

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY

INTERPRETATION

All Victory Christian College documents, policies, procedures, guidelines, handbooks, codes of conduct and other documents are to be interpreted in a manner that is consistent with the Statement of Faith. The College may adopt, supplement, vary or rescind its documents, policies, procedures, guidelines, handbooks, codes of conduct and other documents it has adopted at any time in its absolute discretion by the provision of notice.

INTRODUCTION

Victory Christian College is dedicated to providing everyone at the College with a safe, friendly, supportive, Christ-like, collaborative working and learning environment that is free from bullying and harassment. As Christians, we are called to uphold and obey two commands above all others. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "...Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). The latter commandment promotes mutual love, justice, dignity and respect, and is directly contrary to bullying and harassment.

Bullying and harassment is antithetical to the Christian ethos of the College, including as articulated in the Statement of Faith. Complaints of bullying and harassment will be taken seriously and investigated in a professional manner. The College will actively seek to ensure that the offending behaviour stops.

AIMS

The College's goal is to provide a setting where the spiritual, educational, physical, social and emotional health and well-being of staff and students are fostered. Therefore the aims of this policy are:

- To clearly define what behaviour constitutes bullying and what does not.
- To educate the school community about bullying and harassment, and the fact that they are unacceptable
- To alert everyone within the school community to the signs and evidence of bullying, and to responsibly report it to staff, whether as observer or victim
- To ensure that all reported incidents of bullying are followed up appropriately, and that support is given to both victims and perpetrators
- To seek parental and peer-group support and co-operation.
- To promote a culture within the College which is consistent with the Christian ethos of the College and the beliefs articulated in the Statement of Faith, and which actively discourages bullying
- To provide an environment free from all forms of abuse and which upholds the inherent dignity of each member of the College community as persons created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) in a manner consistent with the Christian ethos of the College (including as articulated in the Statement of Faith).

DEFINITIONS

Harassment

- Harassment is behaviour that targets an individual or group due to their: identity, culture or ethnic origin, religion, physical characteristics, age, ability or disability. It offends, humiliates, intimidates or creates a hostile environment. It may be an ongoing pattern of behaviour or a single act, intentional or unintentional.

Bullying: The national definition of bullying for Australian schools says:

- Bullying is an 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.

CATEGORIES OF BULLYING

Covert bullying

Covert bullying can be very difficult for someone outside of the interaction to identify. It can include hand gestures and threatening looks, whispering, excluding or turning your back on a person, restricting where a person can sit and who they can talk with. Social bullying (spreading rumours, manipulation of relationships, excluding, isolating) is often covert bullying.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying includes any form of bullying behaviour that occurs online or via a digital device. It can be verbal or written, and can include threats of violence as well as images, videos and/or audio. It may involve setting up a defamatory personal website or deliberately excluding someone from social media spaces.

Physical Bullying

Physical bullying includes hitting, pushing, shoving or intimidating or otherwise physically hurting another person, damaging or stealing their belongings. It includes threats of violence. Deliberately causing an allergic reaction to another student is also a form of physical bullying.

Social Bullying

This is sometimes called relational or emotional bullying, and includes deliberately excluding someone, spreading rumours, sharing information that will have a harmful effect on the other person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.

Verbal and Written Bullying

Verbal and written bullying includes name-calling or insulting someone about an attribute, quality or personal characteristic. It includes, but is not limited to, name-calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, discriminatory remarks, or verbal abuse.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OR ABUSE

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, 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, offensive questions about someone's body and/or someone's private life, or encouraging or making others do so.

Depending on the age of students and or the involvement of adults, bullying of a sexual nature may be a reportable incident or seriously impact child safety.

The information above should be read in conjunction with our Child Protection Policies (in particular, the Mandatory Reporting Policy), Child Safety Code of Conduct and Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

Sexual abuse allegations against a student must be addressed appropriately in line with the 4 Critical Actions for Student Sexual Offending.

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

Involves an argument or disagreement between people, but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the problem. Unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly for retaliation.

Social Rejection or Dislike

This behaviour is not bullying unless it is directed towards someone specific and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.

Single-Episode Acts

Single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If someone is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many

different people is not the same as bullying. However, this does not mean that single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression should be ignored or condoned as these are unacceptable behaviours.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Students' Role

- If bullying is witnessed, students are requested not to join into the bullying. Instead, the bullying is to be reported to a teacher so that both the person being bullied and the bully can receive help.
- Take preventative action where appropriate if a bullying situation occurs.
- Students are obliged to report bullying and harassment to a teacher. Additionally, students are encouraged to act assertively and influence others to stop bullying behaviour when they see it occurring.
- Where appropriate, students should give evidence of bullying to their teacher on request. This may involve screenshots of social media posts or direct messages.

Parents' Role

- Partner with the College to educate their child regarding bullying prevention and action.
- Parents are encouraged not to ignore bullying. In many cases, the student will not want parents to contact the College in case 'things get worse'. Effective dealing with bullying is very difficult if events go unreported.
- Signs such as students not wanting to attend school, failing to meet work deadlines, apparent sadness, uncharacteristic quietness, spending lunchtimes alone, etc., could be indicators of someone being bullied.
- Parents are encouraged to notify their child's homeroom teacher if they have concerns.
- Where serious matters occur and/or the bullying takes place outside of school time, parents should also report the matter to the police or other relevant authorities.

Staff Role

- Act as a role model in word and action.
- Ensure they are aware of their responsibilities outlined in this policy.
- All staff are required to be alert and respond to suspected bullying incidents, whether inside or outside of the classroom. No reported or observed case of bullying should be ignored.
- Educate students regarding racism, discrimination and bullying in an effort to prevent bullying and harassment. This may involve delivering specific programs in their subject areas, and taking part in relevant discussions about the College values such as Respect, Identity, Belonging, Compassion and Justice.

Visitors and Volunteers

- Report any observations or concerns to the classroom teacher.

IMPLEMENTATION

Parents, teachers, students and the community will be made aware of the school's position on bullying through the College Website, Student Diary, Handbook and Staff Manual. Additionally, the College will adopt a four-phase approach to bullying.

Records will be kept in each phase using the Compass Chronicle feature.

Phase 1 - Primary Prevention

- Professional development for staff relating to bullying, harassment and proven countermeasures.
- Each classroom teacher will clarify to students at the start of each year the College's Bullying and Harassment policy, Student Code of Conduct and the ICT and Internet Acceptable Use Policy.
- Community awareness and input relating to bullying, its characteristics and the school's programs and response.
- The College will work towards providing programs that promote resilience, life and social skills, assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving.
- The College will promote supportive and respectful behaviours and attitudes through its Values Education Program.
- A bullying survey will be administered as required.
- The curriculum will include anti-bullying messages and strategies, including participation in the National Day of Action against Bullying each year.
- Structured activities will be available to students at selected recess and lunch breaks.

Phase 2 - Early Intervention

- Encourage students to report bullying incidents that involve themselves or others. This can be done verbally, or in writing.
- Assure students that their confidentiality will be maintained where possible if reporting bullying.
- On a regular basis, classroom teachers and the principal will remind students and staff to report incidents of bullying.
- Parents are advised to contact their child's homeroom teacher if they become aware of a problem.
- Public recognition and rewards for positive behaviour of problems.

Phase 3 - Intervention

- Once identified, the alleged bully, victim, their parents, and witnesses will be spoken with, and all incidents or allegations of bullying will be fully investigated and documented. Impartiality, confidentiality, lack of victimisation, timeliness and support are regarded as paramount to any bullying investigation.
- Students identified by others as bullies will be informed of allegations and findings. The inappropriateness of the bullying behaviour will be fully explained to the bully. Responses such as "I was only joking" or "he's too sensitive" and the like will be explained as unacceptable. The expected guidelines for future behaviour will be clearly explained. A time of prayer will ensue if appropriate.
- Where appropriate, a restorative meeting will be conducted in an effort to repair relationships that may be damaged. The meeting will be an opportunity for remorse to be expressed by the bully, and forgiveness to be extended by the victim.
- Resolution with both parties will be encouraged, with an understanding of how they must interact appropriately in the future. Both bullies and victims will be offered support.
- The victim of the bullying will be seen regularly over the next few weeks if appropriate, and periodically after this, to establish whether the bully has modified his or her behaviour. The Parents of the victim may be contacted during this time to support the family, should the victim's response to the bullying be highly emotional.
- If the bullying behaviour does not recur, the matter will end.
- If the bully's negative behaviour persists, parents will be contacted, and a meeting arranged. At this meeting, a firm commitment to the Bullying and Harassment Policy will be asked of the student. Consequences that are consistent with the College's **Student Code of Conduct** will be discussed and implemented.
- Complaints found to be wholly or substantially vexatious (i.e. factually untrue), or maliciously made, will be seriously dealt with.

Phase 4 - Post Violation

Consequences for bullying students will be individualised, and may involve:

- Referral to the Wellbeing Team.
- Withdrawal of privileges.
- Controlled use of digital devices.
- Exclusion from class.
- Exclusion from the yard.
- Detention/s.
- School suspension.
- Behaviour Management Plan.
- Expulsion.
- Ongoing counselling from appropriate agency/ies for victim, bully, as well as witnesses and friends of both parties as needed.
- Reinforcement of positive behaviours will be made.
- Where deemed appropriate and helpful, Classroom Meetings will be conducted.
- There will be ongoing monitoring of identified bullies. This could include daily reporting to a designated teacher.

RELEVANT RESOURCES AND LEGISLATION

- [4 Critical Actions for Student Sexual Offending](#)
- Bullying, No Way! website: <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au>
- Bully Stoppers website: <https://www.vic.gov.au/bully-stoppers>
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)

- E-Smart, Allannah and Madeline Foundation, <https://www.alannahandmadeline.org.au/what-we-do/prevention-programs/esmart>
- E-Smart Digital Licence, <https://digitallicenceplus.org/>
- Kids Helpline, <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>, 1800 55 1800
- Reachout, <https://au.reachout.com/>
- School Operations Guide: Bullying Prevention and Response, Department of Education and Training, updated 02/06/2021, <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/bullying-prevention-response/policy>
- SchoolTV, <https://vcc.vic.schooltv.me/>

RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

- Child Protection: Failure to Disclose Policy
- Child Protection: Failure to Protect Policy
- Child Protection: Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safety Code of Conduct
- Complaints Policy
- Discipline Policy
- ICT and Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- Parent Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Staff Manual
- Student Code of Conduct