

How Tompkins Schools Promote Healthy, Bully-free Environments

New York State's Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) took effect in 2012. It requires schools to provide students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function. Local schools have done a lot to comply with DASA. There has been significant training of teachers and staff. Schools have developed codes of conduct defining acceptable and unacceptable behavior and reporting procedures. Schools have designated a DASA coordinator and provide this information publically. And schools must report incidents to the state annually. Since DASA reporting took effect, the number of reported incidents has risen each year. This is likely due to schools understanding the requirements better, rather than there being more incidents. In the 2014-15 school year, Tompkins schools reported 72 incidents and an additional 10 cyberbullying incidents¹. Sex and race were listed most often as the reason for a reported incident.

Bullying of any sort is inconsistent with DASA principles of creating a safe and supportive environment. In Tompkins County, 1 in 3 students say they have been bullied at school;² this is consistent with national rates³. While a majority - 86% - of Tompkins students report that they feel safe at school, 14% report that they do not feel safe⁴.

What constitutes bullying? The 3 main elements of bullying are:

- unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance
- intentional behavior toward another person
- behavior that is often repeated

Bullying can happen at school and also on the playground, on the bus, in the neighborhood, and on the internet. It can be verbal (saying or writing mean things, threats), physical (hurting a person or their possessions), or social (spreading rumors, embarrassing someone). A significant amount of bullying, especially by middle schoolers, is cyberbullying, using social media and other electronic methods to threaten, hurt, or embarrass another student.

What can you do? Parents, school staff and other caring adults have an important role in preventing or stopping bullying.

- Help children understand bullying. Talk about what bullying is, how to stand up to it safely, and how to get help.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Check in, observe, listen.
- Talk to your child, to teachers and school officials to find out more about what's going on. Depending on the severity of the bullying, you might need additional resources, and there are many available online and in our community.
- Encourage kids to always be in the company of others. Bullies tend to target loners.

¹ [NYS Dept. of Education DASA reports](#)

² [2014 Tompkins County Youth Survey](#), given in all public schools, grades 7-12

³ <http://Stompoutbullying.org>

⁴ [2014 Tompkins County Youth Survey](#)

- Encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities and hobbies can boost confidence and help kids make friends.
- Contact your school's Dignity Act coordinator for more information.

Monthly Messages are brought to you by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department, a proud partner of The Community Coalition for Healthy Youth.

If you have further questions or comments about this message or would like information on how to become involved with the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth, please email ahendrix@tompkins-co.org

Thank you in advance for sharing this monthly message with your networks.

