

# BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY



POLICY NUMBER: 

B16	005
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## *What is bullying and harassment?*

### **Definition of Bullying**

Bullying is repeated verbal, physical, social or psychological behaviour that is harmful and involves the misuse of power by an individual or group towards one or more persons. Cyber-bullying refers to bullying through information and communication technologies such as the internet and mobile phones. Conflict or fights between equals and single incidents are not defined as bullying. Bullying of any form or for any reason can have longterm effects on those involved including bystanders.

### **Definition of Harassment**

Harassment is behaviour that targets an individual or group due to their identity, race, culture or ethnic origin; religion; physical characteristics; gender; sexual orientation; marital, parenting or economic status; age; ability or disability and that offends, humiliates, intimidates or creates a hostile environment. Harassment may be an ongoing pattern of behaviour, or it may be a single act.

### **It may be helpful to also know that:**

#### **Discrimination**

Discrimination occurs when people are treated less favourably than others because of their race, culture or ethnic origin; religion; physical characteristics; gender; sexual orientation; marital, parenting or economic status; age; ability or disability. Discrimination is often ongoing and commonly involves exclusion or rejection, and may be subject to investigation under the Equal Opportunity Act 1984.

#### **Violence**

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person(s) that results in psychological harm, injury or in some cases death. Violence may involve provoked or unprovoked acts and can be a single incident, a random act or can occur over time. This may constitute an assault, which is a police matter.

#### **Bullying and harassment:**

- may involve hitting, kicking, pinching (physical); name-calling, teasing, threats (verbal); notes, graffiti, text messages, sending filmed or photographed images, comments on social networking sites (visual/written); stand-over tactics, gestures (psychological); rumours, putdowns (social exclusion); physical, verbal or nonverbal sexual conduct (sexual).
- may be done directly (e.g. face to face) or indirectly (e.g. via the internet or mobile phones)

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- involves the misuse of power and may be motivated by jealousy, distrust, fear, misunderstanding or lack of knowledge
- has an element of threat
- can continue over time
- is often hidden from adults
- will be sustained if adults or peers do not take action.

**Note:** Under recent amendments to the South Australian Equal Opportunity Act 1984 it is unlawful for a student 16 years of age and over to sexually harass another student or staff member. Students and staff should have their complaints addressed through the school grievance procedure, but can make a complaint to the Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia.

## ***How can I tell if my child is being bullied or harassed?***

Children affected by bullying and harassment may not talk about it with their teachers or school counsellor. They may be afraid that it will only make things worse, or that it is wrong to tell tales or 'dobin' other students. When people are bullied or harassed they may feel angry, embarrassed, frightened, humiliated or uncomfortable, scared or unsafe. That is why, as parent or care-giver, you have an important part to play in helping the school, and your child, deal with bullying and harassment.

Some signs a child or young person is being bullied or harassed may be:

- Reduced ability to concentrate and learn
- Refusal to attend school, excuses not to go
- Unexplained cuts, bruises, or scratches
- Stolen or damaged possessions/clothing
- Headaches or stomach aches
- Asking for extra pocket money or food
- Acting out, tearfulness, sadness, lack of interest in usual activities
- Unwillingness to discuss or secrecy about their online communications (e.g. mobile phone texts, Facebook comments)

## ***What should I do if I think my child is being bullied or harassed?***

If you think your child is being bullied or harassed you may feel anxious or sad. However, it is important that you try to stay calm and take the following steps:

- Listen calmly to your child
- Let your child know that telling you about the bullying or harassment was the right thing to do.
- Find out:
  - What happened
  - Who was involved
  - Where it happened
  - If anyone else saw, read, or heard it.
- Talk with your child about what should be done.

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- Make a note of what your child tells you to help you when you talk to the school.

**Note:** These steps are also useful if you think that your child:

- has been involved in bullying or harassment of others
- as a bystander, may be affected by bullying or harassment of others
- as a bystander, has information and is concerned about other students being bullied

## ***Talk to the school***

Your child may not want you to talk about the bullying or harassment. However, it is important you let the school know so the problem can be worked out together:

- Make a time to speak to your child's teacher, the counsellor, deputy principal or principal.
- Be as clear as possible about what happened.
- Ask the school what else you can do to help your child and the school to stop the bullying or harassment from happening.
- Keep in touch with the school, and let the staff know if problems continue.
- You may want the school to take action that does not identify your son/daughter.

## ***What will the school do?***

All DECS schools work within the guidelines of the School Discipline Policy:

*DECS, school communities, services and agencies work together to create learning communities which are:*

- *safe*
- *inclusive*
- *conducive to learning*
- *free from harassment and bullying*

Each school has an anti-bullying and harassment policy and grievance procedure, either as an individual statement or as part of the school's behaviour code. You can ask for a copy of the school's policy or code. A range of consequences may be used for students who bully and harass, including time spent out of the classroom or playground. Schools can initiate a Student Development Plan in response to the unacceptable behaviour of students. Principals can suspend and/or exclude students from school, even if the behaviour occurred outside of school hours or off site, including cyber-bullying. Police may also need to be contacted if the behaviour is considered illegal (e.g. sexting).

Staff may also:

- talk with students involved and help them to solve the problem teach students about dealing with conflict and anger
- teach students about care and respect for themselves and others. Your child will be supported, and in many, but not all schools, may access school-based counselling services. A student support plan can be developed by the school in partnership with you

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and your child. The school can seek support from the services available in the Regional Office.

### ***What if the bullying or harassment continues?***

If you have tried these suggestions, including keeping in touch with the school, and your child is still being bullied or harassed, contact your local regional office and talk to the Manager, Regional Support Services or the Regional Director.

The telephone number for your regional office is available from the general switchboard for the Department of Education and Children's Services on 82261000. Regional office staff will work with you and the school and try to solve the problem.

### ***Need more information?***

The following telephone numbers and websites can provide support and information about bullying and harassment for parents and young people:

- DECS Parent Helpline: 1800 222 696
  - DECS information for parents: [www.decs.sa.gov.au](http://www.decs.sa.gov.au) > Parents and Community > Health and Wellbeing > Bullying and harassment.
- See also Cyber-safety
- Australian Communication and Media Authority's advice for parents [www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au)
  - DECS information for students: [www.decs.sa.gov.au](http://www.decs.sa.gov.au) > Student Information, >Your Health and Wellbeing > Bullying and harassment
  - Bullying No Way: [www.bullyingnoway.com.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au)
  - Children, Youth and Women's Health Services [www.cywhs.sa.gov.au](http://www.cywhs.sa.gov.au)
  - Information for parents and young people: <http://www.cyh.com/Default.aspx?p=1>
  - Parent Helpline: 1300 364 100
  - Youth Healthline: 1300 131 719
  - Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
  - Youth beyondblue [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)
  - Reach Out <http://au.reachout.com/>
  - Parenting SA Parent Easy Guides [www.parenting.sa.gov.au](http://www.parenting.sa.gov.au)
  - Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia: equal opportunity, human rights and laws, complaints: [www.eoc.sa.gov.au](http://www.eoc.sa.gov.au)
- Phone: 82071977