

Article 7 – Developing Policies to Prevent Bullying

While we would all like to think our schools and community organizations are free from bullying, the fact is that bullying continues to occur no matter how much we wish it not to be the case. Developing policies to deal with bullying is, therefore, critical.

In fact, stopping bullying has proven to be extraordinarily difficult. This does not mean that we should not be working as a whole community (students, staff, parents, the local community) to do whatever we can to try to eliminate bullying.

Our advice is **do not wait** – assume bullying is taking place and take seriously the need for developing policies to prevent and reduce its frequency. Here's how:

An anti-bullying policy should have, at least, the following:

1. Policy Title

Obviously this is simply the name of your policy. In most cases it will simply be (Name of School's) Anti-bullying Policy, but you may also want to use a more inclusive title such as School Safety Policy; Student Protection Policy; Say No to Bullying Policy; and so on.

2. Purpose

This is an important part of developing your anti-bullying policy. What exactly do you want your policy to achieve? It is important to be clear about this. Suggesting, for example, that the purpose of your policy is to stop bullying is both unrealistic and dangerous. It is clear you cannot stop **all** bullying; if you make the claim that you can and a student is bullied then you have not achieved the purpose of your policy and may open the way to litigation.

A better way to look at your purpose statement is to think about what you want the policy to do. Thus, you might write something like: The purpose of this policy is to set out the procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying at (Name of School/College). A simple statement like this then gives guidance about what the rest of the policy will include.

3. Scope

Stated in its simplest terms, 'scope' refers to the 'types' of bullying included in the policy; the location of the bullying; and the people to whom the policy relates. A typical statement might, therefore, be: This policy sets out policies and procedures for dealing with physical, verbal, emotional and cyber-bullying whenever and wherever it might occur in relation to students and staff of (Name of School/College/Organisation).

4. Responsibility

This is the position or name of the person who is ultimately responsible for ensuring a policy is in place and followed. In most cases this will be the school Principal or Head. In some countries this is the responsibility of the school Board, in which case the position responsible would be the "Chairman (Chairperson) of the Board".

5. Point of Contact

While the school principal, for example, might be the person in the position of responsibility for policy development and implementation, in fact another member of school staff is likely to be responsible for the operation of the policy and the point of contact for parents, victims of bullying and school staff. This person is likely to be the Deputy Principal or the Director/Dean of Students or, possibly, the student counselor.

6. Definitions

This is the section where the policy states exactly what it meant by bullying. It may include a straight definition, for example:

“Bullying is repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person and occurs when someone, or a group of people, upset or create a risk to another person's health and safety, or their property, reputation or social acceptance.”

It might also include definitions about categories of bullying such as: direct physical bullying; direct verbal bullying; indirect bullying (such as lying, spreading rumors, damaging, exclusion etc.) and cyber bullying.

7. Policy

The policy itself may be divided into a number of parts. For example, it may include a policy statement that outlines the principles on which the policy is based and the procedures to follow when bullying is observed or an incident is reported. It may also include statements about the responsibilities of staff, students and parents with regard to observing the school's policy.

Policy Statement

The policy statement sets out the principles the school promotes with regard to bullying. This might begin with a statement about the rights of all members of the school community to feel safe and also include statements about natural justice, consistency, confidentiality, inclusivity, communication, and so on.

Procedures

This section includes information about how you will ensure all staff, students and parents are aware of the school's anti-bullying policy; the program the school is using to combat bullying; what to do when you see bullying occur; reporting procedures (who to report to, when to report); what happens after receiving a report of bullying; who is notified about the bullying; the sanctions that might occur against the bully.

Some of the things you might consider here are:

- Who is involved in developing the policy?
- How do you make sure everyone knows about the policy?
- Who do students report to if they are bullied?
- How do you ensure the bully is treated fairly?
- How do you support the victim?
- What are the follow-up procedures?
- What is the system for communicating with the parents of victims and bullies?
- What are the procedures if bullying persists?
- How is the physical environment reviewed to make it safer?
- What are the policy review procedures?
- How do you deal with parental complaints?
- What programs are in place to educate all members of the community that bullying is always unacceptable?
- What programs are in place to help students deal with bullying?

The role of the school, the staff, the students, the parents

This **optional** section sets out some of the things the school, the staff, students and parents can do to support the anti-bullying policy. Some things your policy might include are set out below.

The **school** will:

- Involve students, staff and parents in the development and review of its Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Identify one or more members of staff as a Bullying Contact Person.

- Ensure all staff are familiar with the school's anti-bullying policy and provide appropriate professional development on a regular basis, including at the time of induction of new staff members.
- Establish a Buddy Program train student Peer Buddies to whom victims of bullying can report, and/or approach for support.
- Ensure that all accessible areas of the school are patrolled thoroughly.
- Establish, and widely publicize an e-mail address for students/parents to anonymously report bullying.

Staff members will:

- Watch for early signs of distress in students. This could be evident in any aspect of school life.
Ensure they are familiar with the school's anti-bullying policy.
- Where bullying is observed, intervene immediately to stop the bullying.
- Offer the victim immediate support and help and outline what will now happen.
- Educate all students with regard to their responsibilities as bystanders to a bullying incident.
- Ensure they do not model bullying behaviour in interactions they have with students, parents or other staff members.

Students will:

- Report all incidents of bullying to a trusted Peer Buddy or a teacher or year level coordinator or other staff member or, anonymously, via the school's anti-bullying email address.
- Actively support students they know are being bullied.
- Refuse to become involved in bullying, including as a bystander.

Parents will:

- Watch for signs of distress in their child, such as, unwillingness to attend school, a pattern of headaches or stomach aches, equipment that has gone missing, request for extra pocket money, damaged clothing or bruising. Early contact is essential at this point.
- Take an active interest in their child's social life.
- Report to the school's Bullying Contact Person or any other member of school staff if they know, or think, their child is being bullied.
- Keep a written record if the bullying persists: Who, What, Where and When?
- Advise their child to tell a trusted teacher.
- Tell their child that there is nothing wrong with them.
- NOT encourage their child to hit back or respond verbally.
- Ensure they do not model bullying behaviour in interactions they have with the school staff and administration.

8. Policy Release Details

This is the final section of your policy. It sets out details of when the policy was established:

Date of Policy

The name of the person or position that approves the policy, the signature of that person, and the date of signing. In most cases this will be the Chairman of the School Board.

Approved By

Signature:

Date:

Review Date

This is a decision for the school administration and board. Most schools review their policies annually.

Related Policies and Documents

This refers to other policies and documents the school has developed that relate to keeping students safe. For example:

Child Protection Policy

Allergies Policy

Anti-Harassment Policy

You are now ready to write an Anti-Bullying Policy for your school.