

# How do you *stop a bully?*



Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities  
offers **advice** for difficult situations **for all ages!**

## Bullying: Types and Warning Signs

The CDC defines bullying as repeated “unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power” and can take different insidious and pervasive forms:

**Physical**, including hitting, kicking, tripping or damaging personal items or property.

**Verbal**, such as teasing, name calling and threats of harm.

**Social and relational**, like spreading rumors, damaging reputations and relationships, or excluding victims from groups or events.

**Cyberbullying** is another form of verbal and social abuse, one that’s inflicted through the internet on social media, messaging platforms, mobile devices and more.

Those who have been targeted by bullies aren’t always forthcoming about it. However, there are warning signs to look for:

**Unexplained injuries** like bruises or scratches

**Lost or destroyed things** such as clothing, backpacks or other personal items

**Reluctance** to go to school, **lower grades** or **less interest** in schoolwork

**Less interest** in previously enjoyed activities such as sports, clubs or hobbies

**Difficulty sleeping** due to stress or nightmares

**Health complaints** such as head or stomach aches, which can be caused by anxiety

**Talking or writing** about **self-harm** or **hurting others**

Sources: Centers for Disease Control, DisabilityCampaign.org

# Taking Bullying Seriously

Bullying is **not a ‘normal’ part of childhood.**

BY ANNE STOKES

For years, Yesenia Gonzales warned her son’s teachers and school administrators that Matthew was being bullied: He came home with unexplained bruises and scratches, he was afraid to go to school and would cry and beg to stay home. The day before the middle-schooler was violently assaulted in the school cafeteria, his mother pleaded with the school’s administration to provide more supervision during lunchtime when her son was particularly vulnerable.

“Matthew was attacked from behind. He was punched, as he recalled, four to five times in the back of the head,” Gonzales says. “He said he didn’t know what happened, someone just hit him. I’ve never heard him cry like that in my life. ... I told the school, ‘I warned you and I told you my son was being bullied, but you did nothing to protect my child and here we are.’”

Matthew’s injuries included a broken nose, but could have been much worse. In fact, his assault was so egregious, the case was forwarded to the district attorney’s office and is being tried as a felony. Gonzales says that while all of her kids have had some problems with bullying, it’s been more prominent with Matthew because of his developmental disabilities: At the age of 6, he was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome and was nonverbal until the first grade. He expresses himself through stimming and has difficulties with social interactions.

According to PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center, children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be bullied than typically-abled children. Difficulty with communication, mobility and social



situations, and lack of peer support can make students with intellectual or developmental disabilities common targets.

Today, Matthew is thriving at a different school. Gonzales credits the school’s administrators and faculty with creating a safer, more tolerant environment that better aligns with Clark County School District’s policy 5137, which prohibits discrimination based on bullying and outlines how schools should investigate and address incidents. She says that while

she’s spent years on her own trying to better communicate with her son’s schools, researching laws and policies, and dealing with the legal system, there is help for families going through similar situations. Groups such as the Nevada Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities can connect families with advocacy efforts, resources, local organizations and other parents who can help.

“These organizations are out there to help families with children with disabilities, they have answers that you may not know. They may have parent guides to educate you on your child’s disabilities or they may have conferences to talk very specifically about bullying,” Gonzales says. “Don’t be afraid to speak up and be your child’s voice; you are their advocate and their line of defense. Do not let anyone intimidate you from doing what is right. If you don’t understand, ask questions.”

For more information on available resources, visit [www.nevadaddcouncil.org](http://www.nevadaddcouncil.org) or call 775-684-8619.

*“Don’t be afraid to speak up and be your child’s voice; you are their advocate and their line of defense.”*

**Yesenia Gonzales**  
Parent Advocate and NGCDD  
Partners in Policymaking  
Student

# How to Reduce Bullying at a New School

Stay strong, stay busy and **talk to others.**

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

**Dear Council,**  
**I hate my new school. Some of the kids in my class make fun of me and bully me every day just because I'm different. What can I do to get them to stop picking on me?**

For the answer, we turn to advocate Stacy Alaribe, a Council member of the Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities:

I know it can be terrifying to have other students bullying you when you just want to be friends.

When people bully you, it can make it harder to concentrate in school and cause you to think bad thoughts about yourself.

Like you, I have a disability, too. I have a mobility issue because of cerebellar degeneration and, when I was younger, I was bullied, so I know how you feel.

Here are some steps you can take to make the bullying stop:

! **Talk to adults at your school.**

Report the bullying to someone you're comfortable with, like a teacher, a school counselor, or someone you feel is there for you. They may be able to talk to the other child and educate them on how their bullying makes you feel.

! **Talk to your parents.**

Your parents may be able to arrange for a meeting at school where both families and the principal or counselor can all sit down together and talk it out.

*"When I was bullied, talking to other people who went through it helped me."*

**Stacey Alaribe**  
Council Member, Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities



! **Talk to other kids and adults with disabilities.**

Chances are they've been bullied a time or two as well. When I was bullied, talking to other people who went through it helped me.

! **Start an anti-bullying program.**

Ask your principal or counselor if they will start an anti-bullying program at your school. A Peacemaker program, for example, encourages older students to bring more positivity to the playground and help younger students to be at peace with each other.

! **Stay busy.**

Take up sports, join a self-help group or a club at your school. That's important because bullies can make you feel all alone and not want to do anything. But playing sports or joining a club can be a great way to have some fun and keep your mind off the bullies.

! **Stay strong.**

Try to not let what's happening get you down. Staying strong and forgetting the rest is hard to do. But I believe that if you keep this in mind, it will help you. I have to remind myself of this every day, even when the going gets tough and people are putting me down. I also tell myself that anyone can accomplish anything despite having a disability or limitation in their life.



## Resources to Combat Bullying

Organizations across the state of Nevada offer a number of resources to help families of bullied children:

### Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

Administers an anti-bullying initiative that includes listening sessions to gather public opinions and ideas on how to combat bullying. Visit [www.nevadaddcouncil.org/anti-bullying-initiative/](http://www.nevadaddcouncil.org/anti-bullying-initiative/) for details.

### Community Care Champions

Its activity book teaches youngsters about bullying prevention. Visit [www.nvpep.org](http://www.nvpep.org). Find the activity book here: <https://bit.ly/34zlduu>.

### Safe Allies

A program of Nevada PEP (Parents Encouraging Parents) that offers workshops on current laws against bullying and instruction on how to report incidents of bullying and navigate school systems. Visit [www.nvpep.org/safe-allies/](http://www.nvpep.org/safe-allies/).

### Stopbullying.gov

This site lists anti-bullying laws and policies in Nevada and other states. It also showcases articles on how to spot bullying and cyberbullying and what parents and schools can do to prevent the behavior. Visit [StopBullying.gov](http://StopBullying.gov).

### Safe Voice Nevada

An anonymous reporting system where individuals can report incidents of bullying and other threats to children's safety or well-being. Visit [www.safevoicenv.org](http://www.safevoicenv.org).

## Putting the Brakes on Bullying

These organizations offer a number of resources to help teens with disabilities who are bullied and their families find help:

### Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

The Council's anti-bullying initiative includes listening sessions designed to gather ideas from the public on how to put an end to bullying. Visit [www.nevadadddcouncil.org/anti-bullying-initiative/](http://www.nevadadddcouncil.org/anti-bullying-initiative/) for details.

### Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center

The NDALC is a nonprofit that advocates for people with disabilities struggling with challenges related to discrimination, abuse, education, community integration, healthcare and employment. Visit [www.ndalc.org](http://www.ndalc.org).

### Safe Allies

A program of Nevada PEP (Parents Encouraging Parents) and Youth M.O.V.E., Nevada, Safe Allies educates children and teens about bullying through youth-oriented digital resources and activities. It also hosts workshops for parents on the law and the process for reporting incidents of bullying. Visit [www.nvpep.org/safe-allies](http://www.nvpep.org/safe-allies).

### Safe Voice Nevada

This reporting system lets individuals anonymously report incidents of bullying. Visit [www.safevoicenv.org](http://www.safevoicenv.org). To make a report, call 1-833-216-SAFE (7233).

### Cyberbullying Research Center

The center offers tips and information on how to prevent and stop bullying online. Visit [www.cyberbullying.org](http://www.cyberbullying.org).

# High School Bullies Leave Teen Feeling Worthless

How teens can **combat harassment** and **rebuild self-esteem**.

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

**Dear Council, Help! I have a disability and I'm being bullied by kids at my high school. They use every chance they can get to make fun of me and make me miserable. Whenever I'm in the hall at school, the lunchroom or even in the bathroom, the bullies corner me and call me bad names, hit me and threaten to hurt me. I used to like school, but the harassment has gotten so bad that I no longer want to go to school anymore. These kids are making me feel worthless. What can I do to make the bullying stop?**

*Renee Portnell, a mother of two and former Council member of the Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, offers this advice:*

I understand what you're going through. My oldest daughter has autism and was bullied in high school when she was younger. Whenever she went into the bathroom, three teenagers would taunt her, call her names and hit her. She tried to tell her teachers what was happening. I ended up having to talk to the principal.

Your first step is to tell someone, whether it's a teacher or your school's principal. Tell someone you feel comfortable with.

If possible, at the time the bullying occurs, try to get a peer, someone you trust, to go with you to the office to tell the principal what's happening and that you want the bullying to stop.

Tell your parents about the bullying, too. If your principal thinks the bullying is not a big deal,

your parents may be able to help by talking to the principal themselves if they know what is going on.

Tell a sibling and, if they can stand up to the bullies without anyone getting hurt, they should confront them.

It also helps for parents to talk to the parents of other teens with disabilities. They may have some suggestions.

If the school won't help you, try talking to someone at an advocacy organization in your town. For instance, try getting in contact with the Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center. The NDALC helps individuals with disabilities who may be dealing with issues related to discrimination, abuse, health, employment or education.

No matter what, you should know yourself well enough to know that you are a good person. But there are people in this world who will try things like bullying, and you have to deal with it. So, if you are being bullied at school, tell someone. Tell your trainer.

Tell your parents. Tell somebody at your school.

Tell somebody. The biggest thing to remember is that you are not worthless.

Renee Portnell is a mother of two in Sparks, NV, and a former Council member of the Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

**"Your first step is to tell someone, whether it's a teacher or your school's principal."**

**Renee Portnell**  
Mother and former Council Member, Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities



# Staying Safe Online

## Cyberbullying Resources

Cyberbullying can be **anonymous and pervasive**.

BY ANNE STOKES

*Like other high school seniors his age, JP has a pretty active academic and social calendar: He's the school's football team manager, he's running for senior class treasurer and he likes to post fun videos and music edits on social media.*

"I just do it for fun, I edit my own stuff," he says. "I do (set) some things private."

JP admits that sometimes others leave nasty comments on his posts, something that makes him hesitant to share things that make him happy. Luckily, he has a supportive family who helps him navigate any cyberbullying he may encounter.

"We do some research about who they are, where they're from. If it's from school, we screenshot the content and then delete it or take the post down all together," says his mom, Kimberly Palma-Ortega. "Sometimes when we answer back, what ends up happening?"

"More arguments," JP answers.

At 16, JP is at a time in his life when fitting in means everything. Due to the communication style, language and mobility difficulties, as well as needing a little extra support when it comes to social interactions, fitting in can be hard. Sometimes such differences can make children with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) more susceptible to bullying.

Cyberbullying is an online form of social and verbal bullying that's committed more often on smartphones for kids and young adults. It can take the form of threatening or offensive messages, embarrassing photos, fake social media accounts and posts that are created to be hurtful, threaten or abuse others. Once online, such hurtful content can be shared worldwide, 24/7. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one in six high school students reported being cyberbullied in 2020. And studies have

shown that students with I/DD are two to three times more likely to be bullied than their typically-abled peers.

"My advice is to ignore other people ... when people want to push you around or bully you, just ignore them.

Tell a teacher or principal (and) ... you should tell your parents," JP says. "And parents need to keep more of an eye on their children, what they're posting or watching."

**"When people want to push you around or bully you, just ignore them. Tell a teacher or principal (and) ... you should tell your parents."**

**JP**  
Nevada High School  
Senior

For more information and resources, visit [cyberbullying.org](http://cyberbullying.org) for support with dealing with online abuse.



While it may seem face-to-face bullying would be more traumatic than virtual abuse, the Internet's anonymous yet pervasive nature and global audience can broadcast victims' suffering worldwide 24/7. While daunting, there are some steps you can take to help make this cyberbullying stop:

**Report it.** Tell a trusted friend, family member or teacher about what is happening. You also can report offensive posts and messages (and their corresponding account) to most social media platforms to have it removed.

**Unfriend, unfollow and/or block** bullies from being able to contact or view your profile. Update your privacy settings and filters to restrict who can see your information or message you.

**Document** evidence and keep records of what happens, when and where. Take screenshots of posts, photos, videos or messages.

**Alert law enforcement** or other authorities if you feel at risk or if your personal safety is threatened.

Find solutions together. Parents may feel taking away mobile devices or deleting social media accounts is the answer, but for bullies, excluding victims from popular social scenes is the point. Instead, involving your child in finding solutions allows them a chance to regain a sense of dignity and self-efficacy. Kids understand the social nuances involved better than adults.

For more resources, including a continually updated list of online companies, gaming and social media platforms along with their abuse reporting contacts and resources, visit [cyberbullying.org/report](http://cyberbullying.org/report).

## Resources for Parents and Youth

Stephen Schumacher, who is a self-advocate and a former Council member on the Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, is a knowledgeable guide to resources for people with disabilities. "I was bullied as a little boy, more times than I can remember," he says.

Stephen was on the council for nine years, serving as both vice chair and chair. Along with a parent on the council, he came up with the original idea for the articles on bullying in this issue. He recommends the following resources:

<https://thatsnotcool.com> is aimed at teens who experience bullying when dating.

<https://washoeschools.net> has a link to report bullying at school.

<https://stopbullying.gov> is a federal resource for kids, parents and teachers.

**Local libraries** are a good source of information on bullying.

**Local sheriffs' offices** have information on bullying.

<https://nevadaddcouncil.org> features a wealth of information, including virtual classes for parents.



# How to Help Your Kids Help Themselves

## Advice for parents who are trying to stop bullying.

BY JILL SPEAR

### Dear Council, My child is being bullied at school and I'm very worried about it. What can we do to stop this?

"Families need support, help and someone to listen when their children are being bullied," says Robin Kincaid, Director of Educational Services at Nevada PEP (Parents Encouraging Parents). Kincaid and her co-workers — all of whom are parents of a child or children with disabilities — strive to stop the cycle of bullying.

While bullying is a constant problem in the disability community, there are many solutions available to children and their families. Kincaid, who has worked at Nevada PEP for 23 years, receives lots of worried calls like the note above. She and her organization offer training to parents and caregivers on how to stop bullying of children and young adults, ages 0-26.

Victims of bullying are not to blame for the hurtful actions of others, but three things can trigger bullying, according to Kincaid: Being without friends or other people; appearing to be vulnerable; and the child's reaction to the bully.

If the child or young person doesn't speak up, they're more likely to be bullied again.

"We encourage families to go through a process called Safe Voice. Families or students can go to the Safe Voice website (<https://safevoicenv.org>) with the complaint, which is received by the Nevada Public Safety Commission, and then goes to the correct authorities," she says.

If it's a case of bullying, the complaint goes to the school, which investigates, then creates a safety plan for the student. This may involve an alternate route to class or supervision from an adult at school who takes the student from class to class.

Everyone involved is contacted, including the bully, and the school works with the bully to tell the individual to stop,

which may include discipline. Both the bully and the student being bullied receive counseling.

Nevada PEP, which can be found online at <https://nvpep.org>, deals with every kind of disability, from autism to mental health issues. "By the time these children are adults, we hope they'll have the tools to deal with this. We're working on advocacy skills with teens, too." Kincaid adds, "We try to encourage the idea of 'upstanders' in schools, meaning kids who will stand up to bullies. However, our education is for the family, and providing teaching moments for both the bully and the person being bullied."



*"Families need support, help and someone to listen when their children are being bullied."*

**Robin Kincaid**  
Director of Educational  
Services, Nevada PEP

# How to Stop Bullying at Work

Start with **awareness**, then build **communication**.

BY JILL SPEAR

**Dear Council,**  
**I like my job, but someone keeps bullying me and it's making me miserable. Can you give me advice to stop this?**

"That's just not OK," begins Alison Greathouse, a person with a disability and an employee of the Nevada Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation. As the parent of autistic twins, she understands the harm bullying can cause.

Greathouse has been in her current position as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor for five years and has worked in the field since 2009. She helps people with disabilities get and keep jobs. "We approach problems as a teaching moment," Greathouse says. "We help people to either stand up for themselves or we'll bring someone into the workplace to help."

Sometimes, the problem is simply miscommunication. Vocational Rehabilitation promotes greater understanding of different disabilities at work. When it's bullying

behavior, many steps can be taken to make the workplace a safe place.

If the job itself is a challenge, Greathouse and her team look for different ways for someone to communicate or to do a job. "You have to make your own needs very clear. For example, people who don't want to be touched can be taught to respond differently if the bullying is based on a lack of understanding of that person's needs," she notes.

Greathouse and her team work to find solutions for people with disabilities, and she stresses getting people to handle things one-to-one. She recommends starting off by saying to the bully, "That's not cool" or "you're violating my civil rights." She also advocates saying, "I'm a human being" or "I don't read minds." If the person still doesn't change their behavior, then the issue is moved up to the supervisor.

Vocational Rehabilitation works with people who have a variety of disabilities. "Sensory loss is a huge issue," says Greathouse, who works as a counselor with people who are deaf or blind. In one instance, they bought equipment to help an individual who is deaf at work. Individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or who have bipolar disorder will find help, too. For example, if someone with PTSD from battle can't handle the sound of a coffee grinder at work, the counselors find ways to work around this.

Greathouse ends on an important note: "When you have diversity, you have a stronger workplace because employers are not always hiring people who think like they do. Having someone with a disability can mean doing something a little differently, and this can help everyone."

*"We approach problems as a teaching moment."*

**Alison Greathouse**  
Certified Rehabilitation Counselor  
and NGCDD Partners in  
Policymaking Graduate



## Resources for the Workplace

One of the best places to start is the Nevada Department of Employment, Training, and Rehabilitation, which is the workplace of Alison Greathouse.

Visit [https://detr.nv.gov/Page/Rehabilitation\\_Division\\_Bureau\\_of\\_Vocational\\_Rehabilitation](https://detr.nv.gov/Page/Rehabilitation_Division_Bureau_of_Vocational_Rehabilitation) for contact information and more.

For additional resources, it's helpful to ask someone who has confronted bullying at work. Stephen Schumacher, who is a self-advocate and a former Council member on the Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, is a knowledgeable guide. Along with a parent on the council, he came up with the original idea for the articles on bullying in this issue. Schumacher recommends the following resources, which include helpful links:

**Local libraries** are a good source of information on bullying.

**Local sheriffs' offices** have information on bullying.

<https://nevadaddcouncil.org> offers a wealth of information, including advocacy groups in Nevada, links to help with employment and the Life Stages Tool Guide, which helps individuals live the most independent life they can at any age.

# Yes, You Can Stop Bullying!

Get good advice from local experts and the Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.



Your NGCDD team, from left: Ellen Marquez, Self-Advocacy Coordinator; Catherine Nielsen, Executive Director; and Marisol Rivas, Projects Manager.  
PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS

## What is bullying?

Bullying contains three core elements:

- Unwanted aggressive behavior
- Observed or perceived power imbalance
- Repetition or high likelihood of repetition of bullying behaviors

## Know the warning signs.

- Unexplained injuries
- Lost or destroyed clothing, books, electronics or jewelry
- Frequent headaches or stomach aches, feeling sick or faking illness
- Changes in eating habits, like suddenly skipping meals or binge eating
- Difficulty sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Declining grades, loss of interest in schoolwork, or not wanting to go to school
- Sudden loss of friends or avoidance of social situations
- Feelings of helplessness or decreased self esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors such as running away from home, harming themselves, or talking about suicide

## Is your child bullying others?

Kids may be bullying others if they:

- Get into physical or verbal fights
- Have friends who bully others
- Are increasingly aggressive
- Get sent to the principal's office or to detention frequently
- Have unexplained extra money or new belongings
- Blame others for their problems
- Don't accept responsibility for their actions
- Are competitive and worry about their reputation or popularity

Source: [Stopbullying.gov](http://Stopbullying.gov)

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## We're here to help!

Nevada Governor's Council on  
Developmental Disabilities

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## Resources

### Safe Allies

[www.nvpep.org/safe-allies/](http://www.nvpep.org/safe-allies/)

### Safe Voice Nevada

[www.safevoicenv.org](http://www.safevoicenv.org)

### Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center

[www.ndalc.org](http://www.ndalc.org)

### Cyberbullying Research Center

[www.cyberbullying.org](http://www.cyberbullying.org)

### Safe Voice Nevada

[www.safevoicenv.org](http://www.safevoicenv.org)

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