

Conflict Resolution Prevention and Management Policy Freedom Thinkers Education PBL Society

POLICY STATEMENT

The Society has a zero tolerance stance on abuse and expects all students, staff, Board members, parents, volunteers and other members of Freedom Thinkers Education PBL Society to be treated with respect and courtesy, in accordance with the *Code of Conduct* at all times. This abuse includes, but may not be limited to: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, harassment or bullying.

Any incident of abuse that comes to the attention of staff or administration will be actively addressed, with the intent of pursuing healing and justice for the victim/target, healing and accountability for the aggressor, and a restoration of positive relationships among all members of the school community.

POLICY RATIONALE

Any form of abuse may have a negative impact on the learning environment, and can leave individuals with long-lasting scars. The school, therefore, takes a firm and intentional position in addressing all forms of abuse.

At Freedom Thinkers Education we value respect for each other. This allows students, staff and society members to feel safe, to develop a sense of belonging, to forge friendships with peers and maintain respectful relationships. With this sense of community, teaching and learning thrive.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

I. Purpose

Our policy models a respectful environment that is intended to prevent any form of abuse from occurring and, in the event that it does occur, promote healing and justice for the victim/target, and healing and accountability for the harasser/bully.

II. Awareness

There are many underlying causes of abuse and bullying. Abuse and bullying can be blunt or subtle, and may continue undetected by anyone other than the victim/target. Myths about abuse, harassment and bullying often make it difficult to address the underlying issues.

Examples of these myths which must be debunked are:

- Bullying or harassment is “no big deal”
- We all survived it, so...
- It doesn't happen here because all of the kids come from good homes.
- Racist or sexually inappropriate jokes are not harassment or bullying; they are just a little off.
- Name-calling and verbal aggression is not bullying, because “sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me”.
- Power struggles and pecking order issues are not important issues, as they've always been in schools.
- Children can work it out on their own.
- Teachers, parents/caregivers and administrators understand what is really going on in the school all the time.
- Teaching conflict resolution or anti-bullying in the curriculum alone resolves the problem.
- Students excluded from social groups are not the school's concern.

III. Prevention

Our staff are leaders who nurture and model a school climate that fosters community, attempts to prevent all forms of abuse, and works for forgiveness, healing and reconciliation when either of these occur.

- Staff shall make students aware that they can safely and confidentially communicate complaints about abuse to any staff member.

IV. Intervention

Staff may exercise their judgment to choose, depending on circumstances, whether to start an intervention at Stage 1, or go directly to Stage 2 or Stage 3 (see below for description of steps).

Stage 1

In this stage, the issue is **addressed by the parties and the first member of staff that is aware of a problem (unless it is an abuse issue which will then be dealt with as laid out by the Child Protection Policy).**

1. Staff shall, where appropriate, encourage and support students to work out issues among themselves with guidance in conflict resolution techniques.
2. Staff may inform parents/caregivers of student(s) involved.
3. Staff shall maintain confidentiality (unless it is deemed unsafe or falls under a different Child Protection policy).
4. If the staff's guidance does not resolve the difficulty, the staff shall report the matter to the Principal.

Stage 2

In this stage, the issue is **addressed with the involvement of the Principal**.

1. The Principal shall investigate every complaint or staff report about abuse. The Principal shall interview participants and witnesses, and review evidence, as necessary.
2. The Principal shall assess if the harm is harassment, bullying, or child abuse. In the case of child abuse, refer to the *Child Protection Policy*.
3. The Principal shall lead a reconciliation process that may include the following activities:
 - Lead a session in which the specific impact of the harassment/bullying behaviour is understood by the parties involved (impact on individuals, groups, the school as a whole, etc.)
 - Discuss expectations in a specific and concrete way.
 - Explain options and encourage student(s) to suggest remedies.
 - Indicate when the Principal will check back with the student(s), staff and parents/caregivers to see if the harassment/bullying has been resolved.
4. The Principal shall document a summary of these events, including names, times and methods of communication, and retain a copy in administrative files.

Stage 3

In this stage, the issue is **addressed with a formal plan and may involve authorities outside the school**. The Principal shall take the following action:

1. Notify student(s) and parents/caregivers involved and the Board of Directors of the Society that action will be taken.
2. Assess the need to refer to the appropriate authorities.
3. Ensure that a formal plan is prepared to address healing for the victim/target and accountability for the harasser/bully. The plan shall include specific accountabilities for monitoring and follow-up.
4. Ensure that all steps in the plan are implemented in a timely manner.
5. Document a summary of these events, including names, times and methods of communication, and retain a copy in the administrative files.

V. Process and Timelines

To enable timely responses to issues as they arise, the Principal may delegate his/her authority under this policy to the Administrative Head or another teacher for periods when the Principal is unavailable.

Time is of the essence in dealing with harassment/bullying, since the victim/target may continue to be subjected to harassment/bullying while the interventions and planning are underway.

Stages 1 and 2:

Proceed in a timely manner at the discretion of staff and Principal.

Stage 3:

Once the Principal determines that the matter requires a Stage 3 response, a plan shall be completed within 5 working days.

VI. Appeals

Parties involved may consult the *Appeals Policy*.

This policy will be reviewed annually with all staff members.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are intended to enhance understanding of this policy. They are descriptive only and not intended to be used for any legal actions.

Abuse

As defined in the *Child Protection Policy*.

Bullying

“Bullying...is a pattern of repeated aggressive behaviour, with negative intent, directed from one child to another where there is a power imbalance.” (The most widely accepted definition from the work of leading Norwegian researcher, Dr, Dan Olweus)

This aggressive behaviour includes physical or verbal behaviour, and is an intentional and purposeful act meant to inflict injury or discomfort on the other person. Olweaus’ definition identifies three critical conditions that distinguish bullying from other forms of aggressive behaviours, including:

- Power: Children who bully acquire their power through physical size and strength, by status within the peer group, and by recruiting support of the peer group.
- Frequency: Bullying is not a random act. Rather, bullying is characterized by frequent and repeated attacks. It is this factor that brings about the anticipatory terror in the mind of the child being bullied that can be so detrimental and have the most debilitating long-term effects.
- Intent to harm: Children who bully generally do so with the intent to either physically or emotionally harm the other child.

Bullying can start out in seemingly playful ways, consisting of pranks, jokes, and some “roughhousing”. The incidents soon become more hurtful, degenerating into name-calling, ridicule, personal attacks, and public embarrassment. Rough and tumble “play” gives way to punching, kicking, restraining, and beatings (Ross 1998).

Bullying often involves **physical and/or verbal aggression**. It consists of open assault on another student, slapping, hitting, punching, kicking, throwing things, jostling, or poking (Ross 1998). It can also include verbal taunts or open and overt behaviour, and takes the form of teasing, criticism, gossiping, spreading malicious rumours, threatening to withdraw friendship, **social isolation**, or exclusion from the group.

See outlines below of various forms bullying can take. Please note that this information is not exhaustive. When determining whether a specific behaviour is bullying, consider whether or not it:

- is repeated over time
- is intended to hurt
- involves a power imbalance.

Adapted from the Ministry of Education programs, *Focus on Bullying* (1998) and *Focus on Harassment and Intimidation: responding to bullying in secondary schools* (2001).

Discrimination

Racial slurs: imitation of accent: put downs about cultural differences; gender harassment; insults about appearances (weight, glasses)

Harassment

Harassment includes, but is not limited to, such behaviour that has the purpose or effect of offending or demeaning an individual or group of individuals on the basis of race, colour, size, ancestry, place of origin, nationality, religion, family status, physical or mental ability, age, gender, or sexual orientation.

Harassment can be a single incident or a series of incidents. Bullying is usually a series of such incidents. The unwelcome comment or conduct does not have to be directed at a specific person for harassment to occur. Bullying is usually directed at a particular individual. Comments or conduct that tend to ridicule or disparage a group may give rise to an offensive environment and thus to harassment. When it includes an individual who is targeted, then it can be bullying.

Intimidation

Stealing: extortion: pranks: dares (public challenge): bribery; threats; locking in a confined space: swarming: stalking: anonymous phone calls: gossip; breaking confidence.

Non-verbal Body Language

Inappropriate glaring; snickering; gestures; ignoring (silent treatment); shunning; confining; surrounding; blocking; unwelcome physical contact such as inappropriate touching or patting.

Physical Aggression

Spitting; pushing; tripping; hitting; shoving; kicking; hair pulling; hiding personal possessions (lunch etc); damaging property, attacking family or friends; coercion; intimidation; threatening with a weapon; defacing property; stealing.

Social Isolation and Alienation

Shunning; exclude from a group; rumours or malicious rumour spreading; public humiliation; undermining; embarrassing gossiping; setting up a student to look foolish; spreading rumours; inciting hatred; racist, sexist or homophobic alienation; setting up someone to take the blame; display of pornographic, racist or other offensive or derogatory material.

Staff

Any individual who is employed by Freedom Thinkers Education PBL Society, including an independent contractor who has entered into an agreement with the Society.

Verbal Aggression

Inappropriate teasing; name calling; offensive remarks, inappropriate jokes or innuendo, mocking; sarcasm; putdowns; whistling/catcalls; leaving nasty or threatening notes; threatening or intimidating phone calls; giving dirty looks; racist, sexist taunting; daring another to do something dangerous; verbal threats against property; verbal threats of violence or inflicting bodily harm; coercion; extortion; includes all forms of inappropriate communication including mail, e-mail, fax, voice mail, notes, or yearbook journaling.

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