

Utah Bullying Prevention

Guidance for Families

Spring 2026

Partnering to Prevent Bullying in Utah

Goal: To provide comprehensive information and resources for families on addressing and preventing bullying, cyberbullying, hazing, retaliation, and abusive conduct in Utah schools.

Our commitment:

- The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) is committed to fostering a safe and supportive educational environment for all students.
- A safe learning environment, where all members are treated with dignity and respect, is essential for students to learn and achieve high academic standards.

Utah Context and Impact

Prevalence in Utah

- Approximately **one in five** high school students (**18%**) in Utah report being bullied.
- Bullying most often occurs in unsupervised areas and during unstructured times, as well as online.
- Bullying is considered peer abuse and repeated exposure can lead to negative long-lasting effects on health and well-being.



Bullying Defined

Bullying is commonly understood as aggressive behavior that follows this pattern:

- **P** – Imbalance of **P**ower and Strength
- **R** – **R**epeated over time
- **I** – **I**ntended to cause distress or harm

The Utah Legislature recently updated the state's definition to reflect this common understanding in [Utah Code Section 53G-9-601](#).

- Utah Code divides bullying into student and staff bullying
- A single egregious event may also be considered bullying.

Types of Bullying

There are several different types of bullying. These include:



Verbal: name-calling, threats



Social: spreading rumors, embarrassing someone



Physical: tripping, hitting, damaging property



Cyberbullying: using electronic means

Related Misconduct

In addition to bullying and cyberbullying, the following related behaviors are prohibited in schools:

- **Hazing**: subjecting an individual to an activity that poses a substantial risk of physical or emotional harm, often associated with group initiations, regardless of consent.
- **Retaliation**: taking adverse action against someone for reporting an incident or to influence an investigation.
- **Abusive conduct**: verbal or nonverbal conduct by a parent or student directed at a school employee that a reasonable person would find hostile and offensive.

Impact of Bullying

Students Who Are Bullied May:	Students Who Bully Others May:
Experience depression and anxiety.	Use alcohol and other drugs.
Express numerous health complaints.	Get into fights, vandalize property, and drop out of school.
Demonstrate decreased academic achievement and school participation.	Be abusive toward romantic partners or children as adults.

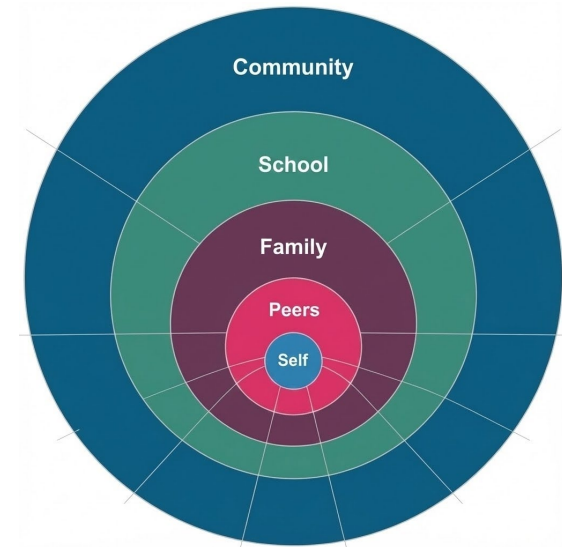
Bystanders:

Bystanders are more likely to have increased use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs, and experience increased mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.

Why Does it Happen?

Bullying is a complex issue that does not exist in isolation. The following are reasons why a student may bully others:

- Peer factors
 - Attain social power
 - To “fit in”
- Family factors
 - Violence in the home
 - Low parent involvement
- Emotional
 - Social skills deficits
 - Difficulty with regulating emotions
- School
 - Conduct problems are not addressed



Bullying vs. Conflict

Peer Conflict	Bullying
Disagreement where both sides express views (between equals).	Negative behavior directed by someone exerting power and control.
Children usually self-monitor and modify behavior if lines are crossed (guided by empathy).	Done with the goal to hurt, harm, or humiliate; continues even when harm is known.
Adults can support by guiding mediation, problem-solving, and critical thinking.	Behavior must be immediately stopped. The bullied student should not have to participate in conversations with the student who bullied them.

Warning Signs

Not all students who are bullied show signs, but families should watch for the following potential indicators.

- **Behavioral changes:** avoiding social situations or expressing a desire not to go to school
- **Physical symptoms:** frequent headaches, unexplained injuries, or difficulty sleeping
- **Eating habits:** skipping meals or binge eating
- **Emotional distress:** expressing feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, or talking about suicide
- **Property loss:** losing or having damaged clothing, books, or materials
- **Device use:** changes in device use and/or hiding screens

Note: Risk factors for being bullied include being perceived as different, being depressed, anxious, or having low self-esteem, or being perceived as weak.

Bystanders

There are four types of bystanders during a bullying incident:

- **Assistants** help the individual doing the bullying and join in. For example, an assistant may physically restrain or block the target.
- **Reinforcers** support the youth who bullies or the bullying behavior by laughing, encouraging or cheering during or after the incident.
- **Outsiders** witness the bullying situation but stay out of it and do not get involved.
- **Defenders/upstanders** help by intervening or extending support to the person being bullied, either privately or in the moment.

Bystanders have significant influence to make a positive difference!

When bystanders to bullying intervene, bullying stops within 10 seconds 57% of the time.

Empowering Bystanders to be Upstanders

A bystander can make a positive difference by becoming an upstander: someone who intervenes, interrupts, or speaks up to stop the bullying.

How youth can be upstanders:

- Question the bullying behavior or shift the focus using humor.
- Intervene as a group to show disagreement.
- Walk with the bullied student to help diffuse potential interactions.
- Reach out privately to check in with the person who was bullied to let them know you care.
- Always report the bullying to a trusted adult, parent, teacher, or administrator.

How to Stop a Bully



[How to Stop a Bully YouTube Video Link](#)

How Youth Can Protect Themselves from Bullying

- Calmly ask the bully to stop.
- Seek help from an adult, friend, or classmate.
- Be assertive, not aggressive.
- Use humor to deflect threats.
- Avoid unsafe places or walk away.
- Agree with belittling comments to defuse them.
- Walk with friends.
- Use positive self-talk.
- Avoid emotional reactions which may embolden the student who is bullying.

Protection from Cyberbullying (1)

Cyberbullying presents unique challenges due to the permanence and reach of electronic content.

- Never accept friend or network requests from unfamiliar people.
- The "Mom Principle": do not post or share photographs or videos that you would not be willing to share with your mother, father or another important caregiver.
- The "Forever Principle": assume that everything online will be there forever.

Protection from Cyberbullying (2)

- The "No Privacy Principle": assume that everyone can access information about you in cyberspace.
- Do not reply to or retaliate against incidents of cyberbullying.
- Block threatening or questionable people from viewing profiles and personal information.
- Regularly change passwords and immediately delete hacked profiles.

What Can Parents Do?

If Your Child is Bullied (1)

To do:

- Daily thoughtful conversations
 - Casual, curious discussions
 - Talk about their daily schedule
 - Show trust
- Open-ended questions
 - Where did this happen?
 - What was going on before this happened?
 - Does this person act this way toward others?

If Your Child is Bullied (2)

Avoid:

- Never tell the child to ignore the bullying.
- Do not blame the child for being bullied.
- Do not tell the child to physically fight back.
- Resist contacting the other parents.

If Your Child Bullies

If your child is accused of bullying, parental response is key for accountability and positive behavior change.

- **Talk with your child:** calmly explain the accusation and ask for their account.
- **Hold accountability:** firmly state that bullying will not be tolerated and behaviors will be taken seriously.
- **Establish rules and consequences:** develop clear rules and expectations. Provide fair, consistent consequences and affirm appropriate behavior.
- **Increase supervision:** spend more time with your child and monitor their activities, including social media and texting.
- **Build Positives:** Encourage involvement in social activities with positive role models.
- **Work with the School:** ensure accountability and ask for updates on further incidents.

Working with the School

Effective bullying prevention relies on strong partnership between families and schools.

Working with the school:

1. **Learn the policy:** familiarize yourself with your school's bullying policy.
2. **Grievance process:** follow your LEA's grievance policy, which often starts with contacting the teacher, followed by the school principal, and then possibly a district representative.
3. **Reporting:** students and witnesses are encouraged to report bullying to any school employee, who must then report it to the school's designee. Reports can also be submitted via the SafeUT app.

Relationship with Suicide (1)

The relationship between bullying and suicide is complex.

- Bullying can exacerbate feelings of isolation, rejection, exclusion, and despair.
- Bullying and suicide share common risk factors, such as underlying mental health issues.
- Students who are bullied, who perpetrate bullying, or who are both bullied and bully others are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Relationship with Suicide (2)

School Notification Requirement [Utah Code 53G-9-604](#):

- If a school is notified that a student has suicidal ideation, they must provide the parent with suicide prevention materials and information on ways to limit the student's access to fatal means, including a firearms or medication.

Note: while bullying can trigger suicidal thoughts, suicide is rarely caused by a singular factor, and most youth who are bullied do not engage in suicidal behaviors.

Intersection of Bullying and Discrimination

- If the bullying is so severe or pervasive that it creates a hostile environment and is based on certain protected traits, schools have a legal obligation to end the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and eliminate the hostile environment that limits a student's ability to participate in or benefit from school programs or activities.
 - In a ["Dear Colleague" letter](#) dated October 21, 2014, the Department of Education's (ED) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) stated that bullying may be considered harassment when it is based on a student's race, color, national origin, sex, or disability.

What to Expect from the School

Utah Notification Requirements

- Parent notification: schools must notify parents in a timely manner whenever their student is involved in an alleged incident of bullying, whether they were targeted or perpetrated the incident.
- Action plan: if an incident is *verified* following an investigation, the school must create and implement a comprehensive action plan.
 - The action plan serves as the vehicle for ongoing communication with parents to provide regular updates and must adhere to legal guidelines.
- Voluntary parent participation: schools can develop and implement an action plan, even if a parent chooses not to participate.

Investigation and Notification

- Schools must investigate incidents of bullying, cyber-bullying, hazing, and retaliation.
- The investigator must be adequately trained.
- They may interview the following individuals:
 - Subject
 - Alleged participant in prohibited behavior
 - Parents
 - Witnesses
 - Staff (familiar with the subject and alleged to have engaged)
 - Others as they see fit
- The investigator is required to keep details of interviews confidential.
- Further reports of bullying will become part of the review.

Action Plan: Targeted Student

The plan must include a tailored response that prioritizes the targeted student's well-being and access to education.

- **Supportive measures:** provide a tailored response that addresses the student's specific needs, including supportive measures to preserve access to educational services.
- **Accommodations for decreased exposure:** include accommodations the student may need to decrease interaction with the student who caused the incident.
- **Notification of consequences:** the targeted student's parents must be informed of the plan to address the behavior of the student who caused the incident, while complying with FERPA.
- **Access to resources:** ensure access to other requested resources, if available.

Note: the action plan cannot require the targeted student to change their educational schedule, placement, or participation in school-sponsored activities.

Action Plan: Student Who Caused the Incident

The plan must address the behavior of the student who caused the incident through tailored consequences and necessary support.

- **Consequences and support:** establish consequences and supportive measures that are tailored to the student and preserve educational access where possible, while also protecting the well-being of other students.
- **Resources to address the cause:** provide resources, strategies, or interventions designed to address the underlying cause of the incident/behavior.
- **Emergency removal:** outline a process for the emergency removal of the student from school, along with a description of what constitutes an emergency.
- **Appeals process:** provide an appeals process for one or more of the consequences included in the action plan.

What Can Be Disclosed?

- A school may disclose information that pertains to the child of that specific parent but cannot disclose information to that parent about other students involved.
- Enough info should be shared for the subject's party to have a reasonable assumption their child is being protected. This includes:
 - Description of school's response to acts of bullying
 - Consequences that may result from the continuation of bullying based on school policy

Resources and Conclusion

Grievances and Authority

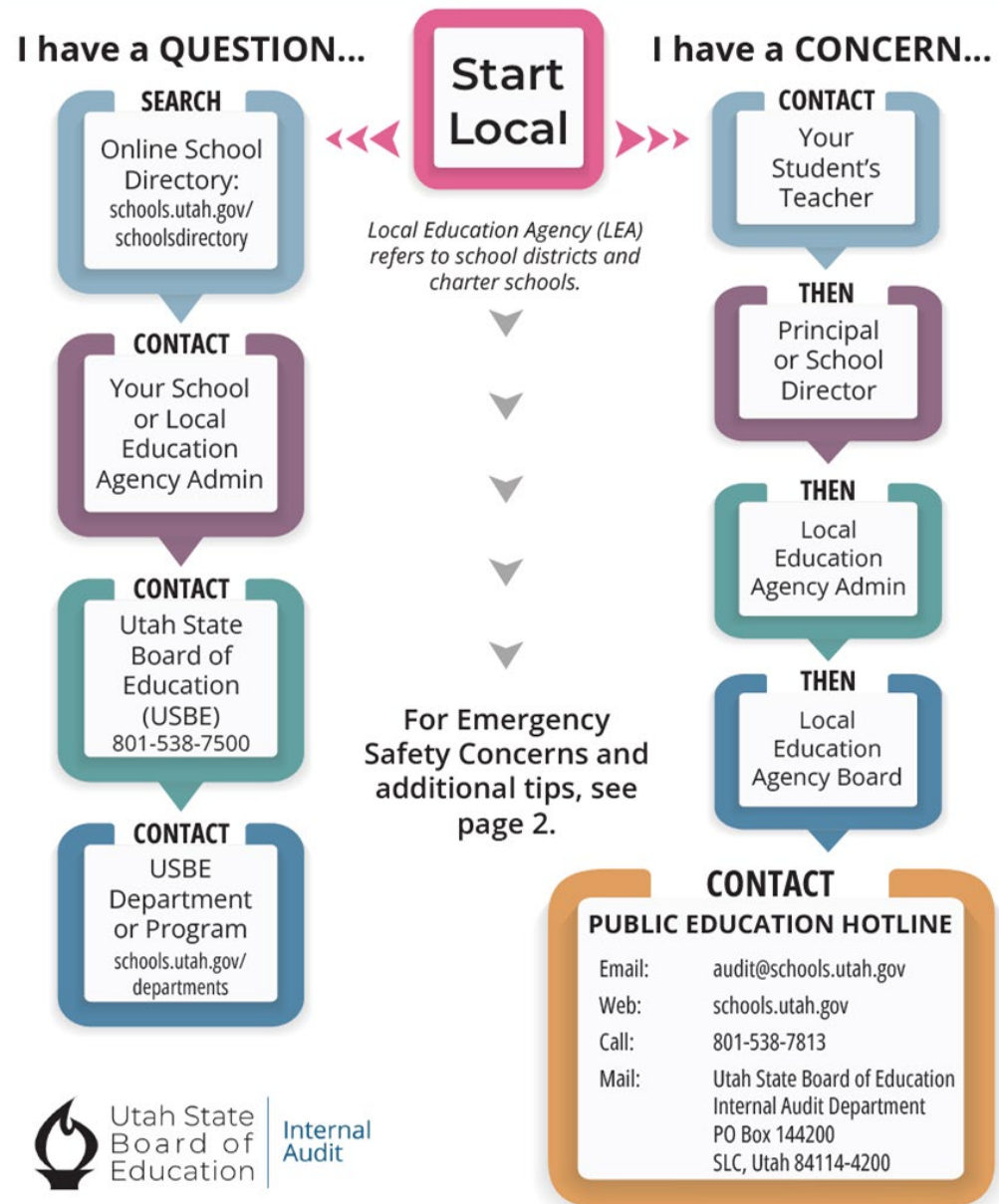
- The state of Utah grants LEAs local control over their policies and processes.
- USBE does not possess the authority to conduct investigations to determine whether a specific incident constitutes bullying, nor can USBE make determinations regarding disciplinary actions.
- For concerns outside the scope of USBE, follow your LEA's grievance process or contact your local school board.

Hotline

The Public Education Hotline is maintained by the Internal Audit Department of USBE. The Hotline is an avenue for citizens, educators, employees, and other stakeholders to report concerns related to any of the agencies governed by and/or provided resources by USBE.

Submit a [hotline complaint here](#).

Utah Public Education: Where Should I Start?



Resources

- [SafeUT](#)
 - A 24/7 confidential crisis chat and tip line available in Utah. Individuals can connect with licensed counselors for immediate help and anonymously report concerns like bullying or threats.
- [988 Suicide and Crisis Line](#)
 - Available 24/7 for crisis support.
- Pediatrician or family doctor
 - Professional health resource
- School counselor or school-based mental health specialist
 - School-based support resources
- [Stop Bullying Initiative](#)
 - A federal initiative offering comprehensive, research-based guidance and resources for parents and students.

Thank you!