

## **Bullying Prevention Policies**

A sound bullying prevention policy is essential for coordinated and consistent efforts to reduce bullying. A policy establishes the framework for bullying prevention with a definition of the problem and a statement of importance, as well as implementation and evaluation plans. Within the education system, these policies are generally required at all levels: state, school board, and school. The policy should be developed collaboratively with participation of all groups within the school community (principal, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and community partners). The discussion below pertains to schools, but bullying prevention policies can be used as a framework for healthy and respectful relationships within any organization where children and youth come together (e.g., sports teams, summer camps, recreation centers).

### **Elements of a Bullying Prevention Policy**

The following elements of a Bullying Prevention Policy have been excerpted and adapted from the Safe School Action Team report: *Shaping Safer Schools: A bullying prevention action plan.*<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Definition and parameters***

- A statement of commitment to the importance of preventing bullying, ensuring safety for all students, and promoting respect, tolerance, and empathy.
- A clear definition of bullying in all of its forms and means;
- A statement indicating that bullying on school property, at school-sponsored events, on school buses, and through electronic means that impact students' well-being at school is unacceptable and will be addressed.
- A statement of the roles and responsibilities of: the principal and vice principal, teachers, other staff, students, parents, and other adults in the school community.

#### ***Communication of the policy***

- Inform students and other members of the school community of the bullying prevention policy.
- Include a policy statement regarding bullying in student/school handbooks, and inform students of the unacceptability of bullying, procedures for reporting bullying, and consequences for bullying.

#### ***Procedures for reporting bullying***

- Language of policy should include the positive term "reporting" to describe the socially responsible actions of those who come forward with information on bullying. By avoiding terms such as "tattling" or "ratting", there is less negative tone associated with the act of reporting, which may promote reporting and reduce the risk of retaliation.
- Provide information for concerned parents about whom to contact, starting from the classroom through to the board level.
- Provide a process that enables students and parents to report anonymously any incidents of bullying to teachers and school administrators.

- Instruct students, teachers and staff to notify school administrators when they witness acts of bullying.
- Create guidelines for teachers to investigate incidents of bullying when they receive reports of bullying.
- Identify procedures for school administrators to investigate any written reports of bullying from teachers, and to review anonymous reports.

### ***Plans for preventing and responding to bullying***

- Outline how bullying prevention education will be implemented throughout all grades in the school with the goal of building capacity for positive social relationships and a positive school climate.
- Bullying prevention activities should be integrated into curriculum expectations at each grade level. With links to curriculum, teachers will be able to promote cooperation, concern for others, social problem solving, conflict resolution, tolerance, and respect.
- Include training for school staff to prepare them to intervene with those students who bully, to support those students who are victimized, and to educate bystanders on their roles.
- Describe interventions for students who bully, with a range of consequences for bullying from positive educational interventions through to exclusion from school for extreme and intractable cases.
- Identify procedures to notify the parents/guardians of a student who is bullied about what action is being taken to prevent any further acts of bullying;
- Identify procedures to notify the parents/guardians of a student who bullies of the school's response, and the consequences that will result from further acts of bullying;
- For any student who reports a bullying incident, specify strategies for protection from retaliation.

### ***Oversight and monitoring the bullying prevention policy***

- Create a bullying prevention committee comprised of administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students, and community partners. This committee meets regularly to review policy implementation and monitor effectiveness.
- Specify an evaluation procedure to monitor the effectiveness of policy, specific bullying prevention programs, and intervention strategies used to address bullying problems.
- Collect data on the number of reported incidents of bullying, the number of incidents that were verified, and the strategies used to address them.
- Implement a survey that is administered once or twice a year to determine the prevalence, nature, location, and responses to bullying problems.

Bullying prevention is the responsibility of all members of the school community. The key mechanism for bullying prevention lies not in the words of the policy, but in the moment-to-moment interactions within the school. The policy serves as a guideline for creating a positive school climate and a statement of commitment to respectful relationships. Once a bullying prevention policy is in place, the principal is responsible for strong leadership and support of the policy, and the school staff is responsible for

responding to bullying, as well as integrating learning about healthy relationships into curriculum and through specific programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Safe Schools Action Team (2005). Shaping safer schools: A bullying prevention action plan. Report of Safe Schools Action Team to the Ontario Minister of Education. Toronto: Queen's Printer.