

Society of Women Engineers Bullying Prevention Guide

Bullying is not compatible with the mission of SWE and should not be overlooked whenever and wherever it occurs. Staff and volunteers should understand how to prevent bullying and be prepared to deal with it proactively and thoughtfully.

What Is Bullying?

Bullying is harassment or aggressive behavior that is intended to intimidate, dominate, coerce, or hurt another person (the “target”) mentally, emotionally, or physically. It is *not* “just messing around,” and it is *not* “part of growing up.” Bullying is a form of victimization, not conflict. It is no more a “conflict” than is child abuse or domestic violence.

Forms of Bullying

Bullying takes many forms including:

- **Verbal**—Name-calling, belittling, taunting
- **Social**— Spreading rumors; destroying or manipulating friendships; excluding or ostracizing the target
- **Physical**— Hitting, shoving, kicking, using physical coercion, intimidation through gestures
- **Criminal**—Assault; sexual aggression
- **Cyberbullying**— Using digital technology such as social media, cell phones, etc., to engage in these kinds of behaviors

A bullied youth may develop a poor self-image, lose self-esteem, quit activities and clubs, or begin bullying other youth, thus perpetuating the bullying cycle. Studies indicate bullied youth tend to be future bullies. **As a leader, either break the cycle or do not let it start.**

How to Spot Bullying

A youth who is being bullied may:

- Be reluctant to join activities or unwilling to participate.
- Avoid activities, arrive late, or leave early (to avoid the bully).
- Avoid certain places or areas.
- Seem nervous around certain youth.
- Wait to use the restroom away from the group.
- Appear sad, moody, angry, anxious, or depressed.
- Seek, carry, or hide weapons (for protection).
- Lose money or personal items such as clothing or cell phone (taken by the bully).
- Feel sick, often with seemingly psychosomatic illnesses.
- Appear lonely, have difficulty making friends, or suddenly have fewer friends.
- Seem reluctant to defend themselves verbally or physically when teased or pushed.
- Have bruises, cuts, defensive wounds, or other physical marks.
- Mention or consider suicide.

In overnight camps, a youth who is being bullied may:

- Experience nightmares, bedwetting, or insomnia (triggered by fear).
- Refuse to leave their tent or room at camp (out of fear).

How to Address Bullying

These tips can help event leaders respond effectively:

- Immediately stop the bullying by standing between the bully and the target, preferably blocking their eye contact. Do not immediately ask the reason for the bullying or try to determine the facts.
- In a matter-of-fact tone of voice, state what behaviors you saw or heard. Tell all that bullying is unacceptable.
- Support the bullied youth in a way that allows them to regain self-control, to save face, and to feel safe from retaliation. Follow up with the youth later, but at the time of the incident, do not ask what happened or be overly solicitous. Young people often find it uncomfortable to be questioned in front of peers, and a bullied youth may feel embarrassed to be shielded by an adult.
- Do not require anyone to apologize or make amends during the heat of the moment. Everyone should have time to cool off.
- Speak to bystanders but do not put them on the spot to explain publicly what they observed. In a calm and supportive tone, praise them if they tried to help. If they did not act, or if they responded aggressively, guide them in how to appropriately intervene or get help when they witness bullying; e.g., “Maybe you weren’t sure what to do. Next time, please tell the person to stop or get an adult’s help if you feel you can’t work together to handle the situation.”
- Immediately notify parents or guardians of both the target and the youth who bullied of what occurred. Address the parents’ or guardians’ questions and concerns. Inform them of the next steps.
- Hold anyone who bullies others fully accountable for their actions. If appropriate, impose immediate consequences. As a first step, you might take away program opportunities.
- Increase supervision to ensure the bullying is not repeated and does not escalate. Let the bullies know you will be watching to be sure there is no repetition or retaliation.
- Encourage the individual who bullied to make amends (after follow-up with a parent or guardian) in a way that would be meaningful for the youth who was bullied.

Cyberbullying

A rapidly growing form of bullying, cyberbullying uses the power of the Internet, cellular networks, and social media to harass the target. Cyberbullying encompasses text or instant messages with hostile or degrading comments, embarrassing digital images, and fictitious online posts intended to humiliate, threaten, or coerce.

Cyberbullying can devastate the target, whether a lone bully participates or others witness or join the attack. The target may obsess over what is posted, become depressed, avoid school or social activities, or have suicidal thoughts. In extreme circumstances, cyberbullying can lead to suicide.

Parents and adults should talk with youth about their online activities and stay alert to signs of cyberbullying such as sleeplessness, withdrawal, stress, avoidance, declining grades, or lowered self-esteem

Ways to Address Cyberbullying

- Encourage a child to speak up immediately if they are the victim of cyberbullying. Assure that a young person has a trusted adult—whether parent, teacher, or SWE volunteer—in whom to confide.
- Block cyberbullies by using available privacy controls such as blocked-sender lists and call-blocking.
- Do not erase the messages or pictures. Save them as evidence.
- If the cyberbullying is criminal or you suspect it may be, contact the police. Areas falling under the jurisdiction of law enforcement include threats of violence, extortion, obscene or harassing phone calls or messages, harassment via stalking or hate crimes, child pornography, sexual exploitation, and taking a photo or video image of someone in a place where they would expect privacy.

Seeking Professional Help

Bullying is a form of abuse that can cause psychological, physical, and academic problems. Parents may want to talk with a counselor about a counseling or mental health referral. A professional can assess how much support and assistance a bullied youth needs. If a youth is sick, stressed, not sleeping, or having other problems because of bullying, a health professional should be contacted.

A young person who bullies others will also need the help of caring adults. They may need help recognizing their behavior, taking responsibility for their actions, developing empathy, and finding ways to make amends.

Volunteers can offer guidance in how to interact with others in socially appropriate ways. Assess possible reasons for the bullying behavior, such as lack of self-control, poor social skills, academic problems, or a troubled family life. Depending on the severity of the bullying behavior or the related circumstances, therapeutic intervention might be needed for the bully as well as the target.

Incidents Requiring an Immediate Report to the SWE Board

The following must be reported to the SWE Executive Director for action immediately:

- Any threat or use of a weapon
- Any negative behavior associated with race, religion, sexual identity or orientation, or disability
- Any reports to authorities where a state's mandatory reporting of child abuse laws applies
- Any abuse of a child that meets state reporting mandates for bullying or harassment
- Any mention or threats of suicide

Antibullying Action Plan

- Stop the abuse, bullying, or policy violation.
- Protect the targeted youth.
- Summon assistance from other leaders, authorities, etc.
- Gather factual information about the bullying incident, including details of who was involved, what happened, and when and where it happened.
- Notify parents or guardians of both the target and the youth who bullied.
- Take corrective action.
- Notify SWE's Executive Director when warranted.

Bullying Prevention Resources

Antibullying and Anti-Cyber Intimidation Programs

Website: learning.learningforlife.org/digital-programs/abc

BSA Youth Protection

Website: www.scouting.org/youthprotection

Bullying Awareness

Website: <https://www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection/bullying/Cyberbullying>

Research Center

Website: cyberbullying.us

NetSmartz Workshop

Website: www.netsmartz.org

StopBullying.gov

Website: www.stopbullying.gov

If someone is at immediate risk of harm, call 911.

SWE's Bullying Prevention Guide is based on Boy Scouts of America (2015, February). Guide to Safe Scouting. <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss>