

GIS Guide to Bullying and Offensive Behavior

The faculty and staff at Greenfield Intermediate School want our school to present a safe, secure and bias free learning environment, one where our students feel comfortable as they learn and grow. The nature of public school requires us to bring together a large number of youngsters from a wide variety of cultures and background. This sometimes sets the stage where we see elements of offensive behavior displayed. This can be seen in the form of students harassing or engaging in conflict with one another. Such offensive behavior takes many forms including, teasing, criticizing, aggressive acts, and making offensive statements and gestures.

Although they are inevitable, our school has little tolerance for such behaviors, Our Principal's Principles and The GIS Way are efforts to help students learn the skills and behaviors necessary for positive interactions in the school environment. We regularly work with our students to help them learn how to keep school a place where everyone can be comfortable and learn. Sometimes this involves disciplining those who offend others. At other times our efforts center on helping those who feel harassed or offended to be more resilient and resistant of others' offensive behaviors.

While such offensive behaviors are a normal part of growing up, some behaviors are simply intolerable. Unwelcomed physical contact, fighting, severe harassment, and bullying require swift intervention. Physical aggression, fighting, and inappropriate physical contact are easily recognized. But how do we know when typical offensive behaviors have gone too far? There is no absolute, clear cut definition, but common sense and law have set forth a reasonably defined set of behaviors that will indicate it is time for the school and parents to take action to prevent our students from causing discomfort and possible harm to peers.

Offensive behaviors, even those that are isolated to single incidents, become severe and necessitate action when they take place in a manner that causes physical stress or significant emotional stress. Bullying is always a call to action. Bullying is defined by Indiana Code (IC 20-33-8-02) as overt, repetitive acts or gestures which include verbal and written communications transmitted, physical acts committed, and any other behaviors committed by a student or group of students against another student with the intent to harass, ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or harm the other student. Bullying has been further clarified by the landmark court decision in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education* (1999) which notes bullying exists when harassment is so "severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it can be said to deprive the victims of access to the educational opportunities or benefits provided by the school." Thus the test of an offense to determine if bullying exists boils down to the following questions:

1. *Is the behavior repetitive in nature where many acts take place over a span of time?*
2. *Is the behavior perpetrated by the same person or group of people?*
3. *Is the behavior intended to cause harm?*
4. *Does the harm create a barrier between the victim and his/her education?*

In addition to our duty to help students grow cognitively and academically, we have an obligation to help our students learn to interact properly in social groups while protecting them from severe harassment or bullying. Communication is critical in this effort. Students are encouraged to report to trusted adults when there has been conflict or incidents of harassment. In incidents where the behaviors

appear to be typical, age appropriate conflicts, the school staff will work with the involved students to better equip them for appropriate social interaction. In incidents where the behaviors are severe and/or repetitive, offending students will be appropriately disciplined.

Parents can assist their students by talking with them about conflict and helping them determine the nature of the behavior. Is the behavior typical or is the behavior something that is more serious, possibly crossing the boundary into bullying? Students often feel the need to take action when they have been offended. The harassment log included in this handbook is a good way for students to take immediate action in a manner that is safe and private while providing information to parents and school administration. Students can log the nature of the offense, the identity of the offender, and other pertinent data associated with the offense. Parents can use this information to talk with the students and determine the nature of the offense. Behaviors that are severe, repetitive, or constitute bullying should be reported to school administration. The attached log is very useful during an investigation of offensive behaviors and potential cases of bullying. Any student who is experiencing conflict with others is strongly encouraged to keep record of the offenses on the log.

Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if I feel my child might be the victim of bullying? Communication with your child. Encourage them to talk about the incidents. Have the students log as much detail as possible about the incident(s)? Immediately report any serious incidents or incidents involving physical conflict to school administration

How do I know if my child is being bullied? Any incidents of conflict that make children uncomfortable deserve adult attention. Bullying, the most severe form of conflict, occurs when the behavior is perpetrated by the same individual repeatedly over time with the intent to cause harm. Any incident that meets these criteria is likely to be construed as bullying and requires immediate attention from school authorities.

What will happen if my child is the victim of offensive behavior? The nature of the school's response is determined by the nature of the offense. Those exhibiting typical conflict behaviors are often counseled in an effort to equip them with appropriate social skills. Those students engaging in bullying, aggressive physical conflict, and severe harassment will be subject to disciplinary measures as prescribed by Board Policy and the Student Handbook.

Will I be informed of the actions taken with another student who offended my child? Federal Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA) legislation prevents school staff from divulging matters of student record. Discipline records, by law, are considered student records.

How will I know if something is done? You may expect contact from the investigating administrator when you report incidents of conflict. Incidents reported by students are also investigated, although there is not necessarily automatic follow-up with the parents of the reporting student. Any parent wanting more information regarding their student is always welcome to call the school office.

Harassment Log

Student: You have reported that others at school are harassing you. Please use this log to record who has made harassing statements, what was said, when it was said, and who witnessed to action. This information will be used to assist you in solving the problem.

| Who said it? | What was said? | Where were you? | What date was it? | What time was it? | Who saw it? |
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