

Bullying Policy
St. Michael's College
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Definitions of Bullying

It is important to keep a sense of balance in any discussion of bullying behaviour. There will always be name-calling, slagging and teasing. However when a line is crossed it can be devastating for the person affected by it. The age-old excuse "We were only messing" needs to be constantly challenged, especially in schools. The behaviour becomes bullying when the same person or persons are repeatedly on the receiving end of negative attention, against their wishes, but are unable to stop it.

1. Bullying may be defined as repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or a group against others.

(Department of Education Guidelines on Countering Bullying in Primary and Post Primary Schools September 1993)

2. Bullying is an abuse of power.
3. Bullying is the breaking down of a person.

The last statement highlights the fact that the majority of bullying is verbal rather than physical. The danger of longer term bullying is that the person being bullied may build a barrier to keep the bully out, but they may end up keeping everybody else out as well. Another difficulty is trying to prove certain types of bullying.

What makes a person a victim of a bully?

We believe the following factors need to be taken into account in discussing whether or not an individual will be bullied.

- Vulnerability
- Reaction

In considering what may increase a person's level of vulnerability I would include the following risk factors:

1. Physical characteristics
2. Personality traits
3. Family background
4. Changes in family circumstances
5. Atmosphere in the school

The reaction to negative behaviour will be crucial in determining whether it will be repeated. Almost everybody will be teased from time to time but not everybody will be bullied.

Dealing with a case of bullying

Should a teacher come across an incident of bullying behaviour the following procedure is recommended:

1. Speak separately to the person who appears to be bullying, the person who appears to be the victim and if possible somebody not directly involved, but who saw what happened.
2. If the teacher considers the incident to be serious, it should be written down on a bullying incident form (Report Sheet) and also reported to the Year Head / Principal / Deputy Principal.
3. The Year Head / Principal / Deputy Principal should make contact with the parents if they consider it necessary.
4. The teacher should assure the person who has been the victim of bullying of ongoing support with the encouragement to report back any further attempts at intimidation. They could also check with them quietly how things are going.
5. Speak to the bully and inform him/her firmly but in a non-aggressive manner that such behaviour will not be tolerated. Remind him/her of the existing anti-bullying code/policy if one exists. Any other action(s) should form part of an overall anti-bullying policy.
6. The person who has been the victim of bullying should be kept informed of all developments after the incident(s) have been reported and of any further action that is going to ensue.

Teachers should talk to colleagues, particularly when difficult situations arise.

Bullying Behaviour: Guidelines for Pupils

Bullying is:

Negative behaviour that intimidates someone, mentally or physically.

When a person is intentionally placed in an uncomfortable situation by another person/persons.

Continuous psychological, physical or personal intimidation.

Intentionally hurting someone.

Example:

Physical aggression; damage or misplacement of another's work or property; extortion; intimidation; abusive phone calls or text messages; deliberate exclusion or isolation; slagging; name calling; unwelcome comments; hitting; throwing items at another person; spreading rumours.

It is important to remember:

All students are entitled to an education free from fear and intimidation.

Bullies look for an excuse to do what they do. They try to justify their actions by saying it is a person's fault for being different. If there is no real difference then they will invent one.

What should you do if you are being bullied?

Don't keep it to yourself. Talk to someone you can trust – friend, brother or sister, your parents, a teacher, a member of the non-teaching staff. They are all there to help.

Remember:

It's them that's wrong not you! There is nothing wrong in asking for help.

Try to be assertive. Do not let them see you are upset. Keep your head and shoulders up. Don't look down. Don't retaliate physically – you might end up being accused of bullying somebody yourself.

Tell the truth about what has happened. Don't exaggerate. Don't believe the lies that the bullies tell about you. Don't hide what is happening from the adults you trust.

Dealing with Bullying: Guidelines for Parents

The vast majority of students at school are unaffected by bullying behaviour. There is no need for parents/guardians to worry unduly. However the following signs/symptoms may suggest that a pupil is being bullied:

1. A student who has been happy at school losing interest and enthusiasm for school. This may be reflected in a deterioration in school performance.
2. Anxiety about travelling to and from school – requesting parents to drive or collect them.
3. Unwillingness to attend school.
4. Damage to bicycles or personal property e.g. clothes, books or loss of same.
5. A student returning from school in a very bad humour but reluctant to say why.
6. Unexplained changes of mood. These will often occur before the restart of school – at the end of the week – at the end of the weekend or the end of holidays.
7. Frequent minor illnesses, especially headaches and stomach aches, difficulty in sleeping, not eating. These often accompany the mood changes mentioned above.
8. An increase in requests for money.
9. Unexplained cuts and bruises.
10. Recurrent nightmares.
11. Bedwetting.

These signs do not necessarily mean that the pupil is being bullied. However, if repeated or occurring in combination these signs do need investigation.

Making contact with the school

The best way to make contact with the school about bullying is by telephone or letter. Going in person can put pressure on a pupil. They may be afraid of being called a “rat” or of what their classmates will think. On the phone or by letter an appointment can be made to speak to the class/form teachers/home school co-ordinator or the principal as necessary.

When bullying happens

- The first thing to do is to assure the child that the problem lies with the bully and not with them. This removes the guilt many people feel when they are bullied.
- A written record of the incidents should be kept with date, time, people and brief details.

General Points

- A child who has high self-esteem is most unlikely to be the victim of long-term bullying. Parents can help to build up self-esteem in their children, by encouraging them, by making them feel good about their appearance and getting them involved in activities inside and outside school. Any activities which lead to a sense of achievement will help build self-esteem.
- Sometimes a child may be over-sensitive. They need to learn to tell the difference between the kind of treatment almost everybody is subjected to from time to time. (e.g. slagging in fun and behaviour where there is a deliberate intention to hurt.)

When Parents and the School work together Bullying is less likely to happen.