



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

This Month, Choose to Be Kind

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

Did you know that every day, 160,000 teens reportedly skip school because they are bullied? In addition, a recent survey indicated that 18 percent of New York high school students had been bullied on school property and 16 percent had experienced cyberbullying in the past year.

This month, students, teachers, parents and others come together to help put a stop to bullying and cyberbullying through National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month. As adults, we play a key role in helping to stop the spread of these behaviors. If you're a parent or caregiver, I encourage you to take the following steps to prevent bullying:

Talk it out: One of the best things you can do to help stop bullying and cyberbullying is to have a candid conversation about the topics with your child. According to recent research, parents and caregivers who spend at least 15 minutes per-day with their child can help prevent bullying.

Set goals with your child: Setting "kindness goals" with your child can be a great way to encourage them to treat others with respect. Set targets—like making a new friend or helping someone in need—at the beginning of the week. Talk with your child at the close of the school week and share how you both made a difference by being kind.

Download the app: These days, there's an app for everything—even for helping to stop bullying. Download the “KnowBullying” app from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for strategies on how to prevent bullying, conversation starters on the topic and more.

Know the warning signs: Is your child losing sleep or wanting to skip school? Have you noticed a marked change in his or her emotional behavior? These are just some of the signs that your child could possibly be being bullied. If you notice changes, never be afraid to ask your child about what's going on in his or her life.

Bullying and cyberbullying are serious matters. That's why I've met with local education and law enforcement officials to hear firsthand how these behaviors are impacting our schools. I've also strategized ways to cut down on bullying on a local level and supported legislation to crack down on both conventional bullying and cyberbullying. In addition, I've also secured critical funding to support anti-bullying programs in our region.

As your State Senator, I promise to continue to work to keep students safe and to ensure that education remains the top priority in our classrooms. If you have suggestions on how to fight back against bullying, please don't hesitate to share them by emailing me at ritchie@nysenate.gov.