

## **River Dell Middle School** **Frequently Asked Questions about Bullying**

**1. Does the River Dell Regional School District have a bullying policy?**

Yes. The State of New Jersey requires each school district to adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying. The River Dell Regional School District's Policy (5131.2 as well as key anti-bullying personnel for each school is located on the district web page.)

**2. What is the definition of bullying provided to students?**

Bullying includes a wide variety of behaviors, but all involve a person or a group repeatedly and intentionally trying to harm someone weaker or more vulnerable. It can involve direct attacks such as hitting, threatening, or intimidating, maliciously teasing and taunting, name calling, making sexual remarks, and stealing or damaging property, or more subtle, indirect attacks such as spreading rumors or encouraging others to reject or exclude someone. Students are directed not to harass or bully others using computer technology. River Dell Middle School does not permit students to use school technology (e.g. laptops) for purposes that are not educational. Cell phone use, texting, and social networking are not permitted during school hours.

**3. Is there a distinction between bullying and normal conflict?**

The NJ Bar Foundation makes a distinction between bullying and normal conflict. Students (and adults) experience difference of opinion, differing points of view, accidental physical contact, changing friends and interests, and bantering. These may result in tensions among students. Occasionally conflict may involve aggressive interactions, partly for fun, as a form of self-assertion, and for the testing out of social relations and power. In the case of normal conflict, there is a good faith effort to solve problems, negative behaviors are not recurring, and the rights of students are not threatened. Bullying, on the other hand, is characterized by an imbalance of power, intentional effort to hurt, threat of physical or emotional aggression, and lack of remorse. Bullying is usually a repeated behavior. There is no desire or effort for conflict resolution.

**4. Does River Dell Middle School establish expectations regarding bullying?**

In very early September, the Principal and Assistant Principal meet with all of the students to provide expectations for behavior and academic effort. Bullying is defined, expectations are clearly presented, and consequences are explained. Expectations are reinforced by classroom teachers throughout the school year. In addition, the Administration, Student Counseling Department, School Assistance Counselor and other support staff educate the students and review these expectations through individual and small group interventions.

**5. How common is bullying?**

Research has shown that bullying is common during the middle school years. Schools like River Dell that provide an educational program to prevent bullying are able to minimize bullying.

**6. How does River Dell Middle School address bullying?**

River Dell Middle School is pro-active when it comes to bullying education and its response to bullying. River Dell Middle School believes education of the entire school community is the key to a safe, bully-free environment. Positive school culture and open communication are key components in preventing bullying. A series of bullying prevention lessons, activities, and events teach students how to recognize and report bullying, react appropriately to bullying, be a supportive peer bystander, and engage in conflict resolution. The School Counseling Department along with the

Student Assistance Counselor implement lessons throughout the year to teach strategies that help students to respond appropriately and effectively to peer-to-peer teasing, and other hurtful behaviors. Our Student Assistance Counselor and the Middle School Counseling Department work directly with middle school students who need additional support and guidance, which may include social skills development and more in-depth counseling. River Dell Middle School works with the local Police Departments, the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office, and outside mental health agencies to provide education, support, and counseling. In addition, we are diligent with regard to fostering a positive school culture that models appropriate and ethical behavior, establishes positive student/teacher relationships, and encourages trust and belonging.

**7. Should a parent report a "bullying" episode to the school administration?**

It is very important that parents communicate to administrators immediately when bullying is reported to have occurred. Parents can complete the following form to report bullying: <https://www.riverdell.org/common/pages/DownloadFileByUrl.aspx?key=yS2Wsr2VmLSpIqU9eCf7i10sj3VPmZVErd3blhKoxHlau9PocGeQGj0UljFtLAgHzW9sYydMfd2%2bUv%2fW9hN1M%2bzaG91fjihA%2f8v0Xb3y5CXsjzwuvCe0cjinKcQI2H5gutEm%2fb5c9zgiW3e1LwLN5dEY4zyqZ2pUHqnOqWozvMgKZ92rRrAl6%2fz2jRIsPU%2ba4lBQBQ%3d%3d>. Parents help the school to maintain a positive and safe school environment by reporting cases of bullying. Too often parents do not act on this information and make it more difficult for school personnel to address inappropriate behavior. Timely parent communication is strongly encouraged.

**8. Should parents and students fear retaliation when reporting bullying?**

It is essential that parents and students help to maintain an environment where bullying is viewed as unacceptable, consistently addressed, and where support is provided. All reports are kept *confidential and anonymous* to the fullest extent possible. Retaliation in any form will be addressed severely. Students are encouraged to report bullying to their teacher, school counselor or school administrator who is trained in maintaining confidentiality and acts as an advocate for each student.

**9. What occurs when a parent or student reports a case of bullying?**

Reported incidents are investigated in a thorough manner. A specific set of protocols are followed. In some cases the reported behavior can be quickly validated and appropriate consequences, follow-up, and remediation occurs. Parents are always contacted. In some cases, the circumstances are ambiguous or more complex. The investigation will continue, providing due process to all students involved, until responsibility can be substantiated. Every case of bullying is taken seriously and documented.

**10. Can parents be assured that their children are safe at school?**

Yes. A set of procedures are followed by the school to ensure that a student is not a threat to himself or others. School policy provides that a student may be required to have a psychological evaluation that authorizes the student to return to the school setting. Consequences and remedial actions vary depending on the circumstances and nature of the situation. Ongoing follow-up, monitoring, counseling, and implementation of a behavior plan are instituted. River Dell Middle School works closely with the student's family and other professionals to provide appropriate remediation. The school also works closely with the local Police Departments in these cases.