



CAIR'S GUIDE TO ADDRESSING BULLYING AND BIAS IN SCHOOLS



Practical Steps for Youth and Their Families

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About CAIR The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is the largest American Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. Its mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims.

CAIR's guide references material from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

It is no secret that bullying affects Muslim youth in schools.

According to a [2021 study](#) by CAIR-CA, more than 50% of all respondents reported feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable at school because of their Muslim identity. In honor of National Bullying Prevention Month this October, CAIR is releasing the following guide to support Muslim youth in navigating and responding to instances of bullying that they may experience as well as to advise families as to what they can do to help.

What is Bullying?

Bullying occurs whenever one person intentionally tries to hurt another, whether emotionally or physically. It can occur anywhere – through comments in class, notes left on personal belongings, or online through social media. Frequently, these hurtful words or actions occur more than once, or have the potential to occur more than once, and come from a person in a place of power. Bullying can be from peer to peer or teacher/administrator to student. Some common examples of bullying, especially toward Muslim students, include:

- 1. Verbal: Name-calling; threats; sexual comments; taunting; insulting comments made about Islam.**
- 2. Social: Spreading rumors; excluding others on purpose.**
- 3. Physical: Hitting; shoving; kicking; pinching; spitting; tripping; taking or breaking someone's property; pulling on someone's headscarf or kufi.**
- 4. Cyber (via electronic communication): Sending hurtful text messages to others; spreading rumors or lies online; creating websites or social media profiles to humiliate or make fun of others.**



Questions [reproduced](#) from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center.

For Youth

Am I Being Bullied?

It's not always easy to identify – or even admit – when we're being bullied. Read the questions below and check any that might apply to you.

- Do other students make mean comments about you?
- Have you ever been called hurtful names?
- Are you teased for how you look or act?
- Do you feel alone or isolated at school?
- Has anyone ever spread mean or untrue rumors about you?
- Are you ever purposely excluded from a group?
- Have you ever felt that someone you thought of as a friend is trying to control you?
- Has someone ever touched you in a way that felt inappropriate, demeaning, or threatening?
- Has anyone ever mocked or mimicked the way you talk or act?
- Has anyone ever damaged your belongings?
- Do other students physically hurt you on purpose?
- Are you ever afraid to go to school? Do you get anxious about how you are treated by other kids at school?
- Have photos of you ever been posted online without your permission?
- Has anyone ever pretended to be you on social media?
- Have people posted mean things about you online or commented in a mean way on your posts/stories?

For Youth

I Think I'm Being Bullied. What Can I Do?

1. Identify what's stopping you from taking action, and think about possible solutions. For example, if you're thinking:

"I feel embarrassed and don't want anyone to know."

Remember: Bullying is not your fault. No one ever deserves to be bullied, and you have the right to ask for help against bullying. If you feel embarrassed, tell someone you trust, such as a parent, relative, or teacher at school.

"I don't want to be called a snitch."

Remember: The goal of this label is to silence you, so that bullies and those that help them don't get in trouble. Also, when bullying isn't addressed, it can get worse.

"Nothing is going to change even if I do say something."

Remember: State laws vary, but they generally require that public schools, or schools that receive public funding, protect you from harassment and discrimination. You have the right to express yourself in your clothing and speech, and you have the right to report – and should report – bullying or harassment at school. For more information on your rights to express your faith in school, see CAIR's ["Know Your Rights"](#) guide.

"I already told someone and nothing changed."

Remember: Don't give up; tell another person. Sometimes, teachers, administrators, or even other friends may be rude, distracted, or unwilling to help you when you approach them about bullying. This does not mean that bullying is okay, or that no one can help you.

"This is only happening online."

Remember: Just because it's online doesn't mean it's not bullying. Instead, document the harmful post by taking a screenshot or otherwise capturing the content, block the person from contacting you, and report the individual to a parent, trusted adult, and/or social media provider.

"I'm being bullied by my teacher, coach, or other adult."

Remember: Tell your parent or guardian. Generally, it's not helpful or safe to confront the adult bullying you. Your parent(s) or guardian(s) will be able to help you advocate for yourself at school and report the bullying.

For Youth

2. Address the bullying by being your own self-advocate.

Being a self-advocate doesn't mean that you have to fix the situation on your own. It means that your ideas and comfort are important to your safety. When you've decided to take action against a bully, it can be difficult to know where to start. Take it one step at a time. Start by writing out or thinking through a plan of action. Include:

1. **Details about what is happening to you, when and where it takes place, and who is involved. If you can and feel comfortable, keep evidence of the bullying so that it can be shared with adults who want to help.**
2. **What you would like to change about the situation, how things could be different, and what would help you gain control over the situation.**
3. **Your role in this action plan, who else should be involved, and what they could do.**

When considering your role, remember:

4. **Act with awareness, respect, calm, and confidence.**
5. **Do not respond to harmful words and actions in harmful ways.**
6. **If a situation is escalating, leave.**

Once you've come up with a plan, find a parent, guardian, or other trusted adult and share it with them. Ask for support and remember that your voice and ideas are important to making sure you feel comfortable at school.

For more details on how to be a self-advocate, consider using this [Student Action Plan](#).

In order to advocate for yourself and others against further instances of bullying, consider sharing CAIR's [Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices](#) with teachers at your school. You can also advocate for school staff to create an anonymous submission box to report bullying incidents to avoid concerns over retaliation.



Information [adapted](#) from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center.

For Parents/Guardians

I Think My Child Is Being Bullied. What Can I Do?

1. **Keep the lines of communication open with your child – know your child's friends, ask about the school day, and listen closely to any questions or concerns that arise.** Your child may feel hesitant to acknowledge or to share that they are being bullied. Get as much information as you can from your child (what, when, who, how, and where) and document them. **Listen. Don't blame.**
2. **Know Your Child's Rights.** While state laws can vary, they generally require public schools, or schools that receive public funding, to protect your child from harassment and discrimination and have a process in place for investigating bullying complaints, which require teachers and staff at schools to help students who are being bullied. If your child comes to you for support:
 - a. Request and review the school's bullying policies and follow the procedures for reporting it.
 - b. Request a meeting with the school.
 - c. Send a follow-up email documenting the contents of the meeting to keep a record for school accountability.

For more information on your child's rights to express their faith in school, see CAIR's ["Know Your Rights" guide](#).



Information [adapted](#) from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center and from the [Institute for Social Policy and Understanding](#).

For Parents/Guardians

3. Tell your child to talk to you or a trusted adult at school if they are ever bullied. Your child may not want to tell you that they're being bullied at school or may not want you to get involved. Help them come up with a plan to address the bullying and encourage them to talk to a trusted adult at school who can help intervene. Share, or encourage your child to share, CAIR's [Educator's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices](#) with the school to help protect them and other students from future instances of bullying.

The School Will Not Help My Child Or They Are Ineffective. Who Can I Speak To?

- 1. Report instances of bullying to the district.** If school educators and staff are not supporting your child, or an adult at school is themselves responsible for the bullying, go up the chain of command within the school and district until the bullying stops.
- 2. Contact CAIR.** CAIR may be able to provide legal help to your child. If you wish to file a complaint, please use our online complaint [form](#).