more effective when parents support their children in learning the life skills involved.

For more information on how parents can help, see *How Parents Can Take Action Against Bullying* by Seddon, McLelland and Lajoie (page 17 of this guide).

Restorative justice programs can “provide conflict resolution and increased youth responsibility for actions...The goal is to reduce harm and minimize the likelihood that the student will engage in the unacceptable behaviour again.”

Focus on Suspension: A Resource for Schools. BC Ministry of Education, page 36

Your right to appeal

Your District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) may have advocates or others who can help you. Help is also available through the BCCPAC Advocacy Project toll free message line at 1-888-351-9834.

You can get a copy of the appeal policy from your school or school district. Some Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) or District Parent Advisory Councils (DPACs) may also have them.

If at any time you feel you have been dealt with unfairly, you may contact the Office of the Ombudsman:
Call toll free 1-800-567-3247 (all of BC) 1-800-667-1303(TTY) or (250) 387-5855 for Victoria or (250) 387-5446 (Victoria TTY)
Website: www.ombud.gov.bc.ca
Fax: Victoria: (250) 387-0198
Vancouver: (604) 660-1691
Mail: 931 Fort Street Victoria, BC V8V 3K3

Sometimes, parents and students need to appeal a decision to achieve the best result for the student. Appeal policies, like other policies, are different in every district. Make sure you have a copy of your district's most recent appeal policy and any forms that go with it.

Section 11 (*Appeals*) of the *BC School Act* gives parents and students the right to ask the school board to review any decision a school district employee has made, or failed to make, that “significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student”. Every school district must have a policy on how parents and students can appeal. The decision of the school board following the appeal is final.

- ✓ Ask that your appeal be heard, and as soon as possible.
- ✓ Ask to be present in order to hear the information the school district employee gives. You may request this information ahead of time.
- ✓ Ask if you can bring someone to support you.
- ✓ Ask how the appeal hearing will be conducted:
 - How much time will you be given to present your information?
 - Who will be there? What is their role?
 - Will there be a chance to ask questions of others?
 - Will others ask you questions?
- ✓ Ask for a copy of the minutes taken during the appeal.

If you believe that your appeal was conducted unfairly, you or your child may complain to the Office of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can investigate the process and recommend a resolution, but cannot overturn a decision. The Office of the Ombudsman has a complaint form that you can obtain by calling the office or downloading it from the website: www.ombud.gov.bc.ca/complaint_form.html.

By using the Self-help Guide on page 10 to document your appeal, you will have the information you need to complete the complaint form.



Bullying

Self-help Guide

Work through this guide with your child

Note details of the incident such as:

- Dates
- Times
- Places
- Who (if known)
- What effect has the harassment/intimidation had on your child?
- What policies, laws, etc. apply to this situation?
- What are your child's rights & responsibilities?
- What are the system's rights & responsibilities?

1. Note details of the incident(s) in your child's words.

Possible information sources:

- School or school board office: information on policies, procedures, etc.
- Your local PAC or DPAC
- BCCPAC Advocacy Project: Call toll free within BC 1-888-351-9834
- BCCPAC office: (604) 687-4433
- Local child and youth serving agencies. Check the Resources section of this guide for ideas.
- Community and school-based counselling services
- Mental health agencies
- BC Safe Schools and Communities Centre: Call toll free within BC 1-888-224-SAFE (7233)
- Police
- Office of the Ombudsman

2. State clearly what the issue is (to help you communicate your complaint).

3. Talk with your child and list ideas for solving the problem.

Actions taken: *It is important to keep all of your information together for easy reference, including records of conversations and correspondence you have sent and received, etc. Attach another sheet if necessary.*

Note details such as:

- Who you talked to
- When
- How (letter, telephone, fax, etc.)
- Who is investigating the incident
- What the investigator will do
- What you agreed to do
- When and how the investigator will get back to you
- When you need to call the investigator back
- How the school will keep your child safe and identity confidential?
- What counselling or other services are available should your child need help
- If necessary, how your child's transition back into school will be handled
- Who you should talk to if you or your child have further concerns
- Do you need to call the police?
- Do you and your family need support?

Date/Time: _____ **Contact:** _____

by: phone person letter

Action: _____

Outcome: _____

Date/Time: _____ **Contact:** _____

by: phone person letter

Action: _____

Outcome: _____

Date/Time: _____ **Contact:** _____

by: phone person letter

Action: _____

Outcome: _____

Date/Time: _____ **Contact:** _____

by: phone person letter

Action: _____

Outcome: _____

The role of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC and DPACs)

School and district policies will not, on their own, eliminate bullying. Administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students and community need to work together to build and maintain a safe school, based on justice, respect and compassion for all.

Local and district parent advisory councils are well placed to help with this process. Through meetings, surveys and networking, they can hear from parents and students about their experiences with bullying, and their level of satisfaction with the school or district's response. With this information, as well as resources from BCCPAC, PACs and DPACs can help school communities better understand and address the problem.

PACs and DPACs can provide parents and students with appropriate information on how to deal with problems of bullying. They can also:

- ✓ assess what schools are doing to create and maintain a safe environment (see *How Safe Is Your School?* on page 13 of this guide)
- ✓ recommend the formation of, and participation in, safe school committees
- ✓ provide opportunities for parents and students to hear speakers knowledgeable about the issues surrounding bullying
- ✓ support school district safe school policies and promote effective prevention and intervention programs.

"A parents' advisory council, through its elected officers, may advise the board and the principal and staff on any matter relating to the school."

School Act, Section 8(4)

How safe is your school?

*For more information on assessing the safety of your school, refer to **Safe School Planning Guide, and Focus on Bullying** (BC's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General). A revised edition of the **Safe School Planning Guide** will be available Fall 2003.*

An effective way for parents to contribute to child and youth safety is through participation on their safe school committee. Your safe school committee is the place to evaluate how well your elementary school is creating and maintaining a safe and caring environment. What is your school doing well? What could use improvement?

The answers to these and the following questions will help your safe school committee focus on the most important issues.

- ✓ To what extent do students, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and visitors feel welcome, cared about, and a part of life at your school?
- ✓ What is the Code of Conduct for students? For adults, staff, volunteers? Are the codes displayed? What differences, if any, are there between the code for students and the code for adults?
- ✓ Is the environment safe for people to be themselves, regardless of gender, race, language, degree of affluence, or sexual orientation?
 - Is “lookism” prevalent? Are students singled out on the basis of their clothing, apparent lack of affluence, or other features?
 - Do incidents of racism occur? How severe is the problem?
 - Are sexism or sexual harassment issues?
 - Is homophobia an issue? Is your school safe for people to be themselves regardless of sexual orientation?
- ✓ How does your school demonstrate respect for diversity?
- ✓ What incidents of bullying have occurred in the past year? Two years? How were these incidents recorded and addressed? What follow-up took place?
- ✓ What instances of bullying between adults and students have occurred? How were these incidents recorded and addressed? What follow-up took place?
- ✓ To what extent is awareness of bullying being taught to students? In what subject areas, if any?

Lookism is a discriminatory attitude or behaviour toward someone based on their appearance.

- ✓ How does your school teach social skills related to preventing bullying or intervening when bullying occurs?
- ✓ What opportunities does your school provide for staff, students, parents, and other members of the community to get together to discuss initiatives and responses to bullying? Are these effective?
- ✓ What is your school's policy and process for intervening if there is a bullying incident? In what ways, and how quickly, have parents and students been informed and involved?

BC's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General launched the BC Safe Schools Initiative to address issues of student safety in BC's schools and communities. As part of the initiative, *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities* was released. *Focus on Bullying* recommends a seven-step plan for how a working group, such as your safe school committee, can engage teachers, parents, and students in the creation of a comprehensive plan to prevent bullying in elementary school communities. Although the steps are numbered, schools are encouraged to adapt and rearrange these steps as necessary to suit local requirements and existing programs:

STEP 1: Establish a working group

STEP 2: Involve parents

STEP 3: Involve students

STEP 4: Create a school statement

STEP 5: Build a supervision plan

STEP 6: Develop a response plan

STEP 7: Implement and monitor the plan

(See Recommended reading and viewing on page 17 of this guide.)

“Whole-school approaches to countering bullying involve all members of the school community (students, teachers, parents, and administrators) in the development of clear rules and consequences that discourage all forms of aggression. With a whole-school policy, children know that adults will follow through and protect interveners when bullying occurs. Whole-school anti-bullying policies should be initiated during elementary school and continue to support students throughout all levels of the school system.”

*Paul O'Connell et al.,
“Peer involvement in bullying: Insights and challenges for intervention”.
Journal of Adolescence, 1999, 22: 437-452*

What parents need to know: rights and responsibilities

Knowing the basic rights and responsibilities of everyone in the school community will make it easier to work together to solve individual and school-wide concerns about bullying. Following is a synopsis of basic rights and responsibilities of parents and students set out in the *BC School Act*. Other legislation such as the *Youth Criminal Justice Act, April 2003* or the *Human Rights Code* may apply to specific situations. Ask questions of those in a position to direct you to the laws, policies and processes that will apply to your child's circumstances.

“Parents have the right and responsibility to participate in the process of determining the education goals, policies and services provided for their children. They have a primary responsibility to ensure that children are provided with the healthy and supportive environment necessary for learning. They have a responsibility to shape and support the goals of the school system and to share in the task of educating their young.”

*BC Ministry of Education,
Statement of Education Policy Order*

Parents:

- ✓ have the right and responsibility to ensure their child is treated fairly at school
- ✓ have the right to be informed of their child's attendance, behaviour, and progress in school
- ✓ have the right to examine all student records kept by a board pertaining to their child
- ✓ are entitled to information about their school and district (such information helps parents take advantage of what is available to their child)
- ✓ may consult with the teacher or principal about their child's educational program. Conversely, parents are required, if requested, to consult with the teacher or principal on their child's educational program
- ✓ have the right to appeal to the school board a decision, or failure to make a decision, by a school board employee that significantly affects the education, health or safety of their child
- ✓ have the right to belong to the school Parent Advisory Council (PAC)
- ✓ can be held liable, with or separately from their children, for property of a school board that is destroyed, damaged, lost or converted by an intentional or negligent act.

Students:

- ✓ have the right to participate in an educational program between the ages of 5 and 19
- ✓ have the responsibility to participate in an educational program until at least the age of 16
- ✓ have the responsibility to comply with school rules, policies, and code of conduct
- ✓ may be suspended from school for refusing to comply with school rules, policies, and code of conduct, but up to the age of 16, must be provided with an educational program while suspended
- ✓ have the right to consult with a teacher or principal about their educational program
- ✓ have the right to appeal decisions that significantly affect their education, health, or safety
- ✓ can be held liable, with or separately from their parents, for property of a school board that is destroyed, damaged, lost, or converted by an intentional or negligent act.

Besides the rights and responsibilities outlined in the *BC School Act*, Ministerial Orders and Regulations, children and youth have rights that apply through other provincial and federal legislation, the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and principles of natural justice.

For more information about the rights and responsibilities of students, parents, teachers, principals and boards, see *Building Partnerships in Schools*, a handbook published in 1996 by BCCPAC, the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, and the BC Teachers' Federation. You may be able to locate a copy through your school PAC, principal or district, or you can purchase a copy from the BCCPAC office. The *BC School Act*, Regulations and Ministerial Orders are also available in your school district, or can be obtained from the Ministry of Education.

(See *Recommended reading and viewing* page 17 of this guide.)

“Students have the opportunity to avail themselves of a quality education consistent with their abilities, the opportunity to share in the shaping of their educational programs, and the opportunity to determine their career and occupational goals. They have the responsibility to make the most of their opportunities, to respect the rights of others, and to co-operate with fellow students in the achievement of their goals.”

*BC Ministry of Education,
Statement of Education Policy Order*

Other rights that apply to students:

- the right to be treated with respect and dignity
- the right to be free from abuse and neglect
- the right to be informed of their rights and how to access them
- the right to be heard and have their views carefully considered
- the right to information about decisions that affect them.

“Rules are important for a safe and orderly learning environment and are also important in the formation of student attitudes. *The School Act* (Section 76(2)) requires every school to inculcate “the highest morality”; rules and codes of conduct are one of the school’s chief means of carrying out this duty.”

Keeping Schools Safe: A practical guide for principals and vice-principals, page 89

Recommended reading and viewing

BCCPAC. *Speaking up! A parent guide to advocating for students in public schools*. 1999.

BCCPAC and Open School. *Speaking Up! Parents Advocating for Students in Public Schools*. Video. 1999.

BCCPAC, BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association and BC Teachers' Federation. *Building Partnerships in Schools: A Handbook*. 1996.

BC Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. *A Guide to Aboriginal Organizations and Services in British Columbia*. 2000.

BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Community Programs Division. *Taking A Stand. 2nd Edition*. 1998.

BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General and BC Ministry of Education. *Safe School Planning Guide*. 1999 (revised edition available Fall 2003).

BC Ministry of Education. *Helping our kids live violence free: A parent's guide (for students in grades K to 7)*. 2000.

BC Ministry of Education, *Performance Standards—Social Responsibility*. Available on line at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf_stands/social_resp.htm

BC Ministry of Education, Special Programs Branch. *Focus on Suspension: A Resource for Schools*. 1999.

BC Ministry of Education and BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. *Focus on Bullying: A Prevention Program for Elementary School Communities*. 1998.

A list of Ministry of Education publications available on line can be found at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/pubs.htm>. The list includes resources such as: *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*, *Parent's Guide to Individual Education Planning (IEP)*, *Manual of School Law, K-12 Policy Manual for BC Schools*.

BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association and BC School Trustees' Association. *Keeping Schools Safe: A practical guide for principals and vice-principals*, as part of the BC's Safe Schools Initiative. June 1999.

Clark, Judith A. and Nicholls, Alan C. *A Guide to Schools Legislation in British Columbia. 2nd edition*. Eduserv. Inc. 1999.

Committee for Children. *Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum, Grades 1-3*. Available at 172—20th Ave., Seattle, Washington 98122. Tel. (206) 322-5050.

O'Connell, Paul, Pepler, Debra and Craig, Wendy. *Peer involvement in bullying: Insights and challenges for intervention*. Journal of Adolescence. 1999, 22: 437-452

Office of the BC Ombudsman. *Fair Schools Public Report No. 35*. May 1995.

Rock Solid Foundation and Youth and Society Research Unit of the University of Victoria. *Rock Solid Children, Youth and Adults: Creating a Responsive Environment for the Prevention of Youth Violence. Video*. 1999.

Seddon, Cindi, McLellan, Alyson and Lajoie, Gisele. *How Parents Can Take Action Against Bullying*. Bully B'Ware Productions. Hemlock Press. 2000.

Other resources

The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies (AMSSA): a non-partisan, non-profit, province-wide umbrella organization representing 85 multicultural and immigrant-serving organizations, and related organizations. Acts as a referral and resource link. Call (604) 718-2777, Fax (604) 298-0747, Email: amssa@amssa.org, Website: <http://www.amssa.org>

BC Human Rights Commission: investigates and mediates complaints of discrimination and promotes compliance with the Human Rights Code.

In Victoria: (250) 387-3710, Fax: (250) 387-3643

In Vancouver: (604) 660-6811, Fax: (604) 660-0195

Elsewhere in BC, toll free: 1-800-663-0876

Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD):

In Vancouver: (604) 660-2252; in Victoria: (250) 953-4911

BC Ministry of Children and Family Development: every region in the province has an office open Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The office in your area is listed in the blue pages of the phone book. The ministry offers a variety of services to children and families in need or in crisis. To report suspected physical or sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation, press 0 on your phone and ask the operator for BC Children's Help Line or dial it yourself at 310-1234, or call 1-800-663-9122 or TTY 1-800-667-4770. Ministry website: <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca>

BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services: responds to inquiries concerning issues and resources in multiculturalism and anti-racism; publishes a *Newcomer's Guide to British Columbia* in six languages, a directory of Ethno-Cultural, Multicultural and Immigrant Services Organizations in BC, and *Schools Responding to Racism: Guide for Parents*. Phone: (604) 660-2203, Fax: (604) 660-1150

BC Parents in Crisis Society: offers *Parent Support Circles* in different languages in communities around the province. The circles provide a safe environment where participants can share their frustrations and focus on improving communication, problem-solving and parenting skills. Phone: (604) 669-1616, Fax: (604) 669-1636, Toll free: 1-800-665-6880

BC Safe Schools and Communities Centre: a central source of information, resources, training, referrals, and examples of successful practices addressing safe school and community issues, including bullying and violence prevention. The Centre serves youth, parents, educators, police, youth-serving organizations, and community members throughout BC. The centre is open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. Call toll free within BC: 1-888-224-SAFE (7233). Website: www.safeschools.gov.bc.ca.

Boys and Girls Club: offers *Parents Together*, a self-help support program for parents experiencing parent/teen conflict. Sponsored by the Boys and Girls Club in your community.

Enquiry BC: Call for assistance in directing your phone enquiry to the correct ministry or government organization.

In Victoria: (250) 387-6121

In Vancouver: (604) 660-2421

Elsewhere in BC, toll free: 1-800-663-7867

Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD):

In Vancouver: (604) 775-0303; Elsewhere, toll free: 1-800-661-8773

Enquiry Centre Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday

Call it Safe

Families as Support Teams Society (FAST): provides multi-generational self-help support groups; deals with violence, abuse, stress, and loneliness by targeting children, youth, spouses and seniors to come together as a multicultural multifamily; strengthens family relationships and the community by focusing on prevention and early intervention strategies. Serves all of BC. Phone: (604) 299-0005, Fax: (604) 299-5921

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks: provides information about local youth in care network groups in your area. Call collect: (604) 689-3204

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FIPPA): for more information, please contact your school district office and ask for the FIPPA contact in your district, or call:

Ministry of Education Information and Privacy Office

PO Box 9144, Stn Prov Govt

Victoria, BC V8W 9H1

Phone: (250) 356-7508, Fax: (250) 387-6315, or

Freedom of Information and Privacy Commissioner

PO Box 9038, Stn. Prov. Govt.

Victoria, BC V8W 9A4

In Victoria: (250) 387-5629, Fax: (250) 387-1696; In Vancouver: (604) 660-2421

Elsewhere, toll free: 1-800-663-7867

Immigrant Services Society of BC: provides information and a service centre for immigrants, refugees, and non-English speaking BC residents, helping with their settlement and integration into the community.

Phone: (604) 684-2561, Fax: (604) 684-2266

Learning Disabilities Association of BC: has information about an LDABC chapter in your area. Your local chapter can provide you with information about other resources for students with special learning needs.

204, 3402 27th Avenue

Vernon, BC V1T 1F1

Phone/Fax: (250) 542-5033, Email: lda-vernonbc@home.com

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG): support group for parents with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered children. Provides education, community resources on homosexuality and advocacy for equal rights.

In Vancouver: (604) 421-8084 or (604) 468-1749

In Victoria: (604) 642-5171, Email: PFLAG@gayvictoria.com

People's Law School™: an independent, non-profit, non-partisan society whose purpose is to provide British Columbians, especially those with special needs, with impartial services in English and other languages. Phone:

(604) 331-5400, weekdays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., after-hours you can leave a message,

Fax: (604) 331-5401, Email: staff@publiclegaled.bc.ca, Website: <http://www.publiclegaled.bc.ca/>

Provincial Gay and Lesbian Contact Line: provides information about services and resources in designated areas. Line access Monday to Saturday 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.; Monday, Wednesday and Friday 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Other times message service available. "PRIDELINE BC" Toll free: 1-800-566-1170

Youth Against Violence Line: a safe, confidential way for youth to pass on information, prevent crime or ask for assistance. The number (within BC) is 1-800-680-4264. The Youth Against Violence Line is also available online through secure e-mail at <http://www.takingastand.com>

The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC)

BCCPAC ensures a parent voice at the provincial level and helps PACs and DPACs act as advisors in their schools and districts.

BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils
Suite 202, 1545 West 8th Avenue
Vancouver, BC
V6J 1T5
Phone: (604) 687-4433
Fax: (604) 687-4488
Email: bccpac@telus.net
Website: www.bccpac.bc.ca

The BCCPAC Advocacy Project assists individual parents. Call the toll-free message line at 1-888-351-9834.

Acknowledgments

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Achieve BC homepage:
<http://www.achievebc.ca/>

Ministry of Education home page:
http://www.gov.bc.ca/bvprd/bc/channel.do?action=ministry&channelID=-8382&navId=NAV_ID_province

