

Grace's Law 2.0: Maryland's Anti-Bullying Law



Bullying is unwanted, demeaning behavior among students, employees, or third parties that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or is highly likely to be repeated, over time. To be considered bullying, the behavior must be intentional and include: 1) an imbalance of power (students who bully use their physical, emotional, social, or academic power to control, exclude, or harm others), and 2) repetition (bullying behaviors happen more than once or are highly likely to be repeated based on evidence gathered).

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through texting, apps, or online via social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or hurtful content about another person. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation.

Enacted in 2013 and strengthened in 2019 by Maryland advocates and legislators to address the ever-changing digital landscape, Grace's Law makes the malicious use of internet-based communications with the intent to intimidate or harass a minor, a criminal offense. The law prohibits electronic communications or conduct that may cause physical or emotional distress, including inducing a minor to commit suicide. A single incident may violate the law. A person who is found guilty of violating this law is subject to imprisonment and/or fines up to 10 years and \$10,000.

DANGERS OF BULLYING

There are potential health risks for the targeted student, the 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

HOW YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

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

- Ask your teacher, counselor, or administrator if you can speak privately about a personal problem. Tell the adult what is happening or making you feel uncomfortable and how long it has been going on.
- **Report bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, or intimidation using the HCPSS online reporting tool at stopbullying.hcpss.org/report/bullying. Include as much information as possible to help with the investigation. There are also hard copies of the reporting form available in your school (front office, counselor's office, etc.).**
- Additional information about bullying can be found at stopbullying.hcpss.org. You may also call the Maryland State Department of Education at 410-767-0306 if you have further questions or concerns.
- Ask the administrator to investigate allegations, develop a plan of support, and schedule a meeting. Tell your parents and ask them to attend.
- 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.

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.

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

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.**