

BULLYING: A PROBLEM FOR MUSLIM STUDENTS, PARENTS AND EVERYONE ELSE

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS, PARENTS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Bully [bool-ee]

verb (used with object)

to act the bully toward; habitually intimidate, abuse, or harass

to coerce or compel by name-calling, slander, ostracism, and/or property damage

Bullying is a Big Problem for Muslim Students¹

- More than half of school-age Muslim students reported being bullied at school because of their religion (that is twice the reported national average for all students)
- Nearly one-third of students report being cyberbullied online by their peers

Who is at Risk of Being Bullied?

While **anybody can be a victim of bullying**, some students are more likely to be bullied than others.

Mostly they are students that **seem to be “different,”** like those who are:

overweight, new to a school/class, do not dress “cool,” have an accent, belong to an ethnic or religious minority, bring “non-American” food for lunch, have a disability, have “foreign-sounding” names, and/or wear glasses.

Also at significant risk are students who appear to be weak, have low self-esteem, lack confidence, or are loners who have few friends and are unpopular.

There are times when a Muslim Student May be at a Higher Risk of Being Bullied

- While studying the events of 9/11, Muslim students may face verbal abuse including name-calling and insults against the faith of Islam.
- During the month of Ramadan, when Muslim students may be fasting, they may be singled out during lunch

or snack-time, teased with food, or separated from the class.

- In a World Religions section of a Social Studies, a Muslim student may be called on to be the “expert” or to speak on behalf of all Muslims.
- Muslim students who are absent from school for religious holidays may be confronted with teachers and students who are unfamiliar with those observances. The students may also be demanded to produce evidence of the holiday, despite the state policy that religious holidays are excused absences with the written consent of a parent.

Signs that a Student is Being Bullied May Include:

Unexplainable injuries, loss or destruction of property, rumors and gossip spread quickly, frequent headaches or stomach aches, faking illness, skipping meals or binge eating, difficulty sleeping and nightmares, loss of interest in school, academics decline/grades fall, loss of friends and avoiding social outings, decreased self-esteem, finding ways to hide their identity, and/or self-destructive behaviors.

Is there

- Deliberately aggressive behavior?
- An intention to cause physical or emotional harm?
- A clear imbalance of power?

¹Growing in Faith: California Muslim Youth Experiences with Bullying, Harassment & Religious Accommodation in Schools, Council on American-Islamic Relations – California: <http://ca.cair.com/downloads/GrowingInFaith.pdf> and ICGC/Muslim Mothers Against Violence: <http://www.cincinnatiislamiccenter.org/mmav.html>

Bullying Can Be Preventable

The best way to address bullying is to stop it before it starts. Bullies generally avoid picking on students who show self-confidence or have a positive self-image.

Parents:

- Pay attention: keep an eye out for the warning signs
- Be a presence at school, volunteer and report any incident
- Teach your children the difference between being a “tattle tale” and being a reporter
- Encourage and help your child build friendships

Teachers and Schools:

- Include anti-Islamophobia trainings for teachers and other staff to help reduce bias
- Research and enact evidenced-based interventions and curriculums to help schools address bullying. There are many considerations in selecting the best program for a classroom or school, including the school’s demographics, capacity, and resources
- Create safe spaces for student to destress
- Provide creative outlets for students to express their feelings and reactions to being bullied

Upstander [up·stand·er]

noun

A person who speaks or acts in support of an individual or cause, particularly someone who intervenes on behalf of a person being attacked or bullied.

How to Support a Muslim Student who is being Bullied

- **Intervene!** Ensure that the student who was targeted is in a safe space away from the bully.
- Help students to remove themselves from the situation and refrain from fighting back or provoking the aggressor
- Directly point out stereotypes, and remind all students that generalizations, especially negative ones, are not the whole truth.
- When rumors fly (in-person or online), find the source. Make sure that everyone involved understands the rumor’s impact and that anyone who passed along the rumor knows they were part of the cyberbullying.
- **Never ignore the issue and hope it resolves itself.**

Be an Upstander not a Bystander

Staying silent (or staying “out of it”) always benefits the Bully.

Here are a few Resources for Parents, Teachers and Students

<https://ing.org/resources/for-students/anti-bullying-resources/bullying-prevention-guide/>
<https://www.jacksoncountycombat.com/300/Who-Is-At-Risk>
<https://www.ispu.org/american-muslim-poll-2022-1/>
<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/10-Ways-to-Respond-to-Bullying.pdf>
<https://www.onoursleeves.org/mental-health-resources/articles-support/bullying/bullying-affects-everyone>
<https://www.stopbullying.gov/>
<https://www.isbatlanta.org/>

² <https://www.isbatlanta.org/what-we-offer/>