



Mernda Hills Christian College

Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy

Document Control

| Revision Number | Review Date | Implementation Date | Description of Changes | Prepared By | Approved By |
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| Gilson College – Mernda | | | | | |
| | Sep 2021 | Oct 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">General review | Exec Leaders | Gilson College Council |
| Mernda Hills Christian College | | | | | |
| 1 | May 2023 | Jan 2024 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">General reviewAdded ref. to 'Harassment' throughout | Exec Leaders | College Executive Leaders |
| 2 | Apr 2025 | May 2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">General review | Principal | College Executive Leaders |

Rationale

Mernda Hills Christian College adopts a 'Zero Tolerance Policy' towards all forms of bullying and harassment. All members of the College have the right to learn in an environment that is free from fear, intimidation and harassment. Students have the right to have respect from others, to feel secure in their school environment and be treated with understanding. All staff working with students have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent students from reasonable harm. This includes steps to prevent foreseeable physical or psychosocial harm as a result of bullying.

Bullying and harassment is not always easy to identify, and it may not seem serious, but it can have long-lasting effects. Students, parents, and staff of Mernda Hills Christian College are expected to be aware of the importance of preventing this behaviour to maintain an environment which is safe for all. In addition to paying attention to bullying and harassing behaviour in the College, particular attention is paid to the online safety of all users of the College technology resources.

Implementation

Bullying Defined

Bullying is a form of abuse. It is defined as:

1. An ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.
2. Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records).
3. Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

What bullying is not

Many distressing behaviours are not examples of bullying even though they are unpleasant and often require teacher intervention and management.

1. Mutual conflict:
 - a. involves an argument or disagreement between people but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution.
 - b. Unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly in retaliation.
2. Social rejection or dislike:
 - a. is not bullying unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.
3. Single-episode acts:
 - a. Nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying.

- b. If someone is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied.
- c. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different people is not the same as bullying. However, this does not mean that single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression should be ignored or condoned as these are unacceptable behaviours.

What is Harassment?

Harassment occurs when a person is treated less favourably on the basis of certain characteristics, such as sex (gender), religious belief, ethical belief, colour, race, ethnic or national origin, disability, and sexual orientation. Within this context the College bases its ultimate determination of behaviour upon the Bible and the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

General

Students may be the subject of bullying and harassing behaviour by other students or by staff, and staff may also be the subject of bullying and harassing behaviour by students. Bullying between staff is covered in the *Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy*.

Mernda Hills Christian College acknowledges that racism and harassment due to a person's personal vulnerabilities such as disability are examples of bullying behaviour that warrant special mention. They may take the form of any of the types of bullying behaviour described below and are not tolerated.

Under regulations 40 and 41 of the Education Regulations 1997, the Principal may suspend or exclude a student who acts in a manner that threatens the safety or wellbeing of a student or member of staff, or another person associated with the school. These regulations do not preclude an event that occurs outside of school hours or off site.

Identification

1. Bullying and harassment can take many forms, for example:
 - Physical
 - Any unwanted physical contact eg. hitting, kicking, punching, pushing, shoving or spitting
 - Making rude/inappropriate gestures
 - Taking or damaging something that belongs to someone else
 - Making someone do something they don't want to do eg. forcing others to hand over food, money or something which belongs to them
 - Verbal
 - Name calling, mimicking, teasing or threatening
 - Making fun of someone because of their appearance, physical characteristics or cultural background or actions
 - Cyber
 - Online name calling, teasing or threatening
 - Use of vulgar, obscene, abusive or inappropriate language
 - Revealing personal details or revealing information to others
 - Disrupting the network or the data of others
 - Creation or distribution of deepfakes
 - Sharing inappropriate material with others

- Creation of sites with a deleterious impact on others
- Creating a demeaning alias to target individuals, social networking sites or notes
- Psychological
 - persistent episodes of excluding from activities
 - ignoring
 - “keeping-off”
 - threatening and aggressive staring

Indirect bullying is often harder to recognise and can be carried out behind the bullied person's back. It is designed to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Indirect bullying includes:

- lying and spreading rumours
- playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
- encouraging others to socially exclude someone
- damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance

2. Bullying can also include behaviours that constitute racism or sexual harassment. For example:

- racial slurs
- comments or jokes that put racial groups down (eg. ‘Where are you really from?’)
- exclusion or unfair treatment based on race
- sexual jokes or taunting
- remarking about someone's appearance or clothing

Prevention and Training

All members of the College community have a responsibility to respond to incidents of bullying. The College will work to:

- Provide a supportive learning environment which encourages positive, respectful relationships between all members
- Provide curriculum material to help develop appropriate social skills, relationships and resilience
- Provide wellbeing and pastoral care support to students dealing with conflict resolution

The methods used by the College to discourage bullying and harassment will vary, with new initiatives being introduced when appropriate. These training and prevention methods include:

1. Staff will be provided with professional development opportunities on the nature of bullying and harassment what action to take against these behaviours
2. Students will be made aware that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated, and that bullying and harassing behaviours will be managed through the *Student Behaviour Policy* and the tiers of the College *PB4L frameworks*
3. Classroom teachers clarify with students the College *Anti-bullying and Harassment Policy* at the beginning of each year in student friendly terms
4. Students engage in anti-bullying programs that focus on resilience, bystander behaviours and responsible reporting
5. Health curriculum content includes a focus on anti-bullying
6. A safe, bully-free environment is promoted in Chapel programs, assemblies and homeroom / worship activities

7. The employment of chaplaincy and wellbeing staff to support both targets and perpetrators of bullying
8. Sanctioning students with appropriate consequences who repeatedly use racial, homophobic, misogynistic or discriminatory language and gestures - even if meant in a friendly jovial manner.
9. Monitoring staff and parent language while engaged in College activities to ensure appropriate language is used.
10. Encouraging staff to actively supervise whilst on duty to ensure there is a pervasive sense of staff presence
11. Supporting teachers to adopt behaviour management techniques that discourage opportunities for bullying behaviours, including the use of PB4L and the College's *Student Behaviour Management Policy*.
12. An anonymous feedback survey, with elements relating to bullying and harassment, is conducted annually to determine the extent of bullying at the College
13. The Leadership and Pastoral Care teams regularly analyse data gathered from a variety of sources including the annual feedback survey
14. Students, parents and staff are encouraged to openly talk about bullying and harassment – what it is, how it affects us and what we can do about it
15. Conducting exit interviews

In supporting the prevention of bullying, College students are expected to:

- Tell if they are being bullied or if they see someone else being bullied – both at school, in transit and online
- Help and support someone who is being bullied
- Refrain from bullying and harassing others
- Not allow bullying threats to put them off helping others

Parents are encouraged to:

- Familiarise themselves with the College *Anti-bullying and Harassment Policy*
- Teach their children traditional values – honesty, tolerance, right and wrong, and resilience
- Be prepared to learn more by attending information sessions or using resources that are provided
- Watch for signs that their child may be being bullied or harassed
- Support their child emotionally
- Speak to their child's classroom or homeroom teacher if they suspect their child is being bullied or harassed
- Instruct their children to "tell" if they are bullied or harassed

Intervention

An incident of bullying may be reported by a student, parent, visitor or member of staff. Parents are encouraged to contact the College and speak first with the classroom or homeroom teacher if they suspect a problem or issue with bullying or harassment. In all circumstances, the College:

- Takes bullying incidents seriously

- Provides assurance to the target that they are not at fault and their confidentiality will be respected
- Takes time to properly investigate the facts and any concerns of individuals involved
- Maintains appropriate records and will escalate its response when dealing with persistent bullies

All incidents where behaviours that go against the values and expectations of the College are identified, including bullying, are followed up according to the *College Student Behaviour Policy* and *PB4L Frameworks*. Key steps include:

1. The students directly involved and any witnesses will be interviewed, and all incidents fully investigated and documented.
2. Once this has occurred, the focus is on achieving expected acceptable behaviour from the students involved. This may involve a combination of consequences and support.
3. All students directly involved (those displaying inappropriate behaviours and those impacted by the behaviours) are offered support, which may include counselling.
4. If an allegation of bullying or harassment is substantiated, parents will be contacted and interventions and/or consequences implemented consistent with the *College Student Behaviour Policy*.
5. Should the bullying continue after the Restorative Practice has occurred, appropriate action, which may include suspension or expulsion, will be taken at the discretion of the Principal and Discipline Committee.

Staff Responsibilities

All staff are responsible to:

- Model appropriate behaviour at all times
- Deal with reported and observed instances of bullying in accordance with this policy
- Ensure any incident reported to them is recorded appropriately
- Be vigilant in monitoring students to minimise instances of bullying
- Acknowledge the right of parents/carers to speak with a staff member if they believe their child is being bullied.

Anti-bullying posters may be posted in strategic locations in the College to promote appropriate behaviour and encourage students to respect individual differences and diversity.

Where a staff member breaches this policy, the College will take appropriate disciplinary action.

Related Policies and Processes

- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- ICT Acceptable Use Agreements
- Student Behaviour Policy
- PB4L frameworks
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safe Protection Code of Conduct
- Duty of Care Policy
- Digital Technologies Policy
- Mandatory Reporting Policy
- Restraint and Seclusion Policy

Relevant Documentation or Legislation

- Disability Discrimination and Other Human Rights Legislation Amendment Act 2009
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic.)