K12 ACADEMICS — A FIELD GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

School Safety & Student Wellbeing

5 guides to keeping students safe & well — safety, bullying, mental health & social-emotional learning.

K12 ACADEMICS

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2026 EDITION

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Safety

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SAFETY

School Safety Basics

WHAT IT IS

Keeping students safe is a top priority for every school, and there's a lot going on behind the scenes. This guide explains, in plain English, how schools approach safety — and the simple, meaningful things families can do to help. The goal is to inform and reassure, not alarm.

HOW IT WORKS

- **Emergency plans & drills** — Schools have safety plans and practice drills (fire, weather, lockdown) so everyone knows what to do.
- **Building security** — Visitor sign-in, controlled entry, and staff awareness help keep buildings secure.
- **Anonymous reporting** — Many schools and states have anonymous tip lines (like Safe2Tell or SafeVoice) so students can report concerns safely.
- **Support staff** — Counselors, psychologists, and sometimes School Resource Officers (SROs) support safety and wellbeing.
- **Threat assessment** — Schools use structured processes to take concerns seriously and respond appropriately.

WHY IT MATTERS

- **Talk with your child** — Keep an open, calm line of communication about school and friendships
- **Know your school's plan** — Ask how they handle emergencies and communicate with families
- **Report concerns** — If your child mentions something worrying, tell the school — tips save lives
- **Keep info current** — Emergency contacts and any relevant health info
- **Model calm** — Kids take cues from how the adults around them handle things

AT A GLANCE

Schools use	**Safety plans & drills**
Building	**Visitor & access controls**
Reporting	**Anonymous tip lines**
Staff	**Counselors & sometimes SROs**
Families help by	**Talking & reporting concerns**
In danger	**Call 911**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How do schools keep students safe?** — Through safety plans, drills, building security, support staff, and reporting systems.
- **What is an anonymous tip line?** — A way (like Safe2Tell) for students to report safety concerns confidentially.
- **What can I do as a parent?** — Talk with your child, know the school's plan, and report any concerns.
- **What if my child is worried about safety?** — Listen calmly, reassure them, and share concerns with the school.
- **What if there's immediate danger?** — Call 911.

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SAFETY

Bullying & Cyberbullying

WHAT IT IS

Bullying is repeated, intentional harm involving a power imbalance — and cyberbullying is bullying that happens online, which can follow a child home. It's common, it's serious, and it's something families and schools can address together. Here's what to watch for and what to do.

HOW IT WORKS

- **What bullying is** — Repeated, intentional hurtful behavior (physical, verbal, social, or online) with a power imbalance — different from a one-time conflict.
- **Cyberbullying** — Harassment through texts, social media, or games — it can be constant and hard to escape.
- **Roles** — There are those who bully, those targeted, and bystanders — who can help by speaking up or getting an adult.

STEPS TO TAKE

- **Listen calmly and believe them** — Let your child talk without overreacting
- **Document what's happening** — Dates, details, and screenshots for cyberbullying
- **Tell the school** — Report it — schools are required to have anti-bullying policies and to respond
- **Support your child** — Reassure them it's not their fault; involve a counselor if needed
- **For cyberbullying** — Save evidence, block/report on the platform, and don't retaliate
- **Follow up** — Check that the school's response is working



AT A GLANCE

What	**Repeated, intentional harm + p...**
Where	**In person & online (cyberbully...**
Signs	**Withdrawal, mood/sleep changes...**
If it happens	**Listen, document, tell the sch...**
Schools must	**Have anti-bullying policies**
Support	**Counselors & caring adults**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What counts as bullying?** — Repeated, intentional harm with a power imbalance — not a one-time disagreement.
- **What is cyberbullying?** — Bullying online — via texts, social media, or games.
- **What are the signs?** — A pattern of change: withdrawal, mood or sleep changes, avoiding school.
- **What should I do?** — Listen, document, and report to the school, which must respond.
- **Do schools have to act?** — Yes — schools are required to have anti-bullying policies.

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SECTION 02 OF 02

Wellbeing & Mental Health

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WELLBEING & MENTAL HEALTH

Student Mental Health

WHAT IT IS

Student mental health has become a top priority in schools, and there's more support available than many families realize. This guide explains what schools offer, how to notice when a child may be struggling, and how to get help — calmly and early. You are not alone, and support works.

HOW IT WORKS

- **School counselors** — Support students' academic, social, and emotional needs, and connect families to resources.
- **School psychologists & social workers** — Provide assessment, counseling, and support (and help with IEP/504 needs).
- **Social-emotional learning (SEL)** — Everyday teaching of skills like managing emotions and getting along — see our SEL guide.
- **Referrals** — Schools can help connect families to community mental-health services.

STEPS TO TAKE

- **Start a caring conversation** — Ask how they're doing, and listen without judgment
- **Talk to the school counselor** — They can support your child and point you to resources
- **Check in with your pediatrician** — A good first medical step for mental-health concerns
- **Seek a professional if needed** — Therapists and counselors can help; the school can refer
- **In a crisis, get help now** — Call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or call 911 for immediate danger

AT A GLANCE	
Focus	**A top priority in schools now**
Schools offer	**Counselors, psychologists, SEL**
Watch for	**Lasting changes in mood or beh...**
Get help	**School counselor + pediatricia...**
Crisis	**Call or text 988**
Key	**Early support helps**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What mental-health support do schools offer?** — Counselors, psychologists, social workers, SEL, and referrals to community services.
- **What signs should I watch for?** — Lasting changes in mood, functioning, sleep, or appetite — a pattern, not one bad day.
- **How do I get help for my child?** — Start with the school counselor and your pediatrician; seek a therapist if needed.
- **What if it's a crisis?** — Call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for immediate danger.
- **Does early support help?** — Yes — reaching out early makes a real difference.

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Supporting Wellbeing

WHAT IT IS

A child who feels safe, rested, and connected is better able to learn and thrive. Supporting wellbeing doesn't require special expertise — it's built from everyday habits and warm connection. Here's a practical guide, plus clear guidance on when to seek help.

HOW IT WORKS

- **Prioritize sleep** — Enough, consistent sleep is one of the biggest factors in mood and focus
- **Keep steady routines** — Predictable rhythms help kids feel secure
- **Stay connected** — Regular, unhurried time together builds resilience
- **Encourage activity & play** — Movement, outdoor time, and downtime all matter
- **Balance screens** — Set healthy limits and keep devices out of bedrooms at night
- **Ease the pressure** — Watch for over-scheduling; it's okay to do less

WHY IT MATTERS

- **Build resilience** — Let kids face manageable challenges and learn to cope
- **Name and normalize feelings** — All emotions are okay; it's what we do with them that matters
- **Teach coping skills** — Deep breaths, breaks, talking it out, and asking for help
- **Model self-care** — Kids learn wellbeing from the adults around them
- **Keep communication open** — Be a steady, non-judgmental place to land

AT A GLANCE

Foundations	**Sleep, routine, connection**
Build	**Resilience & coping skills**
Balance	**Healthy screen habits**
Reduce	**Over-scheduling & pressure**
Watch for	**Lasting changes — then seek he…**
Crisis	**Call or text 988**

TIPS

- **Notice patterns** — Lasting changes in mood, sleep, appetite, or interest are worth attention
- **Start with connection** — A caring conversation is often the first, best step
- **Loop in the school counselor** — And your pediatrician for ongoing concerns
- **Seek help early** — Support works best early — it's a strength to reach out
- **Know the crisis line** — Call or text 988 ; call 911 for immediate danger

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What supports a child's wellbeing most?** — Sleep, steady routines, connection, activity, and balanced screens.
- **How do I build resilience?** — Let kids face manageable challenges, name feelings, and teach coping skills.
- **When should I seek help?** — When you notice lasting changes in mood, sleep, appetite, or interest.
- **Who do I turn to?** — The school counselor and your pediatrician are great starting points.
- **What about a crisis?** — Call or text 988; call 911 for immediate danger.

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WELLBEING & MENTAL HEALTH

Social-Emotional Learning

WHAT IT IS

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the teaching of the everyday life and people skills that help students manage emotions, get along with others, and make good decisions. It's woven into how many schools operate, because these skills support learning, behavior, and wellbeing . Here's what it is and how to support it at home.

TYPES & OPTIONS

- **Self-awareness** — Understanding your own emotions, strengths, and values
- **Self-management** — Managing emotions, impulses, and stress; setting and working toward goals
- **Social awareness** — Empathy — understanding and respecting others
- **Relationship skills** — Communicating, cooperating, and resolving conflict
- **Responsible decision-making** — Making thoughtful, caring choices

WHY IT MATTERS

Why schools invest in SEL: research links these skills to better academic performance, fewer behavior problems, and improved wellbeing . SEL isn't a replacement for academics — it's the foundation that helps students focus, persevere, and work well with others so learning can happen.

AT A GLANCE

What	**Teaching life & people skills**
Builds	**Self-awareness, self-managemen...**
Also	**Responsible decisions & empath...**
Why	**Supports learning, behavior &...**
At home	**Reinforce the same skills**
Not	**A replacement for academics**

TIPS

- **Name feelings at home** — Help your child recognize and label emotions
- **Model calm problem-solving** — Kids learn self-management by watching adults
- **Coach, don't rescue** — Let them practice resolving small conflicts
- **Praise effort and kindness** — Reinforce persistence and empathy
- **Talk about choices** — Discuss decisions and their consequences together

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What is SEL?** — Teaching skills like managing emotions, empathy, relationships, and good decision-making.
- **What are the core SEL skills?** — Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making.
- **Why do schools teach it?** — Because these skills support learning, behavior, and wellbeing.
- **Does SEL replace academics?** — No — it's the foundation that helps academics succeed.
- **How can I support SEL at home?** — Name feelings, model calm problem-solving, and coach through small conflicts.

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