

RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS OF HATE & BIAS

Resources and Best Practices for School Administrators

In recent years, we have seen alarming images, hateful language and bias incidents in K–12 schools. The most effective responses to bias-motivated incidents are holistic and incorporate prevention, interventions and consequences, and long-term educational strategies. Below are approaches to assist you in being prepared to respond to bias incidents in their immediate aftermath and to promote inclusive school climates with education.

PREPARE

Be ready for incidents so that you can act quickly when something happens.

P

- Update policies on bullying and harassment and other in-person and online violations. Make sure policies explicitly prohibit incidents motivated by bias, are inclusive of all students and clearly outline consequences that are enforced universally.
- Ensure that school discipline policies limit reliance on exclusion strategies and that alternatives, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports, are tried first.
- Regularly review policies with all members of the school community and publicize them in various ways (e.g. on notice boards, in electronic and hard copy newsletters) and in families' home languages.
- Develop a data collection protocol consistent with local, state and federal standards so that the prevalence and types of incidents can be tracked and patterns can be analyzed and addressed.
- Build relationships with community organizations and partners, law enforcement, media and other relevant stakeholders. These relationships can enhance your ability to respond rapidly and comprehensively to an incident.



ENCOURAGE REPORTING

Young people are very often reluctant to tell adults about incidents because they believe it won't help and may makethings worse.

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- Establish safe and confidential reporting mechanisms and clear procedures for investigation and response. Ensure that those who report incidents don't experience retaliation or unnecessary interaction with law enforcement by enacting policies that address protection for those who report. Be aware of possible false reports and consider what to do if that occurs.
- Make students aware of these systems and encourage them to tell a trusted adult when they experience, witness or hear about an incident.
- Discuss with adults best practice for being more approachable. Take reported issues seriously, invest the time to listen before engaging in problem-solving, maintain confidentiality when appropriate, and model responsible in-person and online behavior.
- Reaffirm your school as a "sanctuary" or "safe zone" school by reinforcing existing laws, policies, and constitutional rights that protect immigrant students from federal immigration enforcement activity at school. Ensuring safety and inclusion for vulnerable students will encourage reporting.

ACT QUICKLY AND RESPOND

Every reported incident should be respond to in a serious manner, which reassures the school community and conveys a message that the behavior is unacceptable.

A

- Utilize a standardized bias-incident response form to guide and document information-gathering after the occurrence of an incident.
- Immediately upon learning of the incident, preserve photos, screenshots, etc. Interview all parties separately and collect written accounts as soon as possible.
- Gather facts with an eye towards the bigger picture at the school. Ask students whether other similar incidents have happened and listen to concerns and feedback about school climate.
- Clarify what the role and duties of school resource officers (SRO)'s and police should and should not be in the process. Contact law enforcement as necessary.
- Ensure the safety of all students and determine disciplinary response, if appropriate.
- On a need-to-know basis, determine the extent to which mental health, social service providers, and other victim resources should be consulted.

COMMUNICATE

Ensure that all members of the school community and stakeholders understand reporting procedures.
When an incident occurs, keep the school community informed.

C

- Communicate with all members of the school community and tailor your message depending on the audience (i.e. students, staff, families and the wider community). Initial communication should (1) describe the nature of the incident (e.g. swastika on the bathroom wall); (2) denounce the act and affirm the inclusive values of your school; (3) announce an immediate investigation of the matter, when appropriate; and (4) share resources for students and families impacted by the incident, including social services and plans for an educational response.
- Send regular updates and plans for short-term and long-term action to the various stakeholders.
- Ensure the protection of students' privacy in any communications about the incident.

EDUCATE

In a regular and ongoing way, teach students about bias, its harmful effects and how to challenge it.
Don't wait for an incident to occur to talk about these important issues.

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- Turn bias motivated incidents into "teachable moments," and offer the opportunity to talk about bias and discrimination and to provide opportunities for students to take action.
- Provide opportunities for all members of the school community to discuss and process their thoughts and feelings around the incident.
- Educate all students, including aggressors or perpetrators, who were involved in the incident. Sometimes young people who engage in bias-motivated behavior do not understand the meaning or impact of their actions on the larger school community. Educators, counselors and administrators should coordinate disciplinary, behavioral and educational interventions.
- Provide professional development for school personnel on how to lead discussions on the nature and impact of bias with students and families. Anti-bias education is a long-term process and preventing bias requires an ongoing commitment from all stakeholders in the school community, including the school's administrators. Integrate anti-bias and bullying prevention strategies into the school curriculum, school climate programs and family engagement.
- Support efforts to provide training for school resource officers on implicit bias and strategies that meet varying needs of officers working with youth.

ADDITIONAL ADL RESOURCES

- [Contact your ADL regional office](#)
- [Model Cyberbullying Policy](#)
- [Zero Indifference Framework](#)
- [Educational Programs and Anti-Bias Training](#)
- [11 Ways Schools Can Help Students Feel Safe in Challenging Times](#)
- [Curriculum Resources](#)
 - [Empowering Young People in the Aftermath of Hate](#)
 - [Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment](#)
 - [Lesson Plans](#)
 - [Books Matter](#)
 - [Anti-Bias Tools and Strategies](#)
- [Family Resources](#)
 - [Table Talk](#)
 - [FAQ for Early Childhood](#)



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