



Northern School for Autism

"Learning for Life"

BULLYING PREVENTION & RESPONSE POLICY

PURPOSE

Northern School for Autism is committed to providing a safe and respectful learning environment where bullying will not be tolerated.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- explain the definition of bullying so that there is shared understanding amongst all members of the NSA community
- make clear that any form of bullying at NSA will not be tolerated
- outline the strategies and programs in place at NSA to build a positive school culture and prevent bullying behaviour. The staff at NSA teach explicit and individualised social skills programs to support the student to develop and maintain friendships.
- ask that everyone in our school community be alert to signs and evidence of bullying behaviour, and accept responsibility to report bullying behaviour to school staff
- ensure that all reported incidents of bullying are appropriately investigated and addressed
- ensure that support is provided to students who may be affected by bullying behaviour (including victims, bystanders and perpetrators)
- seek parental and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour at NSA

When responding to bullying behaviour, NSA aims to:

- be proportionate, consistent and responsive
- find a constructive and positive solution for everyone
- stop the bullying from happening again
- restore the relationships between the students involved.

NSA acknowledges that school staff owe a duty of care to students to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm, which can include harm that may be caused by bullying behaviour.

SCOPE

This policy addresses how NSA aims to prevent and respond to student bullying behaviour. NSA recognises that there are many other types of inappropriate student behaviours that do not meet the definition of bullying which are also unacceptable at our school. These other inappropriate behaviours will be managed in accordance with our *Student Wellbeing & Engagement Policy*.

This policy applies to all school activities, including camps and excursions.

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POLICY

Definitions

Bullying

In 2018 the Education Council of the Council of Australia Governments endorsed the following definition of bullying for use by all Australian schools:

Bullying is 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.

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).

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.

Bullying has three main features:

- It involves a misuse of power in a relationship
- It is ongoing and repeated, and
- It involves behaviours that can cause harm.

Bullying can be:

1. *direct physical bullying* – e.g. hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.
2. *direct verbal bullying* – e.g. name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, verbal abuse.
3. *indirect bullying* – e.g. spreading rumours, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking, encouraging others to socially exclude a person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.

Cyberbullying is direct or indirect bullying behaviours using digital technology. For example, via a mobile device, computers, chat rooms, email, social media, etc. It can be verbal, written or include use of images, video and/or audio.

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Other distressing and inappropriate behaviours

Many distressing behaviours may not constitute bullying even though they are unpleasant. Students who are involved in or who witness any distressing behaviours should report their concerns to school staff and our school will follow the *Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy*.

Mutual conflict involves an argument or disagreement between people with no imbalance of power. In incidents of mutual conflict, generally, both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the issue. Unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly in retaliation.

Social rejection or dislike is not bullying unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.

Single-episode acts of harassment, nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. However, single episodes of harassment, nastiness or physical aggression are not acceptable behaviours at our school and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. NSA will use its *Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy* to guide a response to single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression.

Harassment is language or actions that are demeaning, offensive or intimidating to a person. It can take many forms, including sexual harassment and disability harassment. Further information about these two forms of harassment, including definitions, is set out in our *Inclusion and Diversity Policy*. Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated at NSA and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. NSA will use its *Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy* to guide a response to students demonstrating harassing behaviour, unless the behaviour also constitutes bullying, in which case the behaviour will be managed in accordance with this *Bullying Prevention & Response Policy*.

BULLYING PREVENTION

NSA has a number of programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture. We strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling and encouraging behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness and respect.

Bullying prevention at NSA is proactive and is supported by research that indicates that a whole school, multifaceted approach is the most effective way to prevent and address bullying. At our school:

- We have a positive school environment that provides safety, security and support for students and promotes positive relationships and wellbeing.
- We strive to build strong partnerships between the school, families and the broader community that means all members work together to ensure the safety of students.
- Teachers are encouraged to incorporate classroom management strategies that discourage bullying and promote positive behaviour.
- A range of year level incursions and programs are planned for each year to raise awareness about bullying and its impacts.
- In the classroom, our social and emotional learning curriculum teaches students what constitutes bullying and how to respond to bullying behaviour assertively. This promotes resilience, assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving.

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- The Peer Support Program - at NSA groups will be formed to encourage social interaction. These groups will be based on student interests eg. Lego Club, Boys/Girls Groups, Sensory Play, AAC group
- Students are encouraged to look out for each other and to talk to teachers and older peers about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed.

For further information about our engagement and wellbeing initiatives, please refer to our *Student Wellbeing & Engagement Policy*.

INCIDENT RESPONSE

Reporting concerns to Northern School for Autism

Bullying complaints will be taken seriously and responded to sensitively at NSA.

Students who may be experiencing bullying behaviour, or students who have witnessed bullying behaviour, are encouraged to report their concerns to school staff as soon as possible.

Our ability to effectively reduce and eliminate bullying behaviour is greatly affected by students and/or parents and carers reporting concerning behaviour as soon as possible, so that the responses implemented by the school are timely and appropriate in the circumstances.

We encourage students to speak to their class teacher. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff including teachers, wellbeing staff or the school social worker.

Parents or carers at NSA who may develop concerns that their child is involved in, or has witnessed bullying behaviour should contact the Principal, Pamela Mathieson, on 9462 3480 or by email directed to pamela.mathieson@education.vic.gov.au.

Investigations

When notified of alleged bullying behaviour, school staff are required to:

1. record the details of the allegations in the incident register, and
2. inform the Principal.

The Principal is responsible for investigating allegations of bullying in a timely and sensitive manner. To appropriately investigate an allegation of bullying, the Principal may:

- speak to those involved in the allegations, including the target/s, the students allegedly engaging in bullying behaviour/s and any witnesses to the incidents
- speak to the parents of the students involved
- speak to the teachers of the students involved
- take detailed notes of all discussions for future reference
- obtain written statements from all or any of the above.

All communications with the Principal, in the course of investigating an allegation of bullying, will be managed sensitively. Investigations will be completed as quickly as possible to allow for the behaviours to be addressed in a timely manner.

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The objective of completing a thorough investigation into the circumstances of alleged bullying behaviour is to determine the nature of the conduct and the students involved. A thorough understanding of the alleged bullying will inform staff about how to most effectively implement an appropriate response to that behaviour. Serious bullying, including serious cyberbullying, is a criminal offence and may be referred to Victoria Police. For more information, see: [Brodie's Law](#).

Responses to bullying behaviours

When the Principal has sufficient information to understand the circumstances of the alleged bullying and the students involved, a number of strategies may be implemented to address the behaviour and support affected students in consultation with the Student Wellbeing Team, teachers, ES Staff or, Assistant Principal, as appropriate.

There are a number of factors that will be considered when determining the most appropriate response to the behaviour. When making a decision about how to respond to bullying behaviour NSA will consider:

- the age and maturity of the students involved
- the severity and frequency of the bullying, and the impact it has had on the target student
- whether the student/s engaging in the bullying behaviour have displayed similar behaviour before
- whether the bullying took place in a group or one-to-one context
- whether the students engaging in bullying behaviour demonstrates insight or remorse for their behaviour
- the alleged motive of the behaviour, including any element of provocation.

The Principal may implement all, or some of the following responses to bullying behaviours:

- Offer counselling support to the target student or students, including referral to the Student Wellbeing Team, SSS, an external provider as appropriate.
- Offer counselling support to the students engaging in bullying behaviour, including referral to the Student Wellbeing Team, SSS, an external provider as appropriate.
- Offer counselling support to affected students, including witnesses and/or friends of the target student, including referral to the Student Wellbeing Team, SSS, an external provider as appropriate.
- Facilitate a restorative practice meeting with all or some of the students involved. The objective of restorative practice is to repair relationships that have been damaged by bringing about a sense of remorse and restorative action on the part of the person who has bullied someone and forgiveness by the person who has been bullied.
- Facilitate a mediation between some or all of the students involved to help to encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour and explore underlying reasons for conflict or grievance. Mediation is only suitable if all students are involved voluntarily and demonstrate a willingness to engage in the mediation process.
- Facilitate a process using the Support Group Method, involving the target student(s), the students engaging in the bullying behaviour and a group of students who are likely to be supportive of the target(s).
- Implement a Method of Shared Concern process with all students involved in the bullying.
- Facilitate a Student Support Group meeting and/or Behaviour Support Plan for affected students.

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- Prepare an Individual Management Plan and/or Behaviour Support Plans restricting contact between target and students engaging in bullying behaviour.
- Provide discussion and/or mentoring for different social and emotional learning competencies of the students involved.
- Monitor the behaviour of the students involved for an appropriate time and take follow up action if necessary.
- Implement ILP goals to teach appropriate communication skills, personal and interpersonal skills and strategies to reinforce positive behaviours.
- Implement disciplinary consequences for the students engaging in bullying behaviour, which may include removal of privileges, detention, suspension and/or expulsion consistent with our Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy, the Ministerial Order on Suspensions and Expulsions and any other relevant Department policy.

NSA understands the importance of monitoring and following up on the progress of students who have been involved in or affected by bullying behaviour. Where appropriate, school staff will also endeavour to provide parents/carers with updates on the management of bullying incidents.

The Principal is responsible for maintaining up to date records of the investigation of and responses to bullying behaviour.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The following websites and resources provide useful information on prevention and responding to bullying, as well as supporting students who have been the target of bullying behaviours:

- [Brodie's Law](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/advicesheetbrodieslaw.aspx)
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/advicesheetbrodieslaw.aspx>
- [Bully Stoppers & Bullying. No way!](https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/) <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/>
- [Kids Helpline](https://kidshelpline.com.au/) <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>
- [Lifeline](https://www.lifeline.org.au/) <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>
- [Student Wellbeing Hub](https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/) <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/>
- [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](https://www.esafety.gov.au/) <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>
- [Australian Student Wellbeing Framework](https://www.dese.gov.au/student-resilience-and-wellbeing/australian-student-wellbeing-framework)
<https://www.dese.gov.au/student-resilience-and-wellbeing/australian-student-wellbeing-framework>
- Please refer also to the school's Statement of Values and School Philosophy, the *Complaints, Parents Policy*, the *Duty of Care Policy*, *Mobile Phones - Students Policy*, *Student Wellbeing & Engagement Policy*, the *Inclusion & Diversity Policy* and the Child Safe Standards.

Reference:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/bullying-prevention-response>

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REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was first developed in this format in May 2019 and updated in September 2020.

This policy was last updated in August 2021 and is scheduled for review in August 2023.

EVALUATION

A mandatory policy

This policy will be reviewed every two years or earlier as required following an incident or analysis of new research or school data relating to bullying, to ensure that the policy remains up to date, practical and effective

Data will be collected through:

- discussion with students/parents or carers
- the regular staff survey
- assessment of school-based data, including the number of reported incidents of bullying in each year level and the effectiveness of the responses implemented.

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with staff, School Council, the school community and parent groups.

The School Council was consulted and recommendations, if any, were made by 9th September 2021.

This August 2021 update was presented to School Council for noting on 9th September 2021.

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