

Grace's Law: Maryland's Anti-Bullying Law



Bullying needs to stop! Bullying is behavior that is both repeated and intended to hurt someone either physically, emotionally or both. It can take many forms like teasing, name calling, making threats, physical assaults, sexual assaults and cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is bullying using electronic media like computers, cell phones, and game systems. Our digital interconnectedness makes bullying different and more damaging than it's ever been before. It allows hatred and publicly humiliating gossip or photos to be instantly far-reaching and inescapable as electronic media is everywhere. It can **NOT** simply be ignored. It can cause depression, anxiety, and desperation, which is a volatile mix for young people at a vulnerable stage in life.

In October 2013, the State of Maryland enacted Grace's Law, making misuse of interactive computer services a criminal offense. Its purpose is to prohibit anyone from using electronic media (computers, tablets, phones, etc.) to maliciously engage in conduct that inflicts serious emotional distress on a minor and/or places that minor in reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury. A person who is found guilty of violating this law is subject to imprisonment up to a year and a fine of up to \$500.00, or both.

Society often celebrates—on TV, Internet, music and politics—poor behaviors like name-calling, rudeness, and taunting others, especially those considered different. This is **NOT OK!**

Every human being deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. YOU can make a difference!

Remember the "Golden Rule":

Treat others the way you would like to be treated.

Here's how you can help:

- **Stand Up**...when you hear or see hatred and meanness.
- **Speak Out**...tell them it's not OK. Show support or befriend the mistreated.
- **Get Help – Report It**...tell a responsible adult and fill out a bullying report.

Bullying Hurts. Compassion and Kindness can Heal!

Remember, reporting bullying is not snitching or tattling, it is helping to keep you and others safe. For more information, visit www.stopbullying.gov.

DANGERS OF BULLYING

There are health risks related to depression for the victim, bully, and those who witness bullying, which may include:

- Irritability or anger
- Nightmares
- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Inability to concentrate
- Multiple joint and muscle pains
- Weight gain or loss
- Depression
- Self injury (i.e., cutting)
- Difficulties in falling and/or staying asleep
- Impulsiveness
- Suicide attempts
- Homicidal thoughts

Every person deserves to be treated with dignity, kindness and respect, including you! It can be hard to see, but your time in school, though sometimes painful, is temporary. Things **WILL** get better! You are loved and needed, and have unique gifts and a special purpose to do in this world that takes time to discover. **Never give up!**

HOW YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

In Maryland's public schools, if you feel that you are being bullied, you have the right to report your concerns and the school has the responsibility to investigate those concerns.

- As your teacher, counselor, or administrator if you can speak privately about a personal problem. Tell the adult what is happening or making you uncomfortable and how long it has been going on.
- **Ask for a Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting Form. Complete the form, return it to the administrator, and keep a copy.**
- If an incident occurs in an unstructured area, ask what the school will do to make you feel safe.
- Ask the administrator to investigate allegations, develop a plan of support, and schedule a meeting.
- Tell your parents and ask them to attend.
- Feel free to call the Maryland State Department of Education if you have additional questions regarding the completion of the Bullying Form at 410-767-0031.
- If you are being bullied on a social media site, **screen-shot and save** the content to share with parents, police and the school administration. Fill out a report as often as you need to.
- Change your password, use privacy settings, and block people who send negative messages, texts, tweets or photos.
- **Ask your friends not to share negative media with you or pass it on to others.**

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, take it seriously and **GET HELP**.
Contact the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at 1-888-333-AFSP.