



Dealing with Bullying, Harassment, Aggression & Violence (Students) Policy

Policy Area: Community

Aligns with CECWA Policy: 2-D6

1. RATIONALE

St Helena's Catholic Primary School has a responsibility to provide an educational environment that promotes the dignity and respect of the person and, therefore, aims to encourage the development of positive relationships between students to reduce all forms of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence. St Helena's Catholic Primary School is committed to developing and implementing policies, procedures and practices that protect students from bullying behaviours and which create an educational community that is proactive in the promotion of positive behaviours by all students.

All members of the St Helena's Catholic Primary School community are committed to ensuring a safe and supportive environment which promotes personal growth and fosters positive self-esteem for all. As a Catholic school where Christian values and principles are nurtured, it follows that each person has the right to be respected and also that each person has the responsibility to respect others.

Therefore, at St Helena's Catholic Primary School, we shall not tolerate bullying, harassment, aggression or violence in any form.

2. DEFINITIONS

Definition of bullying:

Bullying is a **repeated** behaviour, that may be physical, verbal and/or psychological and where there is **intent** to cause fear, distress or harm to another; that is conducted by a **more powerful** individual or group, against a **less powerful** individual or group of individuals who is/are **unable to stop this** from happening.

Bullying takes many forms and includes:

- Physical - hitting, pushing, tripping, kicking, spitting on others etc.
- Verbal - teasing, using offensive names, ridiculing, spreading rumours etc.
- Non-Verbal - writing offensive notes or graffiti about others, using e-mail or text messaging to hurt others, rude gestures etc.
- Exclusion - deliberately excluding others from group, refusing to sit next to someone etc.
- Extortion - threatening to take someone's possessions, food or money etc.
- Property - stealing, hiding, damaging or destroying property etc.
- Cyber - any form of bullying which is carried out through electronic means such as mobile phones, email, chat room, social networking, 'sms', web page etc.

What is not Bullying:

Some unpleasant social interactions are not examples of bullying, even though they are unpleasant and often require appropriate intervention and management.

- Situations of mutual conflict, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the problem. Unresolved mutual conflict may develop into a bullying situation with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way.
- Social rejection or dislike is another example of an unpleasant experience that is not bullying unless it is directed towards someone specific and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.

What is not Bullying (Cont'd):

- Single episodes of nastiness, random acts of unkind behaviour, or physical aggression are also not the same as bullying, unless it becomes a pattern of behaviour. If a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied.
- Single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different students is not the same as bullying.

Possible Indicators of Bullying:

For behaviour to be classified as bullying, it needs to involve repeated actions that are designed to cause hurt. Not having friends or not being popular isn't necessarily a sign that a person is being bullied, rather it may mean that there are some communication or interpersonal difficulties that need to be supported. There is a difference between bullying behaviour and what can be described as interpersonal conflict. Some symptoms associated with bullying can include, not wanting to go to school, anger, tears, depression, low self-esteem as well as psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches and stomach aches. It is important to note, however, that these behaviours can be symptomatic of many other issues and may not necessarily point to bullying. Bedwetting and sleeplessness can also be symptoms of bullying in children. Withdrawal and reluctance to 'join in' can be a warning sign, as can truancy, misbehaviour and aggressive behaviour. Cuts, bruising, torn clothing, requests for extra food or money as well as a decline in academic performance can also be clues that a student may be suffering from bullying.

3. PRINCIPLES

1. Catholic schools are safe and supportive environments where the 6 guiding principles and 9 key elements of the National Safe Schools Framework are practiced.
2. Bullying is viewed as a major breach of the school rules and behavioural expectations and therefore follow up action will align with St Helena's Catholic Primary School's Behaviour Management Policy. Any reports of bullying will be investigated, and appropriate action will be taken promptly.
3. St Helena's Catholic Primary School owes a duty of care to its students (*see Appendix 1*).
4. All bullying, harassment, aggression and violence shall be responded to. When bullying, harassment, aggression and violence are ignored or overlooked, it serves to condone or reinforce the behaviour. Bystanders (those who observe bullying) can encourage or assist those who bully simply by doing nothing.
5. In discerning appropriate responses to bullying, the collective welfare of the school community will be balanced with the individual needs of the student/s.
6. All parties to incidents of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence are entitled to appropriate support.
7. Bullying, harassment, aggression and violence may occur outside of the school. When these behaviours impact on a student's learning and behaviour in school, St Helena's Catholic Primary School will take action to support the continued wellbeing of those involved.

4. RIGHTS

1. Every person has the right to feel safe. Any person who bullies another is denying them that right. This means we have to think about others (not just ourselves) in the classroom and in the playground. The right to feel safe means we have a responsibility to consider how we speak and act towards others. Bullying takes away a person's sense of security. The right to safety means that bullying of any kind is unacceptable.
2. Every person has the right to be treated with respect and fairness. This means we show respect to other people, and their property, in the class and in the playground. The right to receive respect and fair treatment requires from us the responsibility to show manners and courtesy towards each other.

4. RIGHTS (CONT'D)

3. Every person has the right to learn. This means we do not adversely affect the learning of another student. At school it is everyone's responsibility to take the necessary steps to stop bullying behaviour. The school will not tolerate any action that undermines a person's right to feel safe, respected and to learn.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

We believe, based on research, that prevention strategies through education that involve the whole school community [students, staff and parents] are more likely to reduce bullying. Therefore, at St Helena's Primary School we recognise that we all share the responsibility to prevent bullying.

1. The Leadership Team will:
 - a. Support, promote, enact, maintain and review this policy.
 - b. Be aware of all legislative requirements relating to bullying, harassment, aggression and violence.
 - c. Support staff in the investigation and resolution of all incidents of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence, including in respect to behaviours that occur outside of school when these impact on student learning and behaviour.
 - d. Provide opportunities for staff professional development related to the focus of this policy.
 - e. Ensure students, staff and parents are familiar with the school's approach to bullying, harassment, aggression and violence and that they understand their related rights and responsibilities.
 - f. Ensure all documentation is completed and stored securely.
 - g. Ensure sensitivity, confidentiality and the protection of the rights of all individuals are maintained.
 - h. From time to time, conduct student, parent and staff surveys to monitor the incidence and profile of bullying at St Helena's.
2. Staff will:
 - a. Be familiar with this policy and consistently teach and enact it as intended.
 - b. Be aware of signs and indications that bullying may be occurring.
 - c. Clearly communicate that bullying behaviour will not be tolerated as it violates the Student Code of Conduct and the school stance that every student has the right to feel safe at school.
 - d. Listen to and investigate all reports of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence and act to stop the behaviour recurring.
 - e. Inform the Principal of all incidents of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence.
 - f. Record identified bullying, harassment, aggression and violence incidents using the school's 'Bullying Incident Report Form'.
 - g. Discuss the non-acceptance of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence with students in the first weeks of each school year and ongoing throughout the year.
 - h. Implement lessons to develop resilience to bullying, harassment, aggression and violence and make students aware of their responsibilities with regard to such behaviour.
 - i. Treat information regarding bullying, harassment, aggression and violence sensitively and confidentially.
 - j. Explicitly teach positive behaviours embedded within the curriculum addressing positive relationships, conflict resolution, resilience, bystander action etc.
 - k. Regularly recognise and acknowledge students who demonstrate appropriate behaviours that promote and restore right relationships (List specific processes in place for example reward, citizenship, student of the week, Principal's awards, Playground buddies, etc).

5. RESPONSIBILITIES (Cont'd)

2. Staff will (Cont'd):
 - i. Provide vigilant classroom, playground and transition supervision
 - o Staff should note supervisory duties for the day and turn up promptly to duty.
 - o Staff are asked to be aware of playground 'hotspots' and visit these areas regularly throughout their supervision duty.
 - o Refer students to school based supports such as 'buddy benches, 'Be a Buddy'
 - o Direct students to safe and structured playground spaces and activities at break times
3. Parents will:
 - a. Support the school's policies on bullying, harassment, aggression and violence.
 - b. Listen sympathetically to reports of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence.
 - c. Encourage their child to speak to their teacher.
 - d. Refrain from encouraging their child to repeat or replicate bullying behaviour.
 - e. Inform school staff as soon as they become aware of any incidents of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence against their child or another child.
 - f. Not approach students (or their parents) against whom a claim of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence has been made.
 - g. Work with school staff in seeking a permanent solution.
 - h. Treat information regarding bullying, harassment, aggression and violence sensitively and confidentially.
4. Students will:
 - a. Practise their rights and respect the rights of others to be free from bullying, harassment, aggression and violence.
 - b. Take steps to stop bullying, harassment, aggression or violence by challenging it directly and/or reporting incidents to an adult.
 - c. Be aware of and use appropriate strategies to respond to incidents of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence.
 - d. Seek help from staff or parents when bullying, harassment, aggression or violence is experienced.

6. PROCEDURES

1. St Helena's Catholic Primary School will:
 - a. Promote positive social health, mental health, safety and well-being
 - b. Provide professional learning and appropriate resources to meet the needs of staff in implementing this policy.
 - c. Undertake, from time-to-time, surveys and the such to gain an understanding of the extent to which bullying exists at the school.
2. All staff will reinforce the school's ethos and expectations in regards to the principles of this policy by:
 - a. Maintaining a proactive stance towards the promotion of student safety and well-being
 - b. Being alert to those situations which trigger bullying, harassment, aggression and violence and to those places in the playground where such incidents most occur.
 - c. Helping students develop competencies to challenge bullying attitudes and behaviours in themselves and in others.
 - d. Ensuring claims of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence are speedily and constructively addressed according to school-based policies and processes.
3. All incidents of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence should be reported immediately to the class or duty teacher. If an incident is reported to a parent in the first instance, the parent should report the incident to the child's class teacher as soon as possible.

6. PROCEDURES (Cont'd):

4. All incidents of suspected or reported bullying, harassment, aggression and violence will be fully investigated according to the following levels of response:

Level 1: The staff member first witnessing/identifying the incident or to whom the initial disclosure is made (refer to "Staff Investigating an Allegation of Bullying" flowchart).

Level 2: When the instance of bullying is severe or when the student continues to engage in bullying behaviour, the staff member at Level 1 will refer the matter to the Principal. The Principal may provide the staff member with additional advice and methods for responding to subsequent incidents of bullying and/or meet with the student who has bullied (as well as the target, bystanders) and parents to try to resolve any outstanding issues.

Level 3: When efforts do not produce significant changes to a student's bullying behaviour, a formal referral will be made to the School Social Worker. A case management model will be used when bullying, harassment, aggression or violence persists with the Principal and Social Worker consulting with relevant parties to formulate a plan of intervention that will be communicated to the student, teacher(s) and parents.

Level 4: For those students who present with significant mental health problems (e.g. conduct disorder, ADHD) along with bullying behaviour, the Principal and Social Worker may choose to make a referral of the student and his/her family to an outside community health agency or private mental health practitioner who can offer a greater range of family support services and types of counselling and therapy.

5. At all times, the investigation process will:
 - a. Honour the principles of natural justice and confidentiality
 - b. Ensure that all parties and witnesses are interviewed independently and in an appropriate manner using a "no blame" approach
 - c. Attempt to establish the reason for the situation
 - d. Aim to heal the relationship between parties
 - e. Reinforce the school's rules and policies within the interview process
6. Where it is determined that bullying has not occurred, the investigating staff member will enter detailed notes into the SEQTA database as soon as possible and forward copies to the Principal and relevant class teacher(s) (if not investigating). Where relevant, they will also inform the class teacher of the student targeted by the behaviour.
7. Where it is determined that bullying has occurred, the investigation will be documented on the school's 'Incident Report Form' and a copy emailed to the Principal. As records may contain information of a sensitive nature, such records will be deemed as 'Closed Access Records' and will be noted as of a confidential nature, with the Principal managing the information appropriately. The investigating staff member will enter a note into the SEQTA database stating: "Please refer to confidential information held by the Principal". Where relevant, they will also inform the class teacher of the student displaying the bullying and the student targeted by the behaviour.
8. Consequences for acts of bullying, harassment, aggression and violence will be in alignment with the nature of the incident (e.g. reprimand, withdrawal from an activity or event, time-out, interview with the Principal, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension).
9. Where bullying, harassment, aggression or violence is found to have occurred, notification will be made to the parents of the offender/s as well as the parents of the target/s. The notification will include details of the incident/s, actions taken (specific details of consequences imposed only disclosed to parents of offender/s) and follow-up actions.
10. Those targeted by acts of bullying, harassment, aggression or violence will be supported throughout the process (*refer to Appendix 5*). They will be offered assertive and help seeking strategies to avert future incidents and, where relevant, access to specialist support services, e.g. School Social Worker, through their parents.

6. PROCEDURES (Cont'd):

11. Those offending against bullying, harassment, aggression or violence will be supported to:
 - a. Take responsibility for their behaviour
 - b. Develop their ability to make more appropriate choices
 - c. Develop appropriate non-violent ways to meet their needs
 - d. Empathise with the feelings of others
 - e. Understand the consequences of their actions on others
 - f. Heal their relationship with the victim.
12. Repeated occurrences of bullying may result in an issue of warning of suspension and could lead to the implementation of suspension procedures and, if necessary, removal of the student from the school through suspension, negotiated transfer or expulsion.

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Acknowledgement:

This policy and its appendices draws on “School Procedures & Practices for Responding to Students Who Bully” available at www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/responding_to_students_who_bully-May_2008.pdf