SCHOOL RESPONSE TO BULLYING



Bullying is deliberately harmful behaviour, repeated over a period of time, by a person or group, who target a less powerful person as the victim. In other words, bullying occurs when one child consistently targets another for negative treatment and the victim feels powerless to stop the interaction. The hurtful actions can be: (1) physical, such as hitting and punching; (2) verbal assaults, for example, teasing, taunting, threatening and name-calling; or (3) indirect, such as psychological exclusion from friendship groups or spreading rumours.

In the first instance schools need to determine the type of incident according to the definitions of bullying, and then refer to its bullying policies and procedures to determine the course of action, including disciplinary procedures when required. Regular self-reviews of the school climate, programmes and strategies to prevent bullying are also necessary.

What process is most effective for schools when bullying occurs?

 1	Act immediately to secure the students' safety and emotional wellbeing.	•	Complete an Incident Report Form (that can be used in court as evidence for either side). Implement procedures in line with school policy.
2	The principal (or authorised person) meets with the victim and his/her parents or caregivers.	•	The principal (or authorised person) will explain the school's anti-bullying policy and outline the actions to be taken. It is important to reassure parents/caregivers and the victim that the school is taking the matter seriously and to respond as soon as possible.
3	Is the bullying a form of relational aggression? Relational aggression is behaviour that harms others through damage (or thread of damage) to relationships, feelings of acceptance, friendships, or group inclusion.	•	For this form of bullying, the social dynamic must be taken into account, with both the bullies and the victim included in the problem solving process alongside pro-social peers to help find a solution to the bullying. No Blame and Undercover are effective programmes for this type of bullying.
4	Is the bullying a form of text bullying? Text bullying is when students use text messages to threaten, harass, and/or intimidate a peer. It involves sending text messages to spread rumours or secrets, call the victim mean names, and to organise the exclusion of the victim from social activities.	•	 All messages to a mobile phone can be tracked. If the text messages were sent during school time, the school should take action. Otherwise the school should encourage the victim's parents/guardians to: Praise their child for disclosing the bullying and counsel them on how they feel about the bullying; reassure them their phone will not be taken away from them; Advise the child not to text back to the offender; When the child has received (and retained) at least four messages that were not replied to, make a complaint to the telephone company; Once the telephone company has acted on the complaint, convene a meeting between the bully (or bullies), their parents/caregivers, the victim (or victims), and their parents/caregivers.
5	Is the bullying a form of cyber bullying? Cyber bullying is the posting of destructive text or images through the internet, including social networking pages, instant messaging programmes, and through emails or message boards.	•	 Schools should advise a student who is being cyber bullied to: Ask the person to stop and not reply to any further messages; Save all messages by taking a screen shot (i.e., print screen, then paste it into a word document) which can be passed onto the school or NetSafe to show what has occurred; If the bullying is occurring through a website, note down the address and check for the site's terms of use/service and make a complaint to the website's hosts if the bully has contravened any of the rules. Bebo, Facebook, MySpace, and Windows Live have dedicated 'contact us' or 'cyber bullying pages'. For more information on how to contact a website's hosts, contact NetSafe. If the bullies were at school or using school resources, convene a meeting with all involved.
6	Does the bullying involve serious physical or sexual assault?	▶	Notify the Police and the parents/caregivers of both the perpetrator and the victim. The school should remain involved and support victim and bully through consequential processes, e.g., SAT/CAT protocols, prosecution, Family Group Conference, school action).

Figure 2: Suggested action to take for bullying