

# Marlborough Schools 'Game Changers': Bully Prevention Month

October is National Bullying Prevention Month.

By [Charlene Arseneault, Patch Staff](#) | Oct 1, 2018 12:26 pm ET



MARLBOROUGH, MA—We hope you've noticed over the past year that we've been focusing on bullying and cyberbullying, a confounding national crisis that turns youths' lives upside down with unimaginable angst and dread, sometimes with deadly consequences. With

each story, we've heard poignant stories from Patch readers in Massachusetts and others who were bullied and overcame it, but also many who continue to struggle with the damage done by bullies to their self-esteem.

Many common threads emerged in emails from our readers: Teachers and other educators have suggested everything from first-period decompression time to classroom contracts with students on how they're expected to treat one another. But for all the readers who said schools need to do more to foster an anti-bullying culture, as many said parents should talk more with their kids about bullying and keep closer track on their social media habits.

And in a loud chorus, they said Americans need to stop wringing their hands and work at all levels to create a world safe from bullying.

That's one of the purposes of [National Bullying Prevention Month](#), observed annually during October to bring attention to the problem and involve people in Massachusetts and nationwide in a conversation on how to create a world safe from bullying.

"Marlborough uses the bullyproofing curriculum, and additionally there are anti-bullying lessons in the Botvin life skills training program," said Superintendent Michael

Bergeron. "In addition, we are part of the 'Game Changers' grant from the Attorney Generals office, an anti-violence partnership in conjunction with the NE Patriots and the Attorney General's office."

## A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Once viewed as a childhood "rite of passage" that toughened kids to handle the pressures of adulthood, bullying and its more insidious digital twin, cyberbullying, is seen by many experts as a major public health issue — on par with heart disease, cancer and diabetes — with devastating and often long-term effects like the loss of self-esteem, heightened anxiety and depression.

Statistics vary, but an aggregate of 80 different studies on bullying suggests one in five American students between 12 and 18 is bullied at some point during their middle or high school years. Traditional bullying — name calling, public humiliation, isolation, physical violence and that sort of thing — occurs most often, with 35 percent of kids reporting they've been targeted in one of those ways. The studies cited by the PACER Center, which established National Bullying Prevention Month, show that 15 percent of kids surveyed report being cyberbullied.

And though it occurs less often, cyberbullying — which has resulted in a [disturbing string of suicides](#) by adolescents and teenagers — is especially hard to stop. While experts say most cyberbullied kids don't kill themselves, the long-tailed internet makes a taunt live longer than one flung on the schoolyard. Kids can escape traditional bullying in the safety of their homes, but because social media is so intertwined with how kids communicate, they never really escape it.

And because cyberbullies have the stealth of anonymity, "empathy tends to fade to zero," [NoBully.org](#) founder Nicholas Carlisle told Patch.

He was knocked around 40 or so years ago as an awkward 12-year-old. The torment persisted through high school, but as tough as it was, his experience was markedly

different from the torture kids endure today, he says — and it's not just that he was attacked in a physical as opposed to online space.

"Online, you can't see the whites of their eyes," Carlisle said. "If you can see someone, that's often a break upon people's aggression — not always, but it does seem to have some break upon crossing the line."

The full consequences of bullying on the brain aren't fully understood, but kids who are targeted by bullies in childhood and adolescence are at increased risk for psychological problems that can stretch into adulthood, according to experts. In the moment, bullied kids may be unable to sleep or suffer a range of stomach issues and headaches. Later on, they're at risk for depression, anxiety, and alcohol and drug use.

#### OCT. 24 UNITY DAY

Among the marquee National Bullying Prevention Month activities is [Unity Day](#), observed on Wednesday, Oct. 24, when everyone is encouraged to wear and show orange to send a message that no child should ever experience bullying.

"Orange provides a powerful, visually compelling expression of solidarity," Paula Goldberg, the executive director of the PACER Center, said in a statement. "Whether it's hundreds of individuals at a school wearing orange, store owners offering orange products or a community changing a landmark to orange, the vibrant statement becomes a conversation starter, sending the supportive, universal message that bullying is never acceptable behavior."