

Supporting Students with Visible Differences

A practical guide for school counselors and school nurses

**National Vitiligo Bond Inc.,
Foundation (Vitiligo Bond)**



A practical resource for responding with dignity, privacy, respectful communication, and school-policy awareness. Students with vitiligo and other visible differences have varied experiences; offer support without making assumptions.



Use this guide alongside your school's policies, safeguarding procedures, and local requirements.



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Student Well-Being and Belonging



- Vitiligo and other visible differences may be experienced in many different ways. Begin with the student's own perspective rather than assuming distress, insecurity, or a need for intervention.



Start with the student

- Use the student's preferred name, pronouns, and language.
- Ask what support feels useful instead of guessing.
- Respect the student's choice about whether, when, and how to discuss appearance.
- Notice participation, belonging, and access to trusted adults without treating difference as a problem.



Build belonging

- Create a classroom and campus culture where differences are treated respectfully.
- Address teasing, staring, exclusion, and unwanted comments according to school policy.
- Make room for the student's strengths, interests, friendships, and goals.
- Offer a private place to talk, without requiring the student to disclose personal information.



Helpful reminder

- Support is appropriate when a student asks for it, reports harm, shows a change in participation, or simply wants a trusted adult.
- **Support is not proof that every student with vitiligo is experiencing emotional difficulty.**



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Supportive Conversation Starters

Choose a private, calm setting. Ask permission before discussing appearance or sharing information, and let the student guide the depth of the conversation.



1 Would you like to tell me what happened?



2 How would you like me to support you today?



3 What would help school feel more comfortable or welcoming?



4 Would you like help talking with a teacher, administrator, or family member?



5 Is there anything you want me to know about questions or comments from other students?

Keep the conversation respectful

- Listen without interrupting or rushing to reassure.
- Use neutral, non-judgmental language.
- Do not ask the student to explain or display their skin.
- Do not promise absolute secrecy; explain the limits of confidentiality in clear, age-appropriate language.



Try instead of assumptions

Replace “You must be upset” with “How has this been for you?”

Replace “You shouldn’t worry” with “What would feel supportive right now?”



Responding to Bullying Reports

When a student reports teasing, harassment, exclusion, or unwanted attention, respond promptly and follow your school or district's bullying, safeguarding, and reporting procedures.



1.



1. Listen and thank the student

Stay calm, take the report seriously, and avoid blame.

2.



2. Clarify immediate needs

Ask what would help the student feel supported during the school day. Address urgent safety concerns through the appropriate school process.

3.



3. Document objectively

Record the student's words, relevant dates, locations, people involved, witnesses, and actions taken. Avoid labels, diagnoses, or speculation.

4.



4. Follow school policy

Notify the appropriate staff, complete required reports, and apply the school's established response process.

5.



5. Follow up

Agree on a check-in plan, monitor whether the response is working, and update the student and family as permitted by policy.



Avoid

- Do not ask the student to confront the person who caused harm.
- Do not require the student to repeat the story unnecessarily.
- Do not promise a particular outcome or absolute confidentiality.
- Do not treat the visible difference as the cause of the harm.



Privacy and Family Communication

Protect the student's dignity. Share information thoughtfully, use approved communication channels, and follow school policy, local requirements, and applicable confidentiality rules.



Protect privacy

- Discuss the student's experience in a private setting.
- Share only what is necessary with staff who need the information to support the student or meet a policy requirement.
- Do not photograph, point out, or publicly discuss the student's skin.
- Ask the student what they are comfortable sharing when age, policy, and safety considerations allow.



Communicate with family

- Use the school's approved process and include the family or caregivers as appropriate.
- Describe observed events and the support requested; avoid assumptions about feelings, causes, or medical needs.
- Invite the family to share preferred language, contacts, and helpful context.



Coordinate respectfully

- Keep records factual and secure.
- Explain what will happen next and who will be involved.
- Connect the student with appropriate school-based supports when requested or indicated by school policy.



A respectful update

I'm reaching out because your child shared a concern about comments related to appearance. We are following our school's response process and want to understand what support feels appropriate. We will protect your child's privacy and keep you informed about next steps within school policy.



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Student Support Checklist

Use this checklist to support a respectful, policy-aligned response.
Check only what applies to the student's situation.



Listen and affirm

- ☐ I offered a private, respectful opportunity to talk.
- ☐ I used the student's words and preferences rather than assumptions.
- ☐ I asked what support would be useful.



Safety and response

- ☐ I clarified whether there is an immediate safety concern.
- ☐ I documented relevant facts objectively.
- ☐ I followed the school or district response process.



Communication and privacy

- ☐ I explained confidentiality and its limits in age-appropriate language.
- ☐ I shared information only through approved channels and with appropriate people.
- ☐ I involved family or caregivers according to policy and the student's circumstances.



Follow-up

- ☐ We agreed on a check-in or follow-up plan.
- ☐ The student knows which trusted adults can help.
- ☐ I reviewed whether the support is working and adjusted as needed.



Keep the focus on dignity and belonging

A student's visible difference is one part of who they are.
Listen, respect privacy, respond to harm, and support the student's participation and sense of belonging.

Student's preferred support:

Follow-up date:

Staff contact:



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