

## **10 Questions Students Can Ask to Make Their Schools More Caring and Safe Places For Middle and High School Students**

*Created by the Bullying Prevention Initiative at the Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Students sometimes feel like they don't have much say in what happens at school. You may wonder how you can make your school a more caring and safe place. One way you can help is by talking with adults at school about what they are doing to develop children's sense of responsibility for others and to make sure that students feel safe, respected, and able to learn.

These questions can encourage principals and teachers to think about what they're doing now— and also what they can do differently—to assure students feel safe and to build students' capacity for caring and respect. The adults in your school might not have answers to these questions right away. But by asking the questions, you can show them what matters to you. You can also suggest that students and adults together pick a few questions that are most important for your school community and meet on a regular basis to work on them.

You can ask these questions of your principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, or other school staff, or you can share them with student representatives who meet with these leaders regularly.

- Does our school regularly survey students about whether we feel safe, respected, and cared about? Are the answers shared with students and parents?
- Is there a confidential way for students to report it when they feel unsafe or mistreated? How do students know about this?
- Is there an adult in our school whose job it is to make sure that everyone feels safe and respected and that people treat each other well? Who is that person?
- Does our school use a program that teaches social and emotional skills like conflict resolution, showing understanding and empathy for others, and being aware of our emotions?
  - How do we know that this program works? Are there any studies?
- How do teachers and other staff know what they are supposed to do when they see bullying or other hurtful behavior?
  - Are they trained in how to stop bullying or other hurtful behavior when it happens?
  - Are they trained in how to keep it from happening in the first place?
- How does our school work with students who act in aggressive or hurtful ways?
  - Besides punishment, how do adults help those students stop acting that way?
- Are there any adults in charge in bathrooms, hallways, and other areas outside classrooms? Who are they?
- How can students be involved in making decisions about some of the things that happen in our school? (For example, school values, community events, non-academic programming)
- Does our school have a peer mediation or peer counseling program?
- Does our school have a policy that clearly states that discrimination and harassment are not tolerated for any reason?
  - Does it cover race, class, gender, sexual orientation?
  - How and where is this policy presented to students and staff?

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