

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



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 such as computers, cell phones, and game systems. Our digital interconnectedness makes bullying different and more damaging than ever before, because hurtful gossip or photos can be shared widely in a matter of seconds.

Enacted in 2013 and strengthened in 2019 by Maryland advocates and legislators to address the ever-changing digital landscape, Grace's Law makes misuse 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. It also prohibits electronic conduct that has malicious intent. 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 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



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.
- **Ask for a Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation Reporting Form.** Complete the form, return it to the administrator, and keep a copy. 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.
- Incidences of bullying may also be reported through HCPSS Sprigeo, an online reporting system, at: <http://report.sprigeo.com>.
- 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.**