

ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

Rationale:

At St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Primary School everyone should be treated respectfully, every person needs to feel safe and secure and students need an environment that supports their learning, personal growth and positive self-esteem.

Every person has the right to feel safe from verbal, physical and emotional abuse that takes the form of bullying. A situation where a student feels unsafe in school because of bullying is not tolerated at our school.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is:

- To effectively prevent bullying, schools need to take a whole-school approach that focuses on safety and wellbeing throughout all school practices. It is important that school safety is not viewed as a separate policy but as a central component of an effective school. St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Primary School strives to develop each of these characteristics.
- To encourage a culture that is firm about unacceptable behaviour and provides incentives for acceptable behaviour.
- To articulate how bullying is defined and addressed; including the means taken to prevent incidents and the response taken when an incident occurs.

To ensure that:-

- Each person in the school community knows about and is alert to the signs and evidence of bullying occurring;
- Each person takes seriously his or her responsibility, whether as a victim or observer of bullying, to report all incidents;
- A satisfactory response is given to all reported incidents of bullying;
- Both the victim and perpetrator of bullying are supported and assisted to learn from the experience;
- Relationships damaged as a result of bullying are, as much as is possible, restored within a reasonable time, and
- The school and parents work in partnership in responding to incidents of bullying.

Definition:

Bullying is repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person that creates a risk to their health and safety. It occurs when an individual or a group uses power to scare or hurt others. Forms of bullying include:

- Physical bullying: pushing, shoving, fighting, pinching and any other unwelcome physical contact used intentionally to intimidate or hurt someone.
- Verbal bullying: put downs, particularly those referring to physical characteristics, can result in loss of self esteem. Racial discrimination of any kind is a form of bullying
- Gesture bullying: non-verbal signals can be used by bullies to silence and intimidate their victims.

- Extortion bullying: physically stronger and more powerful students may bully other students into giving up their possessions, buying food and drink, or taking part in rule breaking activities.
- Exclusion bullying: being left out of activities on purpose is one of the most hurtful forms for children because it feeds their fear of not being accepted.
- Visual bullying: offensive notes or material, graffiti, or damaging other people's possessions.
- Sexual bullying: touching, sexually orientated jokes, drawings of, or writing about someone's body, using rude names or commenting about someone's morals, unwanted invitations of a sexual nature, asking questions about someone's private life.
- Cyber bullying: the use of various forms of electronic media to spread text and visual messages to cause hurt, embarrassment, intimidation. Bullying is when someone, or a group of people, who have more power at the time deliberately upset or hurt another person, their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion.

Types of Bullying:

There are three broad categories of bullying:

1. Direct physical bullying -This form includes hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.
2. Direct verbal bullying - This form includes name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.
3. Indirect bullying - This form of bullying is harder to recognise and often carried out behind the bullied person's back. It is designed to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation.

Indirect bullying includes:

- lying and spreading rumours;
- playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate;
- mimicking;
- encouraging others to socially exclude someone;
- damaging someone's social reputation and social acceptance; and
- cyber-bullying, which involves the use of email, text messages or chat rooms to humiliate and distress someone.

What Bullying is Not:

Many distressing behaviours are not examples of bullying, even though they are unpleasant and often require teacher intervention and management. There are three socially unpleasant situations that are often confused with bullying:

- Mutual conflict: In mutual conflict situations, 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. However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way.

- Social rejection or Dislike: Unless the social rejection is directed towards someone specific and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others, it is not bullying.
- Single-Episode Acts: Single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different students is not the same as bullying.

Implementation Anti-Bullying Strategy:

There are two key elements to the anti-bullying strategy:

1) Primary Prevention & Early Intervention

- a) The implementation of learning programs are aligned with the Ethical, Intercultural, Personal & Social General Capabilities Learning Areas in the Victorian Curriculum. A Prep to Year 6 unit at the commencement of the year with an explicit focus on personal and social learning from the relevant Victorian Curriculum level
- b) Personal and social learning as integral to further Units of work throughout the year.
- c) All policies regarding the school's approach to Child Safety are available for viewing and downloading on the school's website.
- d) Parents kept informed about all elements to the school's approach and regularly reminded and encouraged to contact the school should they become aware of a problem

2) Intervention on an Incident Being Reported

- a) The staff member is to immediately notify a member of the school leadership team who will initiate the process of response
- b) Each incident is fully investigated and the actions taken are documented. These actions will include:
 - i. Once identified, the victim, the perpetrator, and any witnesses are interviewed.
 - ii. The parents of all students involved are contacted and meetings as needed are arranged.
 - iii. An action plan, which takes the intent of restoring the relationship and that equally, addresses the needs of both the victim and the perpetrator is put in place.
 - iv. The action plan is monitored and adjusted as needed.
 - v. If the perpetrator persists in bullying, the above process will be repeated and will result in a revised action plan. Where necessary the specialist staff of the Catholic Education Office and/or other professionals may be asked to become involved. Students who continue to bully will be closely supervised.

Students who have bullied may:

- a) Be excluded from class for a period.
- b) Be subject to an individual behaviour management plan.
- c) Be excluded from the yard for a period.

- d) Have privileges withdrawn.
- e) Be required to cooperate with attending counselling from an appropriate agency.
- f) Be suspended, or in extreme cases have enrolment transfer to another school.

Restorative Practices Restorative Practices are increasingly being used by Catholic and Victorian government schools to manage bullying incidents.

The term Restorative Practices refers to a range of processes which are underpinned by the following concepts:

- misconduct is viewed as a violation of people and relationships; these violations create obligations and liabilities; and
- Problem-solving focuses on healing and making things right.

These practices, ranging from proactive to reactive, involve the development and enhancement of relationships in schools and teaching of conflict resolution and other problem-solving skills. They also involve classroom management that is participatory and democratic and focused on problem-solving.

These practices require a shift in philosophy from traditional punitive models of behaviour management to those relational models which, as well as holding wrongdoers accountable for their behaviour, provide support for the community affected by the wrongdoing.

3) Specific Restorative Practices include:

Community Conferences:

A community conference brings together, in the wake of a serious incident of harm, the wrongdoer and the student being bullied, along with their families and appropriate school personnel. Conducted by a trained facilitator, a series of scripted questions is directed to participants in order to understand the incident and its antecedents and the effects of the incident on the community. An agreement is reached whereby all participants feel that there has been some restitution and that relationships have been repaired. The agreement also reflects plans to meet identified needs of the participants, such as counselling, and to implement necessary changes to school policy and practice. Follow-up is crucial for ongoing support and to ensure compliance with the agreement.

Small Group Individual Conferences:

These are usually confined to a small group of students or an individual student and perhaps teacher(s) who have been involved in a less serious incident of harm. Typically small group conferences might be used to deal with low-level bullying before matters escalate. Parents, while not directly involved, are informed of the process and its outcomes. Follow-up is crucial for ongoing support and to ensure compliance with the agreement.

Classroom Conferences:

These involve the whole-class group in addressing issues which have affected teaching and learning in the classroom and student wellbeing, such as classroom bullying and more generally, classroom disruption.

Evaluation:

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's five-year review cycle or as required.

Prepared by Sarah Rovers, February, 2016

Resources:

- CECV policy 1.14: "Pastoral Care of Students in Catholic Schools" incorporating the "Guidelines for Student Behaviour Management" February 2008.
- Safe Schools are Effective Schools – a resource for developing safe and supportive school environments. Dept of Education and Training 2006
- Guidelines for developing The Student Code of Conduct Directorate of School Education 1994