

## My Child is Being Bullied: A Checklist for Parents & Caregivers

This checklist is a starting place for addressing bullying issues, but **you don't have to navigate this alone**. If you're unsure of the best course of action or want personalized guidance, reach out to our Director of Youth Engagement at [hannah@iowasafeschools.org](mailto:hannah@iowasafeschools.org).

### ☐ #1. Assess the Situation

**Reassure Your Student:** Reporting bullying can be difficult for students. It's essential to respond in a supportive way that encourages them to share openly, now and in the future. Approach questions from a non-judgmental perspective, reassuring your student that you're there to help them and that the bullying is not their fault.

**Review What Bullying Is – and Isn't:** Conflict and bullying are both very challenging for young people but they aren't the same thing – check out [this resource](#) and learn about the differences. Read Iowa's legal [definition of bullying](#).

**Know Your Student's Protections:** Iowa law requires schools to publicly prohibit bullying and outline clear reporting and investigation procedures ([Iowa Code 280.28](#)). Check if your school district has their bullying policy/procedure published in a handbook or online.

If your child has been physically assaulted or is being seriously threatened with bodily harm by another student, you may consider involving law enforcement.

### ☐ #2. Document Everything:

Work with your child to write down all the details of the bullying incidents, including:

- Dates, times, and locations of the events.
- Names of those involved, including any witnesses.
- Any physical or time-specific evidence (photos, screenshots of online bullying, text messages, or, with your child's permission, journal entries)

You and your child can still compile this information even if you're not yet ready to report.

### ☐ #3. Contact School Administration:

Report the bullying to the school's administration team (typically the vice principal or principal) using the school's bullying report form, typically found in the student handbook or school policy manual. If you can not locate the form, ask the school office for assistance. If a reporting form is not available, use the Iowa Department of Education's [sample report form](#).

If you were not able to find the school's bullying policy or procedure, request a copy at this time.

☐ **#4. Request a Safety Plan for Your Child:**

Ask the school to work with your family to develop a safety plan to protect your child. The Iowa Department of Education provides a [sample safety plan](#) that you can use as a guide.

**Note:** It is not appropriate for the school to force your child and the alleged bully to meet for mediation, and your child should not have their schedule or activities altered to avoid the alleged perpetrator.

☐ **#5. Understand the Investigation Process:**

Ask the school to outline their investigation steps, including:

- Who will lead the investigation
- The expected timeline for the investigation
- You and/or your student's role in the process
- Who will notify you of the investigation's findings
- Your options for appealing or escalating the decision

This process is likely detailed in the district's anti-bullying policy.

**FERPA:** School staff are bound by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. While they can share the *findings* of an investigation (such as whether bullying occurred) and create a safety plan for your student, they *often* cannot share any disciplinary actions for another student, as this constitutes an educational record. While this may be frustrating, this law is in place to protect the privacy of all students.

☐ **#6. Stay Updated:**

Request regular updates on the progress of the investigation. Ask for a clear communication of the final results. Keep a record of all communication from the school, including any in-person meetings.

Be sure to continue reporting any additional or escalated bullying incidents that occur.

☐ **#7. Know Your Rights:**

If the bullying is based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, religion, or other protected trait, it may overlap with discrimination.

- In this case, you may also want to file a complaint with:
  - [The Iowa Civil Rights Commission](#)
  - [The Federal Office of Civil Rights](#)
  - The school, as part of a separate process for discrimination complaints

☐ **#8. Check for Resolutions:**

After steps have been taken, check in with your child to confirm whether the bullying issue has been effectively resolved. Some students may hesitate to report further incidents, so encourage open communication and validate their feelings.

**Indicators of successful resolutions:** increased feelings of safety and comfort at school, no recurrence of bullying behavior, specific school actions to address the issue (check-ins with a counselor, adjusting adult supervision, etc.), normalcy of student's grades, social life, and attendance.

☐ **#9. Escalate if Necessary (But Stay Calm & Focused):**

If the bullying is not resolved, and/or if you would like to appeal a decision:

- Follow the school's escalation procedure, which typically involves:
  - Contacting the district superintendent.
  - Bringing the issue to the school board, if necessary. A private session can typically be requested in this instance.
- As a last resort, you can also request an appeal with the Iowa Department of Education. In this case, the department will review whether or not a school has followed their own anti-bullying policy & procedure.

**Note:** While the safety of your child understandably evokes strong emotions, try to remain calm and professional throughout the process. Avoid getting heated, yelling, or turning to social media, as these actions complicate the resolution process and can cause delays in resolving the issue for your student.

You may choose to consult an attorney at this stage in the process.

☐ **#10. Explore Transfer Options:**

If bullying has disrupted your student's ability to feel safe at school, consider transfer options to another school either within your district or to a neighboring district.

**Within District:**

Iowa law allows a parent or guardian to request that their child transfer to another school within the same district if the school district determines that the student has been bullied or harassed by another student.

- [Intradistrict Transfer Request Form](#) - used by a parent or guardian to notify their school district of intent to transfer.

**Out of District - Open Enrollment:**

Your child may be able to change school districts for the *next* school year through open enrollment. The annual deadline is March 1st for the following school year (ex: March 1st, 2025 is the deadline for the '25-'26 school year). The deadline does not apply for approved online schools.

If you've missed that deadline and need to transfer mid-year due to bullying, your child's application may still be considered under a 'good cause' exception. For repeated bullying to qualify, it must meet certain requirements, as approved by your current school district. Connect with our staff for further details.

# iowa safe schools

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