

10 Questions Parents Can Ask to Make Their Children's Schools More Caring and Safe Places

For Elementary School Parents

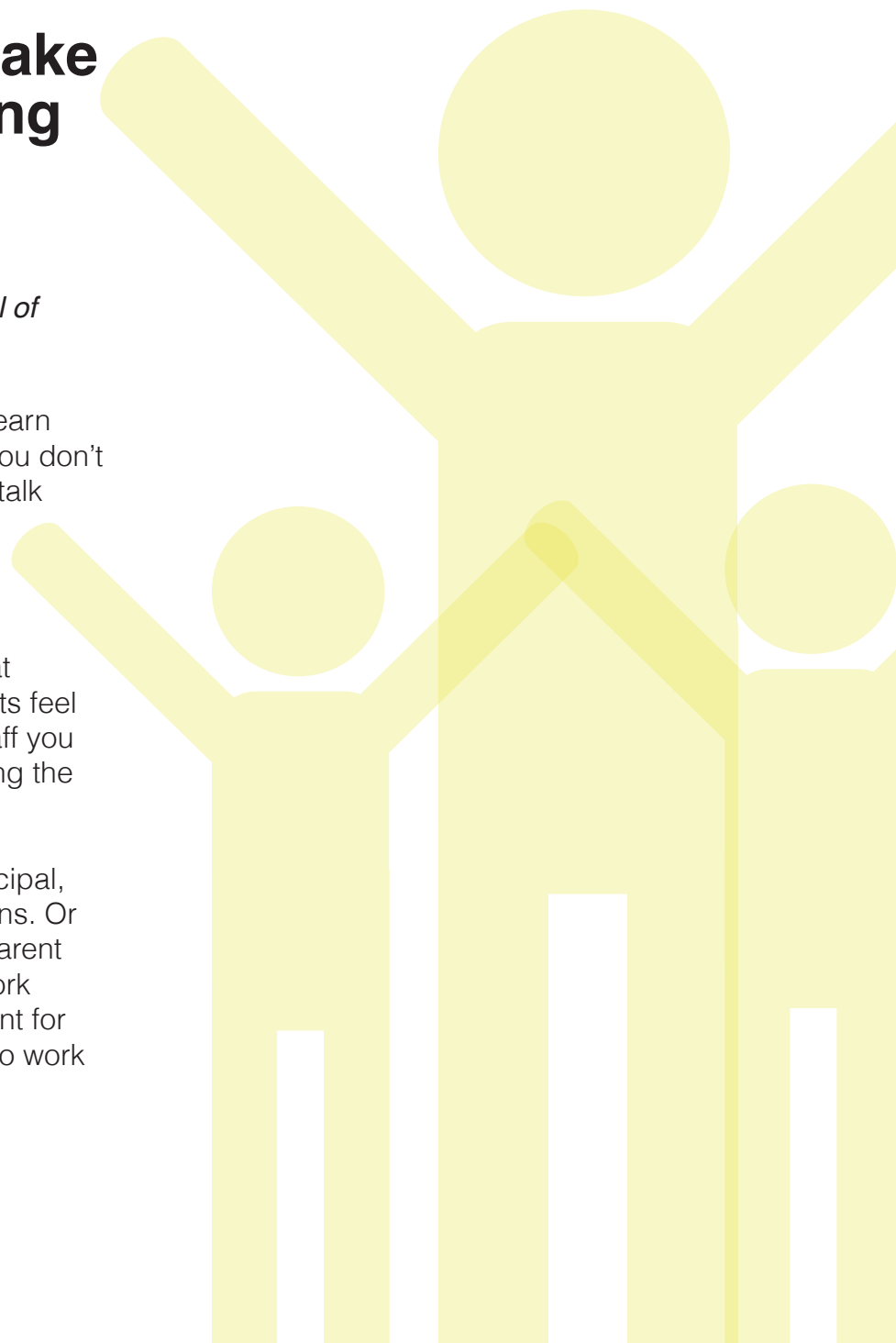
Created by the Bullying Prevention Initiative at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

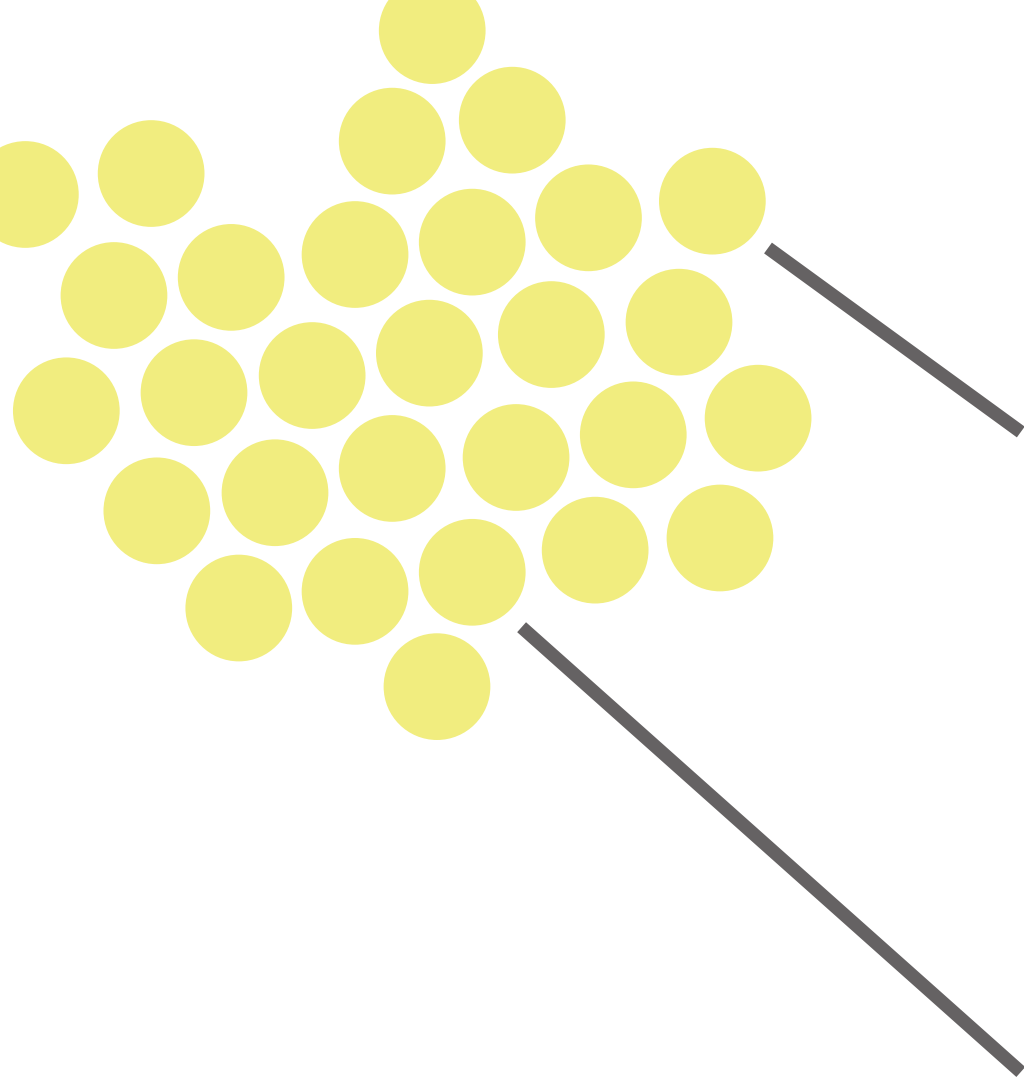
Parents want to ensure that their children are safe, respected, and able to learn when they are at school. But if you're like many parents, you may feel that you don't know what happens inside school walls. When parents and school leaders talk together about what the school is doing to help students, everyone can learn more.

These are some questions that parents can ask principals and teachers. 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 children's capacity for caring and respect. The school staff you talk with might not have answers to these questions right away. But by asking the questions, you can show them what matters to you and your children.

You can set up a time to ask these questions of the principal, assistant principal, or guidance counselor. You can send a letter with some or all of the questions. Or you can share them with the parent representatives on your school's parent council. You can also suggest that parents and school staff work together to pick a few questions that are most important for your school community and meet on a regular basis to work on them.

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- What program(s) does our school use to teach social and emotional skills like conflict resolution, showing understanding and empathy for others, and being aware of emotions?

- o How do we know that this program works? Are there any studies?

- How are students taught to cope with frustration, anger, and other challenging feelings? Who teaches these skills and what are the strategies they teach?

- Whose job is it to ensure that all students feel safe and secure and treat each other well?

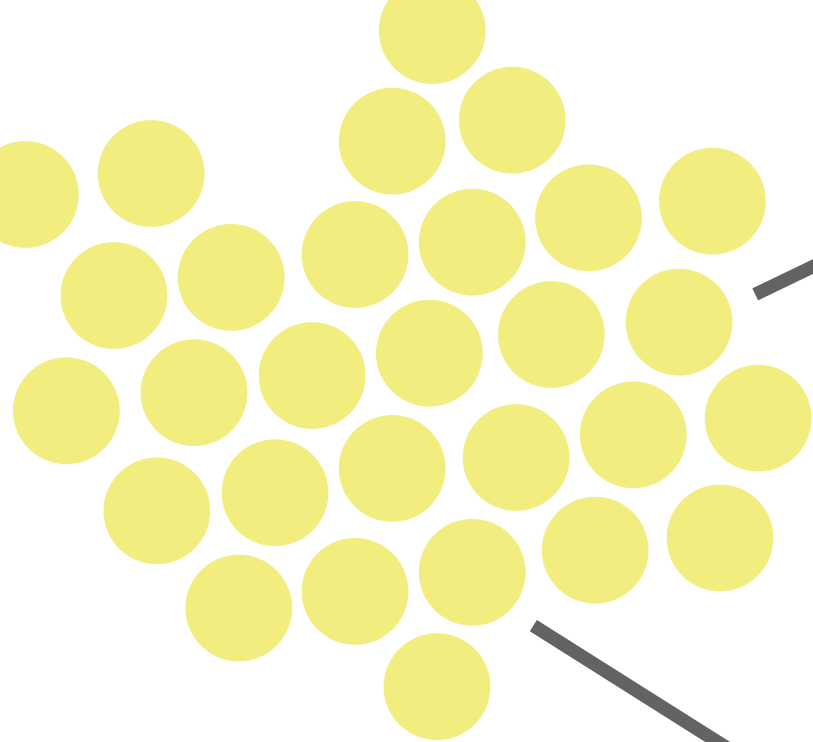
- How can students tell teachers when they are feeling upset or in need of support without the rest of the class knowing?

- How do teachers and other staff deal with aggressive, mean, or hurtful behavior during recess and lunch?

- How do teachers and other staff know what they are supposed to do when they see aggressive, mean, or other hurtful behavior?

- o How are they trained in how to stop hurtful behavior when it happens?

- o How are they trained in how to keep it from happening in the first place?



- How does our school work with students who repeatedly act in aggressive, hurtful, or disrespectful ways?
 - o Beyond punishment, how do school staff help those students learn how to act differently?
 - o If they do not, do they refer those students to outside resources like counselors?
- How do children know what the expectations are for their behavior toward others both in and out of classrooms? How do school staff ensure that children understand and fulfill these expectations?
- What role does the school expect aides, bus drivers, and other support staff to play in ensuring that all students are physically and emotionally safe?
- How can parents provide feedback to school leaders and staff?
 - o Who can they go to when there is a problem?

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