
Why have an anti-bullying policy?

Research over the past twenty years has shown that there is a tendency for bullying to decrease in schools which adopt an anti-bullying policy/bullying prevention programme. Students' perception of pro-active attitudes on the part of teachers to stop bullying is thought to be a key factor in this. In the past and up until fairly recently, bullying was widely considered and accepted as a fact of school life, thought to be character-forming and even seen as somehow being the fault or bad luck of the victim of the bullying. Fortunately, as with other types of violence such as domestic violence, this is no longer the case. An anti-bullying policy helps to remove the secrecy and passive participation often surrounding bullying, reduces opportunities for bullying to happen and offers an uncomplicated course of action for victims/concerned parents to follow. It also raises awareness of the many forms that bullying can take, as often children do not know that they are being bullied (or indeed are bullying), but, in the case of the former, simply know that something is making them unhappy.

It is important that we don't minimise the importance of bullying in our centres because we are extra-curricular. Bullying commonly takes place in extra-curricular activities. In our case we have to remember that students are with us for nine months a year or for six hours a day for the Holiday Classes - a daunting period of time for the victims of bullying.

What exactly is bullying?

Bullying is insidious in nature, can take many different forms and is therefore difficult to define. Different definitions of bullying tend to include the following common elements:

- Negative or hurtful behaviour involving a real or perceived imbalance of power/strength with the less powerful person being repeatedly attacked.
- The attacks tend to become progressively worse.
- There is usually no provocation from the victim (although a type of bully-victim relationship has been identified where there is a type of "provocation").
- There is a "Law of silence" surrounding the bullying.

Common examples of bullying are:

- **Physical violence** (although not all physical violence is bullying)
- **Psychological or emotional aggression** such as:
 - Calling names
 - Using gestures
 - Exclusion
 - Rumour spreading
 - Comment-making
 - Note-passing
 - Text-messaging
 - Stealing/hiding things
 - Defacing property (e.g. scribbling over/tearing victims' work/notebook etc.)

The complex nature of bullying means that the above list is by no means exhaustive. Each case of bullying may be different, with the victim struggling to articulate exactly what kind of things are going on. Often, when put into words, the offending actions may sound trivial to the victim.

What should an anti-bullying policy include?

The recommended key elements of effective prevention programmes are:

1. The creation of a warm school environment where adults are interested in the students
2. Adults in the school as positive role models (e.g. appropriate, respectful behaviour towards each other and towards students)
3. Communication
4. Firm limits on unacceptable behaviour
5. Strategies for reducing opportunities (e.g. break duty)

Our anti-bullying policy

With reference to the above:

1., 2., and 5.

Environmental factors are very important. The attitude and behaviour of adults, especially teachers, play an important role in how much of a problem bullying is likely to be in a school. Students pick up on:

- How the staff/teachers in a school treat each other
- How the staff/teachers in a school treat students
- How aware teachers are of what goes on in the classroom or in breaks
- How much attention is paid to bullying in general (hence a policy communicated to all students)

3.

We need to communicate our approach to bullying with students and parents. At a basic level this involves awareness-raising about what bullying is, as students are sometimes unaware that they are bullying/being bullied. Also, bullying is almost always a group process, with more people involved than the bully and the victim (see diagram below):



This makes it important to increase the likelihood of “reporting/telling”. Those likely to report bullying, if they feel supported enough, are the victims themselves, witnesses, possible defenders and defenders, who will “tell” someone what is going on. The more open a school is about bullying, the more likely “telling” will be.

4. and 5.

This means being aware, as far as possible, of what is going on in your classroom. This is a thorny area, with the teacher sometimes suspecting that something is wrong, but wondering if it is worse for the “victim” if attention is drawn to the offending behaviour (which, to complicate things further, may be difficult to pinpoint or may seem fairly trivial). However, experts say that it is always best to disallow this type of behaviour (either publicly, or by having an initial word with the offender(s) after class). Firstly, by doing this you are showing your awareness of what is going on in class, thus reducing opportunities (see no. 5

above). Secondly, you are showing that you consider the behaviour unacceptable and at the same time you are demonstrating your support for the student who is being “picked on”. This in turn will increase the likelihood of him/her confiding in you if the behaviour does not stop but is going on in breaks or before/after class.

What does the policy mean for teachers?

In conjunction with (and with reference to) communications to be issued to parents and students, remember to:

1. Ensure an environment of teacher-student and student-student respect in your classrooms. Adopt a “nip-in-the-bud” approach, and do not allow insults and teasing (or other manifestations such as those listed above), as these are often the starting point for what then become much more complex cases.
2. If you suspect that a student in one of your classes is being bullied, or if a parent comes to see you because they think that their child is being bullied in your class, speak to your LM or DO immediately. Together we can discuss the most appropriate course of action.
3. Be vigilant on break duty. Your presence will certainly help to reduce opportunities and will send out a positive message to all of our students.

Conclusion

It is true that more and more cases of bullying are being reported in our centre. This is not necessarily negative, as it shows that parents and students are less willing to tolerate unacceptable behaviour from other students, and that they are confident that we will offer them our help and support. This policy will help us work towards ensuring positive, convivial learning experiences for all children and young people choosing to study with us.

