

Bullying, peer conflicts and teasing . . . What’s the difference?

DeForest Area School District staff strive to develop a school environment where all students are valued and safe. Schools are using more terms to describe and report student behavior - and sometimes staff and parents have questions about the terminology used to describe these behaviors. Students, staff and parents have asked a number of thoughtful questions about bullying, some about how to differentiate between bullying and other peer conflicts and teasing. We have developed the following information to help.

There are four main categories of bullying types of behavior: friendly teasing, hurtful teasing, peer conflicts, and bullying. Below are a few examples of these behaviors:

- **Friendly Teasing:** One student comments to another student that he should turn his/her jersey inside out because his favorite team lost last night.
- **Hurtful Teasing:** One girl comments to another girl that she looks chubby in the outfit she is wearing.
- **Peer Conflicts:** Two students have a disagreement on the playground about which one will be the pitcher in kickball.
- **Bullying:** One student repeatedly threatens another student that if he walks down a specific hallway he will get “beat up”. Another example is one student repeatedly calling another student a name regarding his sexual orientation.

<u>Friendly Teasing</u>	<u>Hurtful Teasing</u>	<u>Peer Conflicts</u>	<u>Bullying</u>
Equal power	Unequal power	Equal power	Imbalance of power
Neutral	Sensitive topic	Occurs occasionally	Occurs repeatedly
Purpose is to be playful	Purpose is to upset	Accidental	Intentional and serious
Joins relationships	Excludes	Negotiations and option	Seeks to gain power
Funny to both parties	Sarcastic	Withdrawing an option	Victim is vulnerable
		Relationship is valued	No remorse
		Effort to resolve	No effort to resolve

Additional steps could be considered if the situation is against the protected class. The protected classes are: Race, Color, Religion, National Origin, Age, Sex, Pregnancy, Citizenship, Familial Status, Disability Status, Veteran Status, and Genetic Information.

Three questions guide school officials to determine when a behavior constitutes bullying. (1) Were the alleged bullying behaviors repeated and deliberate? (2) Did the alleged bullying behaviors inflict harm or suffering? (3) Is there an imbalance of real or perceived power between the alleged victim and alleged author of the behavior?

As a school community, staff teach children how to advocate for themselves and to advocate for others. They also incorporate lessons and programs to promote acceptance of all people. Over the course of a student’s educational experience at DASD he/she will participate in many activities relating to acceptance and tolerance, including: The Purple Hand Pledge, Pinwheels for Peace, Mix-it-Up Lunch, Kelso’s Choice, Bullying & Tolerance units, Character Development, a Harassment presentation, Restorative Circling/Practices, On-line Safety, Link Crew and Advisory.

Together we can instill the single most powerful tool against bullying—a welcoming, validating school environment built upon strong character values.