

Alberta's Amended

SCHOOL ACT

Welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS

Amendments to the School Act as part of Bill 10 (in force June 1, 2015) set out responsibilities for all partners in the education system, including students, parents, and school boards. All partners have a responsibility to do their part to ensure welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments.

DEFINITION OF BULLYING

Section 1.1(b.1) of the School Act defines bullying as:

“Repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by an individual in the school community where the behaviour is intended to cause harm, fear or distress to one or more other individuals in the school community, including psychological harm or harm to an individual’s reputation.”

Bullying can take different forms:

- Physical – pushing, hitting
- Verbal – name calling, threats
- Social – exclusion, rumors
- Cyber – using the computer or other technology to harass or threaten

Bullying is not a normal part of growing up and it does not build character. Bullying is a learned behaviour - children and youth often learn bullying behaviours when they either experience being bullied or see it happening to others. When bullying behaviours go unchecked, the message is that the behaviour is acceptable. When bullying behaviours are observed and reported, they are to be addressed and resolved as soon as is reasonably possible. When your child tells you about a bullying incident, let your child’s teacher or one of the school leaders know as soon as you can. Fact sheets *What Adults Can Do* and *Watch and Listen* on www.bullyfreealberta.ca provide information about how to support your child.

Bullying is different from conflict. Conflict is a disagreement or struggle over opposing beliefs, needs, feelings or actions and is a normal part of life. Learning how to resolve conflicts peacefully and recognize the difference between a conflict and bullying is an important skill for students as well as adults.

SECTION 16.2

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS

Under section 12 of the Act, students have the responsibility to ensure that their conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

Parents have a corresponding responsibility under section 16.2(a) to help their child meet his/her responsibilities. Parents can help in many ways. Some examples include:

- model kindness
- pay attention to how you talk about other children and the school in front of your child
- take responsibility for your mistakes
- report any problems at school to the teacher as soon as you can. Problems are easier to solve when they haven’t been going on for a long time. The best place to start is with your child’s teacher. If you are not satisfied with the results of this conversation, the next step would be to make an appointment to speak with your child’s principal
- model peaceful problem solving when you have a conflict.

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SECTION 16.2

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS, *continued*

Section 16.2(b) of the Act says that parents also have a responsibility to contribute to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment. Parents have an important role to play whether they are in the school regularly or not. Some examples include:

- speaking respectfully to and about school staff
- speaking positively about the school, staff, other students and their families in front of your child
- making appointments to ensure the person you want to speak with has sufficient time to have a focused conversation. Drop off and pick up times are not ideal for you or for the teacher
- communicating with the teacher or other school staff – e.g. positive notes or emails to your child's teacher and/or other school staff, positive comments when you drop off or pick up your child.

Note: Decisions regarding consequences imposed on one student cannot be shared with parents/family of other students. While this can be frustrating it is necessary and important to protect everyone's privacy.

SECTION 45.1

RESPONSIBILITIES OF BOARDS

Section 45.1(1) of the Act requires school boards to ensure that students and staff are provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

Under **Sections 45.1(2) and 45.1(3)**, boards are required to have a student code of conduct that

- is shared with parents, staff, and students
- is reviewed every year
- explains what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the school and also outside of school grounds and hours when it affects the learning environment
- addresses possible consequences for unacceptable behaviour
- consequences must consider a student's age, maturity and individual circumstances. This means that consequences may be different for each student.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES:

- **Alberta Education:** www.education.alberta.ca/caringschools
- **Bully Free Alberta:** www.bullyfreealberta.ca
- **The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities:** www.safeandcaring.ca