Anti- Bullying Policy and Strategy

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PREAMBLE

Bullying is the most malicious form of anti-social behaviour practised in schools.

As pupils, teachers or parents we have experienced or witnessed it and, in fact, research evidence indicates that it is more prevalent and damaging to children than most adults are prepared to accept. The perpetrators are found in nursery classes, infant, junior and secondary school: their conduct includes name-calling and teasing, jostling and punching, intimidation and exclusion, and even spreading of malicious rumours. The victims for their part suffer the physical and psychological abuse of these persons, isolation and loneliness, insecurity and anxiety arising from the threatening atmosphere which surrounds them. At its most insidious bullying focuses on the vulnerable who are regarded as being different. Sadly, there is a misplaced belief amongst some adults that if bullies are ignored they will stop bullying. Others hold to the view that it is an inevitable part of growing up which will pass without their intervention. There are even those who subscribe to the view that bullying is 'good' for children as it teaches them to 'look after themselves'.

These views are completely inconsistent with the concept of a 'caring' school or teachers who are in 'loco parentis'. Children look to adults to protect them from the excesses of more aggressive peers. Adult intervention may at times be inept or even insensitive, but it can be effective if the response is early and firm. To do nothing is at best to give the impression that bullying is not regarded as serious and at worst to condone the abuse of a member of the school community by others.

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WHAT IS BULLYING

Bullying is the willful, conscious desire to hurt another and put her/him under stress.

Firstly, the definition draws attention to the fact that bullies know what they are doing; that is, in the majority of cases it is a planned act. Bullies know that by any civilized standards of behaviour to intimidate or oppress another is wrong and yet they do it. They continue to do it because they get personal satisfaction from dominating another vulnerable and less aggressive person, and they gain social status in the eyes of their peers who follow them or are frightened to oppose them.

From the victim's viewpoint, stress is created not only by what actually happens but by the threat and fear of what might happen. The bully does not have to be physically present for the child to be anxious and distressed - he or she may not sleep or want to go to school, suffer from an upset stomach or headaches. In the classroom a child can be pre-occupied with worries about what might happen during break or lunchtime - it can fill his or her mind throughout the day so that he or she is not thinking about learning but how to escape from the bully.

Broadly speaking there are six forms of bullying:

1. Physical Bullying
2. Verbal Bullying
3. Gesture Bullying
4. Extortion Bullying
5. Exclusion Bullying
6. Cyber Bullying

For most people it is the physical form that comes to mind when they think of bullying, mainly because it is visible.

But verbal bullying can be equally hurtful and emotionally bruising. It can range from teasing and taunting to abusive comments about a person's appearance, ability, clothes and so on. The spreading of malicious rumours is another form of verbal bullying. In the classroom the worst excesses of physical and verbal bullying are discouraged by the teacher's presence, although a teacher's presence does not eliminate them.
Gesture bullying can be frightening because of the implied threat of more physical violence to follow. Opportunities for extortion bullying are greater in schools than they ever have been. Pupils come for sweets, money for the tuck shop, and bribes to do homework. They are required to have special equipment for lessons and they possess designer-labeled bags, watches and clothing all of which provide an opportunity for the bully to use physical violence and intimidation to demand payment from the victim. And as with adult extortion the bully will not be satisfied with an isolated act of intimidation.

Exclusion bullying is a subtle and covert form of bullying which is particularly common among adolescent girls. The most painful feature of exclusion is that it is carried out by so-called 'friends'. It can destroy a young person's school life, isolating her from her important peer group. School is a social meeting place and to be excluded from the intimate camaraderie of teenage culture which is germane to a young person's self-esteem can cause untold distress.

Cyber bullying is a relatively new phenomenon. When children are the target of bullying via mobile phones or the internet, they can feel alone and very misunderstood. They may not be able to identify that what is happening to them is a form of bullying, or be confident that the adults around them will understand it that way either. Previously safe and enjoyable environments and activities can become threatening and a source of anxiety.

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Why do Children Bully?

- They may feel insecure or inadequate
- They may be bullied by parents or older children at home
- They may find it difficult to fit in with other children
- They may feel they must succeed at all costs
- They may be very spoilt and go totally unchallenged at home
- They may be humiliated by others and in turn do this to other children
- They may be physically, sexually, or emotionally abused themselves

Where can Bullying Happen?

- Bullying can take place anywhere
- In school, in class, in the playground
- On the way to or from school
- At activities outside of school
- On the road, street, in the home etc
- On Internet
- The school can only investigate and deal with bullying incidents in the school, school activities and on school transport

Indications of Bullying Behaviour

The following signs/symptoms may suggest that a pupil is being bullied:

- Anxiety about traveling to and from school
- Requesting parents to drive or collect them
- Fear of going out to the school yard
- Unwillingness to go to school
- Deterioration in educational performance
- Pattern of physical illness
- Unexplained changes whether in mood or behaviour
- Visible signs of anxiety or distress – stammering, withdrawing, nightmares, difficulty in sleeping, crying, not eating, vomiting, bed wetting
- Possessions missing or damaged
- Unexplained bruising or cuts or damaged clothing
UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

As a prelude to examining the nature of bullying, it is important that we discuss two fundamental issues which are central to our understanding and management of the problem.

1. **There is bullying in all schools, regardless of age-range, sex, co-ed or not, locality, socio-economic status, or composition of intake.**
   It is the characteristics of schools which make such a categorical statement possible. They bring together large numbers of children and young people from a variety of home backgrounds and amongst them will be some who, as a result of their upbringing experiences, will be more aggressive and violent than others. They will have learned that in order to get your own way you must be prepared to be more physically intimidating and verbally abusive to your peers. It is also the case that the design and structure of schools provide ample hidden places where bullying can take place away from the eyes of adults.

2. **Bullying relates to other forms of anti-social behaviour.**
   Pupils who are aggressive towards their peers are also most likely to direct that aggression towards teachers, other adults and property; that is they will disrupt lessons, vandalize property and engage in acts of petty theft.

   The victims of bullies for their part can display an understandable unwillingness to attend school and many become reluctant attenders. A study carried out in Malta has shown that 15% of persistent absentees gave bullying as their reason for truanting. Moreover Knox (1988) holds that many children who become school phobics gave bullying as the reason for their fear.

   Thus, an anti-bullying programme will also tackle and reduce other forms of unacceptable behaviour. This optimistic message is supported by work carried out in Norway where following the Norwegian national campaign, the findings showed a 50% decrease in bully/victim problems. There was no transfer of problems to the journey to and from
school. There was also a reduction in general anti-social behaviour, such as disruption, vandalism and petty theft. Truancy figures also dropped and pupils expressed increased satisfaction with their school life, especially reflected in an enjoyment of playtimes.

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THE STRATEGY

Essential at this stage is the need to restate that it would be naive for anyone to believe that bullying can be eliminated. If we start from the premise that most bullying is hidden, then the best strategy is one that is intent on prevention. When bullying occurs, the way in which we deal with bullies and victims is crucial. If we are sensitive and subtle in our management, we will be giving the students the hidden message that they can indeed trust us to do a good job!

1. Tackling bullying through the curriculum.
The school ethos allows, and indeed encourages that topics are dealt with in a cross-subject manner.

2. Supervision.
All studies point to one conclusive statement: With adequate supervision, bullying is substantially reduced.

The point we must bear in mind is that it is not the number of supervisors out in the ground that will hamper the bully, but the visibility and vigilance of the supervisors. If a bully is going to act and can see a teacher, that in itself will deter most incidents.

3. Identifying the “At-Risk” student
The Grade Coordinators together with the School Counsellor will form a list of students who can be identified as potential bullies and/or victims. During the Grade Coordinators’ meeting, the team will meet to see what progress is being made both on a disciplinary level as well as on a counseling/parenting level. It is in this meeting that decisions such as informing parents of bullies would be decided upon. The list of At-Risk Students would be revised at the end of each term.

4. E-mail facility
All students have access to the internet so it is now patently easy for them to report any incidents they see (whether to them or to others) without the fear of being seen reporting other students.

5. Involvement of parents of bullies
Parents of bullies need to be made aware of the fact. They will know what type of bullying occurred, what strategies are being adopted and what support the School expects from them at home.
6. Librarian
Students who are ostracized or are scared to go to the playground find refuge in the library. This is not to say that all students who visit the library in break are doing so to avoid something - we know that many go there to work

7. The Nurse
Students who constantly complain of stomach aches, headaches etc, especially towards the beginning of the day, need to be identified.

8. Strategies in the Counselling Room and by those responsible for discipline.
When dealing with a group of bullies, two main principles apply.
1) To split and then reunite the group of bullies.
2) To co-operate with the bullies.
Studies have shown that bullies stick together if they are initially addressed together. Consequently, the recommendation is that the school counsellor or grade coordinator meets first with the bullies one by one. In this way, the individual bullies would be much easier to handle compared with a first meeting with the whole group. These individual meetings should be conducted sequentially so that the bullies should not get the opportunity to talk with each other. Then the counsellor should meet with all of them to reunite the group and make further plans.

The situation with the victims is different, with support and the development of techniques as the key aim. The ultimate aim is to have both bully(ies) and victim together in the counselling room.

Whether the bullies should get punished, and if so to what extent is a delicate matter and depends to a large extent on the frequency of the problem, previous history, gravity of the bullying in question and other variables.

9. Use of the Internet.
While we're all becoming fast aware of the potential and real dangers of the Internet, especially for young people, let’s not forget that it is a great source of useful and relevant information. There are some excellent websites such as www.kidscape.org.uk which go into clear detail and instructions on what to do if being bullied. This site, and others are already advertised to all students taking PSD.

10. Personal And Social Development sessions
PSD sessions start from the beginning of School life covering topics like peer
pressure, bullying and assertiveness and a range of other skills may contribute to preventing the problem from occurring. Social skills sessions are held from the early classes to provide a space where children may learn how to socialize more effectively.