



PEER CONFLICT, MEAN BEHAVIOR, AND BULLYING

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Fountain-Fort Carson School District Eight (FFC8) is committed to providing students with a safe school climate, conducive to teaching and learning that is free from threat, harassment and any type of bullying behavior.

When a student is having a problem with her or his peers, it can at times be hard for parents and staff members to know what is happening – is it bullying? Or is it something else?

Each type of behavior must be handled differently, to keep students safe and help them learn how to get along with others.

PEER CONFLICT

Conflict between and among peers is a natural part of growing up. Students will have times when they disagree and can't solve their own problems. They may even become so frustrated that they say mean things or act out physically by hitting, kicking or trying to inflict harm.

If it's peer conflict you will observe that the students involved:

- usually choose to play or hang out together;
- have equal power (similar age, size, social status, etc.);
- are equally upset, angry, frustrated;
- are both interested in the outcome; and
- are able to work things out with adult help (after calming down).

Adults can respond by helping the students talk it out, and see each other's perspective. This is often referred to as "conflict resolution".

MEAN BEHAVIOR

Students may try out behaviors to assert themselves in social situations – sometimes saying or doing mean things – such as making fun of others, using a hurtful name, taking something without permission, leaving a student out, or "cutting" in line. If it is mean behavior, usually:

- it is not planned and seems to happen spontaneously or by chance;
- it may be aimed at any student nearby;
- the student being mean may feel badly when an adult points out the harm he/she has caused.

When adults see or are made aware of mean behavior they should not ignore it. Adults should respond quickly, firmly and respectfully to stop the behavior, to let kids know that their actions are hurtful and to redirect or (re)teach students to more positive behavior. This quick response stops students from developing a pattern of mean behavior as their way of interacting with peers, and prevents mean behavior from escalating. It is a lot easier to correct a student for one mean comment or action than to change a pattern of behavior that grows over time.

BULLYING BEHAVIOR

In FFC8, bullying is defined as, the use of coercion or intimidation to obtain control over another person or to cause physical, mental or emotional harm to another person. Bullying can take many forms and occur through written, verbal or electronically transmitted expression or by means of a physical act or gesture.

Bullying is serious behavior that includes three key features –

- Power imbalance -- One student clearly has power over the other(s), which may be due to age, size, social status, etc...

- Intention to harm -- The purpose of the bullying behavior is to harm or hurt other(s) – it’s planned, intended to be mean and is clearly not accidental.
- May be repeated over time – typically bullying behavior continues over time, and gets worse with repetition. There is a real or implied threat that the behavior will not stop, and in fact may become even more serious over time. If the behavior is not repeated over time then the conditions of power imbalance and the intention to harm must be significant to constitute bullying.

FFC8 staff will address all bullying behavior and ensure the safety of any student who has been targeted. Staff also will reassure the students who may have witnessed the behavior that adults are taking care of it. Additionally, when FFC8 schools respond to bullying, staff will also help the student who has been bullying others to take responsibility for their actions, and learn/practice alternative skills. They will monitor the situation to ensure the bullying stops, and will support the student who has been bullied to regain confidence and a sense of safety. Staff may follow-up with the students who observed the behavior to help them learn what to do when they see bullying.

BULLYING PREVENTION IN FFC8 SCHOOLS

FFC8 is committed to supporting students in developing the appropriate pro-social skills. These efforts include providing prosocial skills lessons and anti-bullying education through the school counseling team in each school. Our staff utilize several resources including universal Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, Boys Town, Responsive Classroom, Trauma Informed Care Practices, and Capturing Kids Hearts. The overall goal of directly teaching prosocial skills to students is to help them develop:

- Empathy and compassion for others
- Strong self-esteem
- Skills to solve problems without aggression
- Skills to take action when they witness mistreatment of others

To seek additional information regarding social skills development or other counseling related supports, please contact the counselor at your child’s school:

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| Abrams Elementary: Corby Meyer (719)382-1490 | Carson Middle School: Christina George, Cynthia Huddleston (719)382-1610 |
| Aragon Elementary: Amanda Ziemer (719)382-1340 | |
| Eagleside Elementary: Jennifer Hollis (719)382-1520 | Fountain Middle School: Lori Angell, Angela Grier, Lori Kadzikowski (719)382-1580 |
| Jordahl Elementary: Angela Lopez (719)382-1400 | |
| Mesa Elementary: Kristina Gregor (719)382-1370 | Fountain-Fort Carson High School: Elizabeth Ballard, Nicole Benjamin, Alissa Brown, Lisa Fowler, Charlotte Martinez, Katie Pasqualetto, Angela Wright (719)382-4385 |
| Mountainside Elementary: Cristina Krumholz (719)382-1430 | |
| Patriot Elementary: Holly Niewinski (719)382-1460 | Welte Education Center: Scott Jagers (719)382-1550 |
| Weikel Elementary: Kimberly Thomas (719)358-4320 | |

RESEARCH LINKS AND OTHER INFORMATION

The following links provide additional information on peer conflict, mean behavior, and bullying.

StopBullying.gov:

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/at-school/index.html>

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/sites/default/files/2017-10/misdirections-in-prevention.pdf>

National Bullying Prevention Center:

<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/resources/questions-answered/conflict-vs-bullying.asp>

Fountain-Fort Carson School District Eight:

<https://www.ffc8.org/cms/lib/CO01900636/Centricity/domain/37/section%20j%20policies/JICDE.pdf>

Adapted from Peer Conflict, Mean Behaviour, and Bullying – What’s the difference? (Vancouver School District 39)

