

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY

RATIONALE

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" (Mt 22:37-39). The latter commandment promotes mutual love, justice, dignity and respect, and is directly contrary to bullying and harassment.

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 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 actively discourages bullying
- To provide an environment free from all forms of abuse.

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.

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

- 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.

CATEGORIES

Direct Physical Bullying

- Includes, but is not limited to hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching and pushing or damaging property

Direct Verbal Bullying

- Includes, but is not limited to, name calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, discriminatory remarks, or verbal abuse.

Indirect Bullying

- Action designed to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Includes, but is not limited to lying and spreading rumours, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking, encouraging others to socially exclude someone, damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance.

Cyber Bullying

- Direct verbal or indirect bullying behaviours using digital technologies. This includes harassment via a mobile phone, setting up a defamatory personal website or deliberately excluding someone from social networking spaces.

Sexual Harassment

- Includes, but is not limited to, touching or brushing against another in a sexual manner, 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.
- This should be read in conjunction with our Mandatory Reporting and Child Safe Policies.

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.
- 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.

Parents' Role

- 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. Unfortunately, most bullying occurs in the playground and/or away from the teachers' earshot.
- 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.

Staff Role

- 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.

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.

Phase 1 - Primary Prevention

- Professional development for staff relating to bullying, harassment and proven counter measures.
- Each classroom teacher to clarify to students at the start of each year the College's bullying and harassment 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.
- On a regular basis, classroom teachers and the principal will remind students and staff to report incidents of bullying.
- Parents are advised to contact the College if they become aware of a problem.
- Public recognition and rewards for positive behaviour and resolution of problems.

Phase 3 - Intervention

- Once identified, the 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.
- 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 (ie. factually untrue), or maliciously made, will be seriously dealt with.

Phase 4 - Post Violation

Consequences for bullying students will be individually based, and may involve:

- Withdrawal of privileges
- Exclusion from class
- Exclusion from yard
- Detention/s
- School suspension
- Behaviour Management Plan
- Expulsion
- Ongoing counselling from appropriate agency/ies for both victim and bully
- 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.
- Rewards for positive behaviour may be considered beneficial.

Resources:

- Bullying, No Way! Website: <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au>
- Department of Education: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/bullying.aspx>