Fact sheet
Bullying and school aged students

The national definition of bullying for Australian schools is:

Bullying is the ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.

Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records).

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

Behaviours that do not constitute bullying include:

- mutual arguments and disagreements (where there is no power imbalance)
- not liking someone or a single act of social rejection
- one-off acts of meanness or spite
- isolated incidents of aggression, intimidation or violence.

Such occurrences may still be serious and require intervention or management, however they do not (as single incidents) meet the threshold of a behaviour that can be described as bullying.

The impact of bullying

A climate in which bullying occurs is not regarded as healthy and schools in which students experience bullying can face reputational harm. Bullying can impact on student engagement, learning and attendance. Concerns about bullying need to be taken seriously and receive a satisfactory response from the school. The impact of bullying behaviour may affect everyone in a school community.

Responsibilities

All incidents that directly impact the good order and management of a school will be managed in line with the school's **Student Code of Conduct**. Principals and school staff have a responsibility to respond to allegations of bullying.

Principals

- ensure that their school's **Student Code of Conduct** clearly articulates the approach for responding to allegations of bullying and includes the **bullying response flowchart**
- ensure the school community is aware of the school's approach for responding to and managing allegations of bullying
- have the authority to take disciplinary action to address student behaviours (such as bullying) that occur outside of school hours or school grounds if the conduct adversely affects, or is likely to adversely affect, other students and/or the good order and management of the school
- share information appropriately and as necessary with staff about any incidents of alleged bullying
- encourage and model appropriate behaviour from staff, parents and the school community
- act to highlight or manage any concerns of bullying.

State school staff (including principals)

- promote positive student behaviours
- follow appropriate processes outlined in the school's **Student Code of Conduct** when responding to allegations and incidents of bullying
- immediate action must address the physical and emotional safety of the student, for example providing a safe place for the student, redirecting students engaging in bullying behaviours or interrupting and addressing verbal abuse in situ
- respond to allegations and incidents of bullying
- take reasonable steps to prevent bullying and respond to complaints to help bring the bullying to an end
- ensure records in OneSchool are maintained accurately in relation to any allegations of bullying.

Students

- who wish to make a report about bullying should approach a teacher with whom they feel most comfortable or trust, which may be their regular class teacher, a guidance officer or deputy principal for example
- who engage in bullying behaviour may face disciplinary action whether behaviour
  - occurs at school
  - occurs outside of school hours or settings (including school camps and excursions)
  - is directed towards other community members or students from other school sites.

Resources

- Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)
- Inclusive education policy
- Supporting students' mental health and wellbeing procedure
- Bullying. No Way!
- Be You

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Bullying response flowchart

Please note these timelines may be adjusted depending on the unique circumstances and risk associated with each situation. This is at the professional judgment of the staff involved. Timeframes should be clearly discussed and agreed with student and family.

First hour
Listen

- Provide a safe, quiet space to talk
- Reassure the student that you will listen to them
- Let them share their experience and feelings without interruption
- If you hold immediate concerns for the student's safety, let the student know how you will address these. Immediate in this circumstance is where the staff member believes the student is likely to experience harm (from others or self) within the next 24 hours.

Day one
Document

- Ask the student for examples they have of the alleged bullying (e.g. hand written notes or screenshots)
- Write a record of your communication with the student
- Check back with the student to ensure you have the facts correct
- Enter the record in OneSchool
- Notify parent/s that the issue of concern is being investigated

Day two
Collect

- Gather additional information from other students, staff or family
- Review any previous reports or records for students involved
- Make sure you can answer who, what, where, when and how
- Clarify information with student and check on their wellbeing

Day three
Discuss

- Evaluate the information to determine if bullying has occurred or if another disciplinary matter is at issue
- Make a time to meet with the student to discuss next steps
- Ask the student what they believe will help address the situation
- Engage the student as part of the solution
- Provide the student and parent with information about student support network
- Agree to a plan of action and timeline for the student, parent and yourself

Day four
Implement

- Document the plan of action in OneSchool
- Complete all actions agreed with student and parent within agreed timeframes
- Monitor the student and check in regularly on their wellbeing
- Seek assistance from student support network if needed

Day five
Review

- Meet with the student to review situation
- Discuss what has changed, improved or worsened
- Explore other options for strengthening student wellbeing or safety
- Report back to parent
- Record outcomes in OneSchool

Ongoing
Follow up

- Continue to check in with student on regular basis until concerns have been mitigated
- Record notes of follow-up meetings in OneSchool
- Refer matter to specialist staff within 48 hours if problems escalate
- Look for opportunities to improve school wellbeing for all students

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