

## Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to explain Chain of Custody Awareness, a *CirclePoint Bullying Prevention Program* mechanism, to adults who monitor students in a non-teaching capacity—e.g., cafeteria monitor, recess/playground monitor, or a non-teaching substitute—so those adults understand how the mechanism works and what they are required to do.

## Chain of Custody Awareness

The “chain of custody” consists of all the adults who teach or monitor an aggressor and target during the course of a school day. Chain of Custody Awareness is the notification of these adults about the bullying problem. These adults are notified of the problem so they can ensure that the bullying behavior (“aggression”) does not continue and if it does, to stop it, document it, and report it. This mechanism helps the target of the bullying behavior by having adults keep a watchful eye on the aggressor throughout the school day, and makes administration aware of any bullying that occurs. Chain of Custody Awareness makes the job of the monitoring adult easier in that it alerts the adult to specific aggressor behavior that has been identified as harmful.

The mechanism is used both formally and informally. In formal instances, the administration notifies the adults in the chain of custody with a request to stop, document, and report observed aggression between an aggressor(s) and target(s). This occurs after a conversation with the aggressor has taken place asking him or her to stop the aggression and letting him or her know that adults in the chain of custody will be informed of the problem and will be monitoring for further aggression. The target is also informed that adults have been notified of the problem and will be monitoring. In informal instances, a teacher or other adult may notify the chain of custody if a bullying problem is suspected.

## Required Actions for Monitors

When a monitor is informed about a bullying problem, the monitor is told the identities of the aggressor and the target, where the aggression has reportedly occurred (e.g., classroom, cafeteria, gym), and what form the aggression takes (e.g., pushing, physical intimidation, verbal taunts, mocking). Once the monitor has this information, the monitor should do the following:

1. Confirm the identities of the students involved with the adult who has notified the monitor. This should be done inconspicuously so as not to draw attention to the students or draw attention to the fact that monitoring will be occurring, which can make other students aware of the problem.
2. In the course of monitoring the student group, the monitor should watch for any aggression between the aggressor and target or any unnecessary social interaction between them. (Note: the reason why adults should monitor for “unnecessary interaction” is that physical and verbal aggression can be subtle).
3. If the monitor observes aggression that is identical or similar to the previously reported aggression, the monitor should:
  - a. step into the interaction and stop the aggressor;
  - b. ask the aggressor to step aside to have a private conversation and let him or her know that the aggression will be reported;
  - c. note the details of the incident (date/time/location/aggressor and any other students involved/aggression used/target);
  - d. provide the incident details to administration.

Note: If the aggressor protests, denies, or accuses the target of starting the aggression, the monitor should explain that he or she is simply there to note observed behavior and that the aggressor should share any concerns with administrators. It is the administrators’ job, not the monitor’s job, to address the aggressor’s concerns.

4. If the chain of custody was notified informally, such as by a teacher who suspects a bullying problem, the monitor should provide the incident details to the teacher.
5. If the monitor observes unnecessary interaction between the aggressor and target, the monitor should step into the interaction, ask the aggressor to step aside for a private conversation, and ask what is occurring. The monitor should remind the aggressor that unnecessary social interaction should be avoided. The monitor will need to use judgment as to whether the incident should be reported or the aggressor be given an opportunity to continue with the activity and change his or her behavior.

## A Few Notes About Bullying

Bullying is nuanced and complex. There are, however, a few key aspects of bullying mechanics that monitors should know.

- Bullying is repeated aggression directed at a target that causes emotional harm.
- Aggression among students is pervasive; it is not necessary to stop all instances of aggression. (Note: aggression as used here is defined as physical or verbal behaviors that are not intended to cause serious physical harm; aggression that involves physical harm must always be stopped immediately.)
- Bullying is generally a group activity. Although there is one aggressor bullying a target, some peers of the aggressor may be assisting by directly bullying the target, while other peers may be reinforcing the bullying by standing on the side of the aggressor(s), laughing, or otherwise creating an atmosphere of many-against-one.
- When talking about those involved in a bullying problem, the terms “bully” and “victim” should not be used; instead, use the terms “aggressor” and “target.”

## Questions, Concerns, and Feedback

Please contact administration with any questions, concerns, or feedback on this process. Please note that monitors occupy a unique position in the school community and are an integral part of the solution to bullying problems; any insights, comments, and suggestions about the Chain of Custody Awareness or other aspects of bullying prevention are welcome. In addition, monitors are invited to review the *CirclePoint Guide for Educators* for more information, which can be provided by the school.