

# Building Respectful and Safe Schools

A resource for school communities



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Education and Early Childhood  
Development,  
2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne,  
Victoria, 3002.

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# 1. About this resource



***Any situation where a member of the school community feels unsafe at school due to bullying or any form of unacceptable behaviour such as harassment, discrimination or a threat or act of violence is not tolerated in Victorian government schools.***

Creating and maintaining respectful and safe school environments is a priority for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the Department). Safe, secure and stimulating learning environments are a platform to achieving the vision of the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*<sup>1</sup> that every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities. A respectful and safe learning environment is an essential characteristic of a school that is engaging and inclusive of a diverse range of learners.

Anti-bullying guidelines, *Safe Schools are Effective Schools*, were introduced in Victorian government schools in 2006 and provided clear advice on strategies to prevent, and respond to, bullying. Since this time, there have been significant developments in approaches to prevent bullying and support children and young people to develop the knowledge and skills to respect and look after themselves and others in the school environment and the broader community. This includes the challenges children and young people face with increasing use of digital technologies and participation in the online world.

*Building Respectful and Safe Schools: A resource for school communities* updates and replaces the *Safe Schools are Effective Schools* guidelines, providing renewed guidance to promote and support safe and respectful learning environments. This encompasses a broad definition of the school environment including digital learning spaces, communication using digital technologies, and situations when students are outside the classroom, such as travelling to and from school and in the playground.

This resource is a supporting document to the *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*<sup>2</sup> (the Student Engagement Policy Guidelines) which require all Victorian government schools to develop and apply a Student Engagement Policy articulating the rights, responsibilities and shared expectations of everyone in the school community. This resource provides detailed information and strategies to assist schools in implementing and continuously improving their Student Engagement Policy to be inclusive of processes and strategies to prevent and respond to incidents of bullying and other forms of unacceptable behaviour.

<sup>1</sup> *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, Victorian Government, 2008. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/blueprint2008/default.htm>

<sup>2</sup> *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Guidelines*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement/default.htm>



This is a resource for all members of the school community - principals, teachers and other school staff, students, families, school councils and individuals and organisations within the community. It provides guidance that can be useful in supporting the school community to work together to provide a respectful and safe school and broader community.

The resource includes:

- Section 2: Roles and responsibilities of the whole school community.
- Section 3: Definitions of bullying and other forms of unacceptable behaviour.
- Section 4: Student Engagement Policy requirements.
- Section 5: Characteristics and strategies for respectful and safe schools.
- Section 6: Strategies for schools to respond to bullying and unacceptable behaviour including preventing cyberbullying, responding to homophobic bullying and incidents that have a serious impact on individuals or the school.
- Section 7: Advice for parents and carers to respond to bullying and unacceptable behaviour.
- Section 8: Useful resources and further information.

## 2. A shared responsibility



Schools should be safe places for everyone - students, teachers and other staff, families and members of the local community. The involvement and commitment of the whole school community is required to achieve a culture in which safe and respectful schools are everyone's concern and responsibility.

**Teachers and other staff** in a school have a responsibility to ensure students are safe within the school and broader online learning environments.

They should make certain there is every opportunity for students to alert teachers and other staff to any concerns they have about safety or wellbeing.

School leaders and leadership teams have a vital role in shaping the culture of a school, the vision for student wellbeing and ensuring that effective policies, procedures and strategies are in place to respond to bullying and unacceptable behaviour. Teachers and schools leaders can also provide opportunities for students to have a voice in developing policies and programs.

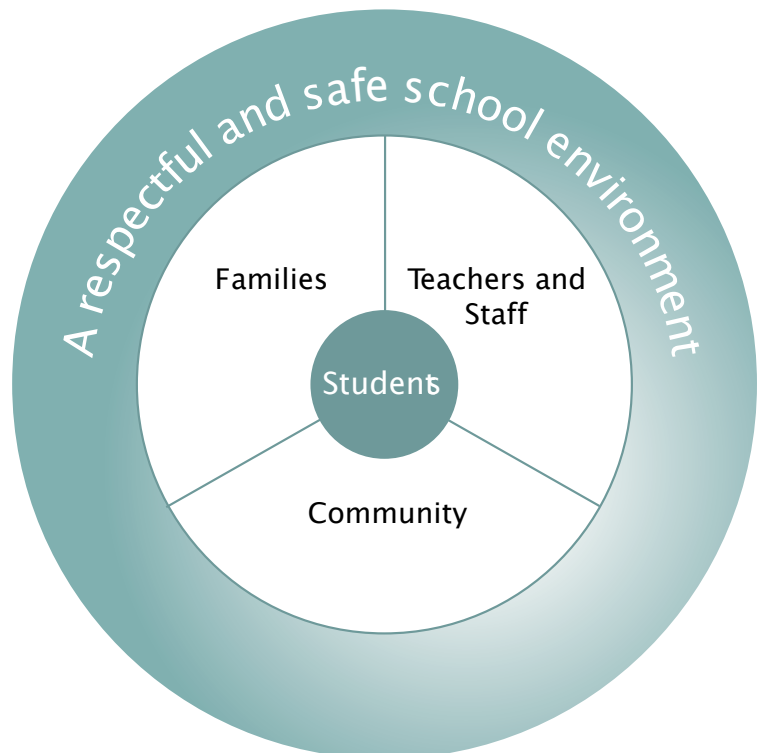
Most **students** dislike bullying and unacceptable behaviour and want it to stop. All students, whether they are being bullied or targeted, a bystander, or are bullying or harming others, are able to play a role in preventing and responding to concerns about safety and wellbeing. This can involve talking to a teacher about what is happening so they can work together to resolve the issue. Students should be actively involved in developing and implementing student wellbeing policies and programs designed to promote respectful relationships and prevent bullying and unacceptable behaviour.

**Families** are the first educators of children and young people and they continue to influence their children's learning and development before, during and after schooling has been completed. While schools have an important responsibility for student safety, learning and skill development, parents, carers, guardians and extended family members have a primary role in modelling and teaching children and young people about appropriate behaviour and respectful relationships. It is

important that families reinforce positive behaviours and anti-bullying messages in the home. Effective schools have high levels of family involvement, providing opportunities to work together in partnership to create and maintain safe and supportive school settings.

Organisations and individuals within the **local community** also have a role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Schools and community organisations frequently form partnerships to implement strategies to support student wellbeing including peer support and student leadership programs, community service, cybersafety and bullying prevention initiatives and the sharing of special knowledge and expertise. Community members also make an essential contribution to effective schools through involvement in school governance, support and volunteering.

*Figure 1:  
A shared responsibility  
for respectful and safe  
school environments*



## 3. What is bullying and unacceptable behaviour?

*Building Respectful and Safe Schools* supports schools to prevent and respond to bullying and all forms of unacceptable behaviour including harassment, discrimination or violence. The definitions below are adapted from *Bullying. No Way!*<sup>3</sup>, the joint Australian Education Authorities website, developed by Australia's educational communities including the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

### 3.1 Bullying

Bullying is when someone, or a group of people, deliberately upset or hurt another person or damage their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion. There is an imbalance of power in incidents of bullying with the bully or bullies having more power at the time due to age, size, status or other reasons.

Bullying may occur because of perceived differences such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, body size and physical appearance, age or economic status. Bullying may be motivated by jealousy, distrust, fear, misunderstanding or lack of knowledge. It can continue over time, is often hidden from adults and will probably continue if no action is taken.

#### Types of bullying

There are four broad types of bullying:

**Direct physical bullying:** includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching and pushing or damaging property.

**Direct verbal bullying:** includes name calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.

**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
- mimicking
- encouraging others to socially exclude someone
- damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance.

**Cyberbullying:** is direct verbal or indirect bullying behaviours using digital technologies. This includes harassment via a mobile phone, setting up a defamatory personal website or deliberately excluding someone from social networking spaces.

<sup>3</sup> Access at *Bullying. No Way!* at <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au>







### What bullying is not

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

**Mutual conflict:** involves an argument or disagreement between people but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution. 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 nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If someone is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. 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.

### 3.2 Unacceptable behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour in the school environment refers to a wide range of behaviours that are not acceptable or appropriate, as outlined in a school's Student Engagement Policy. This includes harassment, discrimination and a threat or act of violence.

#### Harassment

Harassment is behaviour intended to annoy, disturb, threaten or upset another person. Harassment and bullying may involve similar behaviours as both usually involve a person or group of people who have, or are perceived to have, more power deliberately upsetting someone on more than one occasion. Harassment may also occur because of perceived differences such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

Sexual harassment is unlawful behaviour under the *Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and the Victorian *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*. It occurs when a person engages in any unwelcome or unreciprocated conduct of a sexual nature (written or verbal), in circumstances which could reasonably be expected to cause offence, humiliation or intimidation<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> *Responding to allegations of student sexual assault: Procedures for Victorian government schools*, Department of Education, Melbourne, 2007. Access at [http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/Responding\\_to\\_Allegations\\_of\\_Student\\_Sexual\\_Assault\\_-\\_Procedures\\_for\\_Victorian\\_Government\\_Schools2.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/Responding_to_Allegations_of_Student_Sexual_Assault_-_Procedures_for_Victorian_Government_Schools2.pdf)

## Discrimination

Discrimination is treating a person or group less fairly or well because of a particular characteristic such as culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, body size and physical appearance, age; or marital, parenting, or economic status. Discrimination commonly involves exclusion or rejection.

Discrimination may be direct, whereby a person is treated less favourably because of their race, ethnicity, culture or another characteristic. It can also be indirect when a person makes a decision or imposes a requirement, which appears neutral but is unreasonable and has the effect of disadvantaging a person because of their race, ethnicity, culture or another characteristic<sup>5</sup>.

Conduct which causes someone to suffer a detriment or to be treated less favourably than someone else because of their race can be racial discrimination. The term detriment is very broad and includes emotional and physical detriment. Racial discrimination means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race which has the effect of impairing a person's enjoyment, recognition or ability to exercise a human right<sup>6</sup>.

## Violence

Violence is the damaging and destructive use of force by a person or group towards another person, group or property. This force can be physical, verbal, sexual or another action or behaviour and can involve an ongoing relationship between the parties. Violence may involve provoked or unprovoked acts and can be a one-off incident or can occur over time. Violence may be used by those targeted by bullying or other unacceptable behaviour to try to redress the imbalance of power.

A threat of violence is words or gestures expressing intent to use an act of force against a person.

There can be many different causes for violence including alcohol and drug use. Schools should refer to <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/drugeducation> to access a range of age-appropriate classroom resources and guidelines provided through the Department's Drug Education program.

Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as *any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*<sup>7</sup>. The most common forms of violence against women are family violence and sexual assault.

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<sup>5</sup> *Guidelines for managing cultural and linguistic diversity in schools*, Department of Education, Employment and Training, Melbourne, 2001. Access at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/lem/GuidelinesforSchools.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993, United Nations. Access at <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/women>

## 4. Student Engagement Policy requirements



Bullying and unacceptable behaviour should be addressed as part of a school's duty of care to provide respectful, safe and supportive school environments.

The Student Engagement Policy Guidelines outline that all Victorian government schools must have a Student Engagement Policy in place that includes specific strategies to promote positive student behaviour, build a safe and inclusive environment, prevent bullying and anti-social behaviour and encourage respect, compassion and cooperation. This supports the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* that affirms all Victorians must be treated with dignity and equality.

The development of a Student Engagement Policy forms part of the requirements of the School Compliance Checklist, an element of the School Accountability and Improvement Framework<sup>8</sup>.

Schools are expected to integrate their strategies to prevent and respond to bullying and unacceptable behaviour within their Student Engagement Policy.

Schools must ensure their Student Engagement Policy outlines:

- that every student has the right to feel safe at school (including broader learning situations such as digital learning environments) and bullying or unacceptable behaviour including harassment, discrimination or a threat or act of violence is not tolerated
- goals, standards and expectations for student behaviour
- that the school environment is inclusive of all children and young people and diversity is valued and respected
- the whole-school approach to promoting respectful relationships including school culture, policies and procedures, curriculum, programs and partnerships with families and community organisations
- the range of initiatives and strategies to be utilised to prevent and respond to bullying and unacceptable behaviour
- explicit reference to how the behaviours and strategies relate to the safe and responsible use of digital technologies.

**Schools must review their Student Engagement Policy at least annually to ensure its implementation and ongoing relevance to the changing views and issues faced by the school community.**

<sup>8</sup> Further information is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schoolimprovement/accountability/default.htm>

## 5. Creating respectful and safe schools

To effectively prevent bullying and unacceptable behaviour, it is important that student safety is not viewed as a separate policy, but as a central component of an effective school.

Advances in information and communication technologies mean that schools are now broader than the walls of a classroom. Teachers, students and parents are increasingly using digital technologies to teach, learn and communicate, challenging the traditional concept of a school setting.

The Ultranet, a student centred electronic learning environment is being introduced into Victorian government schools throughout 2010. This secure learning environment will support a broader understanding of school settings and connect students, families, teachers and school administrators in new ways. Students will access learning tasks, work independently and collaborate with other students and teachers within and across schools, enrol in specialist classes and have access to learning anywhere, any time. A whole-school approach to creating a respectful and safe school must therefore respond to this changed concept of the school environment.

### 5.1 Characteristics and strategies for respectful and safe schools

The key success factors that help make schools safe parallel the eight elements contained in the Effective Schools Model<sup>9</sup>. The model provides a useful framework for schools to plan and develop a whole-school approach to a safe, secure and stimulating learning environment where bullying and unacceptable behaviour is not tolerated.

Figure 2:  
Effective Schools Model



<sup>9</sup> Effective Schools Model, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/blueprint1/es/>



Described below are the characteristics of schools with high-quality student safety and wellbeing practices and their alignment to the elements of the Effective Schools Model. These characteristics build upon the Department's review and analysis of anti-bullying policy and practice undertaken in 2005 which identified the common themes within a number of schools with effective approaches to student wellbeing.

### Professional leadership

Safe and effective schools start with school leaders who are committed to a shared and well-developed vision of a safe, caring, respectful, supportive and inclusive school community, which sends clear messages that bullying and unacceptable behaviour are not tolerated.

In respectful and safe schools:

- leadership teams have a **vision for a strategic whole-school approach** to student safety and wellbeing that includes a focus on prevention as well as management
- **staff collaboration** is facilitated through a leadership approach which empowers staff to initiate and take responsibility for safe school initiatives that focus on both student and teacher wellbeing
- leadership teams **model respectful and caring interactions** with staff, students and families
- leaders understand their **duty of care responsibilities** for students, and are mindful that an effective and well-executed policy and vision for the prevention and management of bullying and violence is fundamental to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students in their care
- leadership teams and teachers make optimal use of **specialist support professionals** available within the school and in the wider community.

Effective leaders work with staff to develop a whole-school vision based on the wellbeing and personal growth of students. Strong leadership teams also plan for the continuous improvement of the school's vision. Staff members with strong skills and an interest in welfare areas may be identified and empowered to take on leadership roles and work collaboratively with the rest of the staff towards achieving that vision. This can develop a committed team all moving in the same direction to implement a whole-school approach to wellbeing.

Schools have access to specialist support professionals to enhance student safety and wellbeing structures and processes and to provide additional support to students - Primary Welfare Officers, Student Welfare Coordinators, Chaplains, Student Support Services Officers (psychologists, guidance officers, speech pathologists, social workers and visiting teachers), Secondary School Nurses, Multicultural Education Aides, Koorie Education Support Officers and other health and wellbeing professionals employed directly by schools. The effective use of these specialists, as well as organisations and individuals in the wider community, provides a significant contribution to the development and maintenance of safe and respectful school environments.



## Focus on teaching and learning

In a respectful and safe school, there is a focus on the teaching and learning of interpersonal and respectful relationship skills within the domains of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)<sup>10</sup>. Helping students understand the role of power, and the different uses of power in relationships will assist them to develop better relationships<sup>11</sup>.

Many schools utilise specific programs such as *Friendly Kids Friendly Classrooms*<sup>12</sup>, *Bounce Back*<sup>13</sup>, *You Can Do It!*<sup>14</sup>, *M-Power Girls*<sup>15</sup>, *Kidsmatter*<sup>16</sup>, *Mindmatters*<sup>17</sup>, *Bar None Community Awareness Kit for Schools*<sup>18</sup> and personal safety or *Protective Behaviours*<sup>19</sup> programs. A number of schools across Victoria have implemented demonstration programs with a focus on respectful relationships. The *No Regrets demonstration* program focuses on the prevention of alcohol-related violence in the community and a prevention of gender-based violence demonstration program has also commenced. These are examples of the innovative ways in which schools are tackling community issues and promoting respectful behaviours and relationships.

In respectful and safe schools:

- teachers have access to appropriate **professional learning opportunities** to develop and refresh skills to collaboratively create and maintain safe, respectful, caring and supportive school cultures
- opportunities are provided for staff and students to **work with organisations and utilise programs** outside the regular school curriculum to enhance their knowledge, awareness and strategies to deal with bullying and to promote safe and respectful relationships
- **extracurricular activities** contribute to the promotion of positive peer relationships through same age and cross-age student interaction.

The provision of a wide range of extracurricular activities and opportunities can have several positive effects. Students who are involved in stage productions, clubs and teams get to work with, and form relationships with, both same-age and cross-age peers. This changes the culture of the school and can result in less bullying of younger students by older students. Many extracurricular activities can also occur during lunchtimes (for example, clubs, team practices and try-outs and electives), so more students are engaged in supervised activities.

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Essential Learning Standards. Refer to <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from Bullying. No Way! Website, Australian Education Authorities, 2010. Access at <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au>

<sup>12</sup> *Friendly Kids Friendly Classrooms*. Available from Pearson Education Australia [www.pearsoned.com.au](http://www.pearsoned.com.au)

<sup>13</sup> *Bounce Back!* wellbeing framework. Access at <http://www.bounceback.com.au/>

<sup>14</sup> *You Can Do It!* Education. Access at <http://www.youcandoiteducation.com/>

<sup>15</sup> MPower Girls program. Access at <http://www.stride.org.au/achieve.html>

<sup>16</sup> *Kidsmatter* Australian Primary Schools Mental Health Initiative. Access at <http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary/>

<sup>17</sup> *Mindmatters* Secondary Schools Mental Health Initiative. Access at <http://www.mindmatters.edu.au/default.asp>

<sup>18</sup> *Bar None Community Awareness Kit for Schools*. Access at [http://www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au/bar\\_none\\_kit\\_for\\_schools.htm](http://www.officefordisability.vic.gov.au/bar_none_kit_for_schools.htm)

<sup>19</sup> *Protective Behaviours* preventative safety program. Access at <http://www.pbaustralia.com/contact.html>



## Purposeful teaching

The method of teaching, or pedagogical approach, is also a key element in building a respectful and safe school environment. The *e<sup>5</sup> Instructional Model*<sup>20</sup> provides a framework to define and promote high-quality instruction in Victorian government schools that focuses on what the teacher is doing in the classroom rather than on student behaviour. In each of the five phases of instruction – Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate and Evaluate – relationship-based pedagogy is essential.

Curriculum guidance and advice is also available to support schools to implement curriculum that teaches and promotes interpersonal skills and respectful relationships in line with the domains of the VELS. This guidance builds on current good practice across Victoria and is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respect>

In order to prepare students for the innovation and knowledge economy of the 21st century, schools must provide students with access to environments and information and communication technologies that increase their participation, engagement and achievement in education. The increasing use of digital technologies and the internet by children and young people highlights the importance of schools developing policies that are inclusive of digital and online environments and are explicit about the teaching of safe and responsible online behaviours. Schools can refer to <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/learningonline> for further information about cybersafety. Many schools have established cybersafety teams comprising interested staff, student, and parent representatives to oversee the school's approach and initiatives to enhance cybersafety.

In respectful and safe schools:

- **relationship-based pedagogy** such as cooperative learning and problem-based learning is employed and contributes to student achievement and positive peer relationships
- there is purposeful teaching of **cybersafety** and **responsible use of digital technologies** and the internet
- **drug education programs** that enhance broader health and personal development strategies are in place.

Effective drug education is an essential characteristic of a safe and respectful school. Drug education employs interactive pedagogies, engages students in problem-solving and critical thinking and assists students to relate their learning to real life situations. Drug education promotes good decision-making, resilience and builds personal characteristics that enable young people to contribute to a positive school environment and become valued community members in adult life<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> *e<sup>5</sup> Instructional Model*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/e5>.

<sup>21</sup> Schools can refer to <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/drugeducation> for information on the Department's Drug Education program.



## Shared vision and goals

The prevention and management of bullying and unacceptable behaviour in schools is more readily achieved in a caring and supportive school culture that promotes positive relationships and pro-social values. In respectful and safe schools there is a clearly stated philosophy, translated into practice, that student wellbeing is a high priority underpinned by effective student learning and behaviour.

In respectful and safe schools:

- students adopt **pro-social values** and behave in a respectful, caring and inclusive manner because their teachers model such values and behaviours in their day-to-day interactions
- school **policies are developed in collaboration** with all staff, students and parents as the process of collaboration is just as important as the policy
- clear, well-defined and **agreed expectations** of acceptable staff and student behaviour allows all members of the school community to have a shared understanding of unacceptable behaviour
- **teachers intervene** firmly and swiftly to manage any unacceptable situation that compromises a student's safety and wellbeing
- approaches that 'blame the target' for the situation in which they find themselves are not utilised.

**Fun and humour** are often characteristics of respectful and safe schools with good student wellbeing practices. Schools have a commitment to fostering fun in a variety of ways and students believe this is important to the perceived safety of the school.

## High expectations

There are high expectations of everyone and a culture of inclusiveness in a respectful and safe school. Diversity is valued and everyone is treated with respect, fairness and dignity. Perceptions of difference can be part of why bullying and unacceptable behaviour occurs and students may be picked on because they seem to be different. Schools teaching the values of caring, respect for difference and treating others fairly support students to have more positive and successful relationships now and in their adult lives<sup>22</sup>.

In respectful and safe schools:

- both teachers and students have a **strong sense of pride** in themselves and their school
- there is **clear communication** to all members of the school community that everybody has the right to feel physically and psychologically safe and that safety is everyone's responsibility
- there are high expectations of student-student relationships and a focus on strategies for developing **positive peer relationships across all year levels**

<sup>22</sup> Adapted from Bullying. No Way! Website, Australian Education Authorities, 2010. Access at <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au>.



- the school community **embraces cultural and linguistic diversity** and works alongside diverse cultural groups in the community.

Many effective schools implement programs that encourage students in the same year level to work across class groups (for example, Year 7 students on school camp working in teams with peers who are not in their home room group) or through integration across different year levels (for example, cross-age stage productions, sporting teams, clubs). This supports the development of positive relationships between students across the whole school.

*Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship: a Strategy for Victorian Government Schools 2009-2013*<sup>23</sup> guides schools in the implementation of inclusive and participative practices and in building the capacity of the school community to identify and address direct and indirect racism, stereotyping and other forms of prejudice.

### Learning communities

A whole-school approach to student safety and wellbeing is a key characteristic of effective schools. This is reflected in policies and documentation, and consistency between the perceptions of staff, students, parents and the school's leadership team. Strategies and practices are comprehensive and embedded rather than fragmented or 'added-on'.

In respectful and safe schools:

- staff collaborate to implement **whole-school programs** and procedures that strengthen the quality of relationships between people, build empathy and encourage working cooperatively
- there are **partnerships with families** to reduce bullying and other unacceptable behaviour
- structures are established based on **peer support, authentic student leadership** and **student ownership**
- **strong transition programs** occur at different stages of schooling to ensure that students develop a readiness to enter their new environment, to reduce anxiety and to increase resilience
- parents are supported in building their understanding about the **safe and responsible use of technologies at home**.

The following components are important to consider when developing and implementing a whole-school approach to student safety and wellbeing:

#### A positive whole school culture

**Bullying prevention:** an up-to-date Student Engagement Policy which incorporates anti-bullying strategies and responses, anti-bullying curriculum, anti-bullying posters, anti-bullying student committees and the teaching of bystander support skills.

<sup>23</sup> *Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship: a Strategy for Victorian Government Schools 2009-2013*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009. Access at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm>



**Student leadership and ownership:** involvement of students in leadership positions or action teams within the school gives students an authentic voice and responsibilities. Having many students involved in a variety of leadership roles enhances confidence, greater compassion towards others and an enhanced school culture.

**Positive involvement with families:** school leaders and all staff make parents, carers, guardians and extended family members feel a welcome part of the school community. Opportunities for families to work in partnership with the school on wellbeing and safety issues are also valuable.

### Opportunities to develop and nurture relationships

**Positive student–teacher relationships:** teachers who know students well and form positive relationships, with not only students in their own class or classes but with all students in the school foster a strong sense of belonging. Establishment of teacher advocacy structures connecting students with a teacher who acts as a mentor and support also contributes to positive student-teacher relationships.

**A ‘house’ system:** an effective house system supports behaviour management (through incentive schemes) and the development of protective cross-age relationships.

**Peer support structures:** there are a variety of peer support structures which schools may utilise such as ‘buddy’ and peer mediation systems that can have a strong impact on the culture of a school.

**Structured lunchtime activities:** effective playground supervision techniques for lunch breaks, as well as a variety of clubs, special classes and lessons and student-organised activities make lunchtime less ‘boring’ and keep students enthusiastically occupied.

**Embedded social skills:** a focus on the development of student social competencies embedded in the school’s behaviour management system, pedagogy, expectations and structures.

### Engaging curriculum and extra-curricular activities

**Values education:** explicitly teaching values such as respect, compassion, cooperation and friendliness have a proactive impact on student behaviour. Further information on values education is available at <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/values>

**Online learning spaces:** establishing clear and purposeful goals and expected behaviours for the use of online learning spaces supports the safe and respectful use of digital technologies. Further information is available at <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/learningonline>

**Community service opportunities:** opportunities for students to practice social skills (for example, conversation and assertiveness) and apply values such as respect and compassion.



## Collaboration and partnerships

**Strong staff collaboration and a focus on teacher wellbeing:** creation and nurturing of a culture of ‘looking after each other’ through the development of personal and social connections between staff members contributes to a strong sense of shared satisfaction and connectedness.

**Transition programs:** strong relationships and collaboration between kindergarten and primary schools as well as between secondary schools and their feeder primary schools to develop and maintain effective transition programs support students to develop friendships, security and confidence.

**Community partnerships:** mutually beneficial relationship with organisations and individuals within the community enables the sharing of specialist expertise. Collaboration brings schools and services together to provide programs and initiatives to achieve outcomes for students and their families that extend beyond what can be achieved in isolation.

## Stimulating and secure learning environments

Respectful and safe schools provide both stimulating and secure learning settings where there is a culture that is firm about unacceptable behaviour and provides incentives for positive behaviour. In such environments fewer students bully or display unacceptable behaviour and fewer students are prepared to support bullying behaviour.

In respectful and safe schools:

- **respectful relationships are promoted** and embedded within the philosophy of the school
- a significant number of teachers are given the opportunity to develop **skills in non-punitive approaches to intervening** in incidents of unacceptable behaviour
- a strong and consistent **whole-school behaviour management system** is in place to manage bullying, harassment or violence.

Effective whole-school behaviour management systems are based on pro-social values, social competencies, incentives and positive peer relationships as detailed in a school’s Student Engagement Policy. Teachers feel more confident about managing their classes when they perceive there is a sound and fair behaviour management system in place. Teachers are also more prepared to implement new wellbeing and anti-bullying initiatives when they can spend less time managing behaviour and worrying about their students responding negatively. There is then more time available to undertake personal and social learning activities with their students.



## Accountability

Processes to monitor and review policies, programs and practices should be in place to ensure the continuous improvement of respectful and safe schools. Critical evaluation should also be undertaken of any prevention and management programs under consideration to ensure that they are theoretically sound, unbiased and evidence based in terms of content, pedagogy and delivery.

In respectful and safe schools:

- **regular self-monitoring** occurs to determine any indication of bullying and other unacceptable behaviour
- policies, procedures and initiatives, and prevention and management **programs are regularly reviewed and refined**
- the school environment is monitored on a day-to-day basis, incorporating **feedback mechanisms** to ensure processes are effective
- a variety of means are in place to **enable students to communicate with teachers or other school-based staff** when they need support because they are being targeted.

## 6. Responding to bullying and unacceptable behaviour – strategies for schools



Responding to bullying and unacceptable behaviour can be challenging – for students, teachers, school leaders and also for parents/carers. The best outcomes are likely to occur when all parties work together to manage these situations. Bullying and unacceptable behaviour can also be unlawful behaviour at times which may have a serious impact on individuals or the school.

It is also important to consider the role of the specialist support staff available within schools including Primary Welfare Officers, Student Welfare Coordinators, Chaplains, Student Support Services Officers, Secondary School Nurses and other health and wellbeing professionals employed directly by schools. These staff can provide valuable additional input support and advice to schools about evidence-based strategies to respond to bullying and unacceptable behaviour.

### 6.1 Strategies for responding to bullying and unacceptable behaviour

There is no clear answer about the best actions students can take when they are being bullied or unacceptable behaviour is directed towards them. It can be very difficult for students to stop it on their own. Some suggested responses to students when they ask for help in the first instance are:

- ‘Try asking them calmly and politely to stop and then increase this to telling them firmly and loudly to stop’
- ‘Consider putting on a “protective shell” by acting unimpressed. If you feel up to it, make a funny comment’
- ‘Keep notes (what, who, where and when) and make sure they know’
- ‘Talk to a friend and ask for support and ideas about what you could do to solve the problem’.

If these strategies do not work, other strategies should be utilised as soon as possible. Following are some prevention and intervention strategies that are currently being used in Victorian government schools. Schools should determine the most appropriate programs to reflect the needs of the school community.

*Note: It is recommended that any prevention and management programs that schools implement be critically assessed to ensure that they are theoretically sound, unbiased and evidence based in terms of content, pedagogy and delivery.*

#### Assertiveness training

There is some evidence that training students to respond assertively can be a useful strategy. Responding assertively to an incident of bullying or unacceptable behaviour requires the student to be respectful towards themselves and others equally. Central to responding assertively is the student having confidence in themselves and their abilities and knowing their basic human rights.



Teachers can help students to be assertive by encouraging them to:

- plan and practice responses to incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour in a clear and polite manner
- respond using assertive body language, that is standing up straight and keeping eye contact.

Teachers can help students to practice these behaviours through classroom-based role-plays, where the students identify assertive, aggressive and passive behaviours<sup>24</sup>.

### **Bystander training**

A popular strategy in the prevention of bullying and unacceptable behaviour is bystander training. This form of prevention strategy trains bystander students to behave in a supportive way to students who are being bullied or harmed, and to intervene where feasible. It is based on the notion that bad things continue to happen if good people do nothing. For students to effectively stand up for another student who is being harmed, they need to feel confident in their own skills to intervene and know they will have the support of teachers<sup>25</sup>.

Bystander training should build students' skills and enable them to challenge the actions of those inflicting the harm. In addition, training should stress to all students that they are expected to act responsibly and either challenge the bullying and unacceptable behaviour directly or indirectly and report the incident to a teacher<sup>26</sup>. Bystander action is particularly effective in incidents of cyberbullying, such as sending a supportive email or message to the person being bullied.

When developing bystander training modules, teachers can:

- elicit from students how they think they would react if they were observers of a bullying incident and ask students to give a reason for their reaction
- at the next lesson, feed back to them the results, reading out what students have said about why and how they would help the student being bullied
- discuss how students might distinguish between dangerous and non-dangerous situations – and take appropriate action
- discuss what forms of discouragement could be effective without inflaming the situation
- discuss how students might get others to voice their disapproval together
- rehearse possible scenarios and actions using role-plays
- monitor what happens by getting the class to periodically review bystander strategies<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> *Assertiveness for Children*, Kidscape. Access at <http://www.kidscape.org.uk/assets/downloads/assertivenessforchildren.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Craig, W. M., Pepler, D. J. and Atlas, R. (2000b), 'Observations of bullying on the playground and in the classroom', *International Journal of School Psychology*, 21, 22–36.

<sup>26</sup> Boulton, M. J. and Underwood, K. (1992), 'Bully/victim problems among middle school children', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 62, 73–87.

<sup>27</sup> Adapted from Rigby, K. and Bagshaw, D. (2005), 'Using educational drama and bystander training to counteract bullying' in McGrath, H. and Noble, T. (eds), *Bullying Solutions: Evidence-based approaches to bullying in Australian Schools*, Pearson Education, Sydney



## Restorative practices

Restorative practices are used by many schools to respond to incidents of bullying and unacceptable behaviour in order to repair harm to relationships. The term ‘restorative practices’ refers to a range of processes that are underpinned by the following concepts:

- misconduct is a violation of people and relationships
- these violations create obligations and liabilities
- problem-solving focuses on healing and making things right.

Restorative practices involve the development and enhancement of relationships in schools and teaching conflict resolution and other problem-solving skills. They also involve classroom management that is participatory, democratic and focused on problem-solving. Restorative practices require a shift in philosophy from traditional punitive models of behaviour management to those relational models which, as well as holding wrongdoers accountable for their behaviour, provide support for the community affected by the wrongdoing. Three specific restorative practices are outlined below<sup>28</sup>.

**Small group conferences** are usually confined to a small group of students or an individual student who have been involved in an incident of harm that is determined to have a less serious impact. Typically small group conferences might be used by a teacher or staff member to deal with low-level bullying before matters escalate. Parents, while not directly involved, are informed of the process and its outcomes. Follow-up is crucial for ongoing support and to ensure compliance with the agreement.

**Classroom conferences** involve a whole class in addressing issues such as classroom bullying and more generally, classroom disruption<sup>28</sup> that has affected student wellbeing and teaching and learning in the classroom.

**Community conferences** bring together, in the wake of a serious incident of harm, the wrongdoer and the student being bullied or harmed, as well as their families and appropriate school personnel. Conducted by a trained restorative practices staff member within the school, a series of scripted questions are directed to participants in order to understand the incident and its antecedents and the effects of the incident on the community. An agreement is reached whereby all participants feel there has been some restitution and relationships have been repaired. The agreement also reflects plans to meet identified needs of the participants, such as counselling, and to implement necessary changes to school policy and practice. Follow-up is crucial for ongoing support and to ensure compliance with the agreement.

The decision to use restorative practices should be made on a case by case basis as the views of those involved in an incident should be taken into consideration. Based on the circumstances of each individual incident, teachers and staff should consider whether it is appropriate to use restorative practices for matters relating to cyberbullying.

<sup>28</sup> Adapted from Armstrong, M. and Thorsborne, M. (2005), ‘Restorative responses to bullying’ in McGrath, H. and Noble, T. (eds), *Bullying Solutions: Evidence-based Approaches to Bullying in Australian Schools*, Pearson Education, Sydney.

## **Friendly Schools and Families program**

*Friendly Schools and Families* is a whole-school bullying reduction program, initially implemented as part of a research project in 20 primary schools in Perth between 2002 and 2004. Almost 4000 students and their families, and 450 teachers, took part in the program. The research identified the elements that resulted in the greatest reduction of bullying and these findings form the basis of the program<sup>29</sup>.

The basic assumption behind the program is that effectiveness in reducing bullying and increasing pro-social behaviour is the result of many small moves, not just one approach. Some of the key components of the program are:

- open communication about bullying with families and the whole-school community
- a consistent and positive response from all teachers towards bullying behaviour
- teaching peer support skills to enable all students in a bystander role to discourage bullying
- teaching resilience skills that could be employed if students were bullied
- modified playground environments that are more stimulating for students
- teaching social skills and pro-social values
- high visibility of playground supervisors during lunch and recess breaks
- school pride campaigns
- teacher professional development.

The program aims to assist with the design, development, implementation, dissemination and evaluation of social skill-building and comprehensive anti-bullying programs in schools. It provides templates to evaluate current anti-bullying policy and practice, review action taken, identify areas that may require further attention, and help schools engage in evidence-based activities to reduce bullying. Support and guidance can also be accessed through the program. More information about this program is available from <http://www.friendlyschools.com.au>

## **Buddy systems**

Buddy systems can help to promote friendship and support between older and younger peers through regular collaboration, which also fosters a sense of whole-school community. The key characteristic of most buddy systems is the participation of older students in positive, supportive, structured and facilitated one-on-one relationships with younger students. Buddy systems can create feelings of connectedness that enable both older and younger ‘buddies’ to bond more closely with their school within a psychologically safe environment, thereby increasing the likelihood of more positive school behaviour and less bullying or unacceptable behaviour.

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<sup>29</sup> Adapted from <http://www.friendlyschools.com.au/about.php>





## School-wide – positive behaviour support

The purpose of *School-wide – positive behaviour support* (SW-PBS) is to establish a school climate in which appropriate behaviour is the norm for all students. SW-PBS is an evidence-based approach which promotes proactive and explicit teaching of behavioural expectations and rewarding students for following them rather than waiting for misbehaviour or unacceptable behaviour to occur before responding. It provides schools with a school improvement framework which focuses on data and enquiry to drive continuous improvement in the school's behaviour management processes and policies.

SW-PBS provides school communities with an effective, evidence-based approach to creating positive, safe and engaging school environments for all students, including those with behavioural difficulties. The continuum of SW-PBS includes three levels of intervention:

- **Primary prevention:** universal provision of school and classroom-wide systems for all students, staff and school community members. The aim is to provide highly predictable school and classroom environments through the establishment of school-wide expectations of all members of the school community, and implementation of school-wide behaviour management strategies that focus on empowerment rather than control
- **Secondary prevention:** specialised group systems for students who demonstrate behaviours that are concerning or not acceptable
- **Tertiary prevention:** specialised and individualised systems of support for individual students who have not had their needs adequately met through universal and group support.

SW-PBS is currently being implemented in some schools in Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania.

More information on School-wide-positive behaviour support is available from: <http://www.pbis.org> and <http://www.learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=24668>

## *You Can Do It!* Education

*You Can Do It!* Education is a system for helping children to develop social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing. *You Can Do It!* Education involves a number of educational programs based on research which identifies four necessary foundations for all children to possess in order for them to achieve and experience social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing: confidence, persistence, organisation and getting along with others. Four blockers that contribute to poor psychological health, under-achievement and disaffection are also identified: low self-esteem–anxiety, general work avoidance, general disorganisation and rebelliousness–anger.

More information about *You Can Do It!* Education is available from <http://www.youcandoiteducation.com>



## 6.2 Promoting cybersafety and preventing cyberbullying

The internet and digital technologies are now very much a part of life and learning. As an increasingly interactive medium, digital technologies bring with them exciting new opportunities to engage children and young people in their learning. At the same time these technologies also bring some risks. Increasingly schools are dealing with incidents of cyberbullying or unacceptable behaviour that have occurred in the online world or using technology such as mobile phones.

The implementation of specific cybersafety initiatives in schools supports the safety and wellbeing of students and contributes to the prevention of cyberbullying or unacceptable behaviour via technology. A holistic approach to the respectful and safe use of information and communication technologies should include:

- policies and procedures within the school's Student Engagement Policy to encourage cybersafe behaviour across the school including Acceptable Use Agreements
- access to professional learning opportunities for teachers
- specific teaching of the safe use of technologies for students
- internet safety awareness information or presentations for parents.

Schools can play an active role in promoting the safe use of digital technologies by:

- encouraging students to not communicate with strangers online
- warning against providing a mobile phone number to a stranger
- cautioning against adding strangers as friends on social networking websites
- encouraging students to immediately report concerns of online stranger danger to parents/carers, teachers or another adult
- explaining why students should not send, or participate in, the production or forwarding of abusive or offensive digital materials.

The Department provides a website 'Learning On Line' with policy advice, resources, classroom activities and professional learning actions to support the safe and responsible use of digital technologies. This can be accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/learningonline>

Some schools have also implemented a range of approaches to complement classroom teaching and learning and promote cybersafety. These include frameworks such as *eSmart*<sup>30</sup>, programs such as *SuperClubsPLUS Australia*<sup>31</sup> and *CyberS@vvy*<sup>32</sup>, and professional learning available through the Australian Communications and Media Authority<sup>33</sup> and *ThinkUKnow*<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> The Alannah and Madeline Foundation *eSmart* Framework. Access at <http://www.esmartschools.org.au/Pages/Default.aspx>  
<sup>31</sup> *SuperClubsPLUS* Australia social learning network for young children 6-12 years. Access at <http://www.superclubsplus.com.au>  
<sup>32</sup> The Stride Foundation *CyberS@vvy* program. Access at <http://www.stride.org.au/cyber-savvy.aspx>  
<sup>33</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority training program. Access at <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/en/Schools.aspx>  
<sup>34</sup> Australian Federal Police and Microsoft Australia training program. Access at <http://www.thinkuknow.org.au/site/index.asp>

It should be noted that incidents of offensive or suspicious online behaviour should be reported to the Australian Communications and Media Authority or the Australian Federal Police depending on the nature of the behaviour. Information about reporting problematic behaviour is available at <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Report.aspx>

### 6.3 Responding to homophobic bullying

It is a priority for Victorian government schools to create respectful and safe environments that cater for the diverse needs of the community. All students including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex students, have a right to feel safe at school and be free from bullying or being the target of unacceptable behaviour. The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society's report on the sexual health and wellbeing of same-sex attracted young people in Australia, 'Writing Themselves in Again'<sup>35</sup> indicated that the most common place of homophobic abuse was at school. Seventy-four per cent of young people who had suffered homophobic abuse reported at least one incident of verbal or physical abuse at school.

#### Preventing incidents of homophobic bullying

A whole-school approach to student safety and wellbeing is most effective in preventing incidents of homophobic bullying. The most important action teachers and the school community can take is to create and continually model a school environment that respects and celebrates diversity. To promote a whole-school environment that is openly inclusive of the needs of same-sex attracted and transgendered students is to ensure that incidents of homophobic bullying are kept to a minimum. Inclusiveness should be reflected in a school's curriculum, teaching and learning, organisation and ethos, and in community links and partnerships. The school's physical environment should also be openly inclusive such as through displaying relevant posters. Respectful and safe schools clearly communicate to all members of the school community that everybody has the right to feel physically and psychologically safe.

#### Intervening in incidents of homophobic bullying

Homophobic bullying should be dealt with in the same way as any situation of bullying or unacceptable behaviour. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the behaviour is homophobic, and respond to it accordingly. A teacher or other staff member can<sup>36</sup>:

- state that they find the comments or actions offensive
- ask the student if they know why the teacher has found their statement offensive
- ask the student to consider the statement in light of agreed school rules about discriminatory language, and the feelings of the student who they have been bullying

<sup>35</sup> Hillier, L., Turner, A. and Mitchell, A. (2005), Writing Themselves In Again: 6 years on. The 2nd National report on the sexual health and wellbeing of same sex attracted young people, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne. Access at [www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay)

<sup>36</sup> Ollis, D., Mitchell, A., Watson, J., Hillier, L. and Walsh, J. Safety in our Schools: Strategies for responding to homophobia, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne. Accessed at [http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/assets/downloads/safety\\_in\\_our\\_schools.pdf](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ssay/assets/downloads/safety_in_our_schools.pdf)



- agree to a management strategy, as set out in the school's Student Engagement Policy.

Due to the sensitivity around issues of teenage sexuality, the utmost care should be taken in choosing the most appropriate strategies to manage the situation. The student who is being bullied should be consulted about how they would like the situation to be managed. However, the teacher or staff member should take responsibility for the situation and follow up the incident at a later date to ensure it is resolved. Additional information on supporting sexual diversity in schools is available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/supportsexualdiversity.pdf> and Section 4.5 of the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/referenceguide/>

#### 6.4 Responding to incidents that have a serious impact on individuals or the school<sup>37</sup>

Incidents of bullying and unacceptable behaviour do happen and these can have a serious impact on individuals or the school. In these instances, it is important that schools have clear response procedures in place. Incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour may be deemed a critical incident, particularly if the incident has a serious impact on individuals or the school. Deciding whether an incident has had or may have a serious impact on individuals or the school is often a matter of professional judgement by the principal or their delegate.

Victorian government schools are required to report particular categories of incidents to the Department's Emergency and Security Management Unit and the police if the nature of the incident may constitute a criminal offence<sup>38</sup>. Reportable incidents include:

- allegations of serious sexual or physical assault of a student, staff member or a visitor. As a general rule, a serious incident is one requiring medical attention (physical assault) or a police investigation (sexual assault)
- criminal activity, burglary, theft, vandalism and graffiti and minor property damage
- serious threats made against a student, staff member or visitor
- student, staff member or visitor behaviour that could result in potential risk to another student, staff member or visitor<sup>39</sup>.

It should be noted that incidents away from the school must also be reported such as those occurring during camps, excursions or outdoor adventure activities, travel to or from school, non school hours and weekends and holidays.

<sup>37</sup> This section utilises information adapted from Bullying. No Way! website, Australian Education Authorities, 2010. Access at <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au>

<sup>38</sup> Emergency and Security Management, Victorian Schools Reference Guide Section 6.15, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Access at [http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/referenceguide/management/6\\_15.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/referenceguide/management/6_15.htm)

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

If a school is unsure whether an incident is a reportable incident, the Department's Emergency and Security Management Unit should be consulted and can be contacted on phone: (03) 9589 6266.

It may also be necessary for schools to seek advice from the Department's Student Critical Incident Advisory Unit which ensures appropriate supports are in place to maximise the safety and wellbeing of students involved in sexually based incidents including online incidents. Further guidance for schools can be accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/safety/childprotection/default.htm>

### **Preparation**

Prior to responding to incidents that have a serious impact on individuals or the school, it is essential to ensure that the school has developed and implemented agreed policies, strategies and procedures for incidents of this nature. Staff should be briefed on the critical incident response action plans for serious incidents and be confident about supporting the people affected.

### **Response**

It is important to ensure that the level of response is appropriate to the incident and to avoid secondary problems arising from not dealing with incidents, dealing with them ineffectively or in a manner disproportionate to the incident. Specialist support professionals such as Primary Welfare Officers, Student Welfare Coordinators and Student Support Services can assist schools in identifying the most appropriate response. Most incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour will not have a serious impact on individuals or the school and should be managed as quickly and effectively as possible guided by the school's Student Engagement Policy as well as restorative practices such as the no blame approach, the method of shared concern or a formal apology<sup>40</sup>.

When there are incidents that have a serious impact on individuals or the school, the flowchart on page 29 provides guidance on appropriate steps to take. This flowchart should be considered alongside the school's own critical incident response plan. The rights of those involved should be supported while acknowledging the needs of the particular situation. Consequences should be activated in accordance with the school's Student Engagement Policy.

### **Restoring wellbeing**

Repairing and rebuilding trust and relationships is essential following an incident that has had a serious impact on individuals or the school. Restorative practices are most effective in resolving issues and restore the sense of wellbeing for all involved. Strategies to restore wellbeing include:

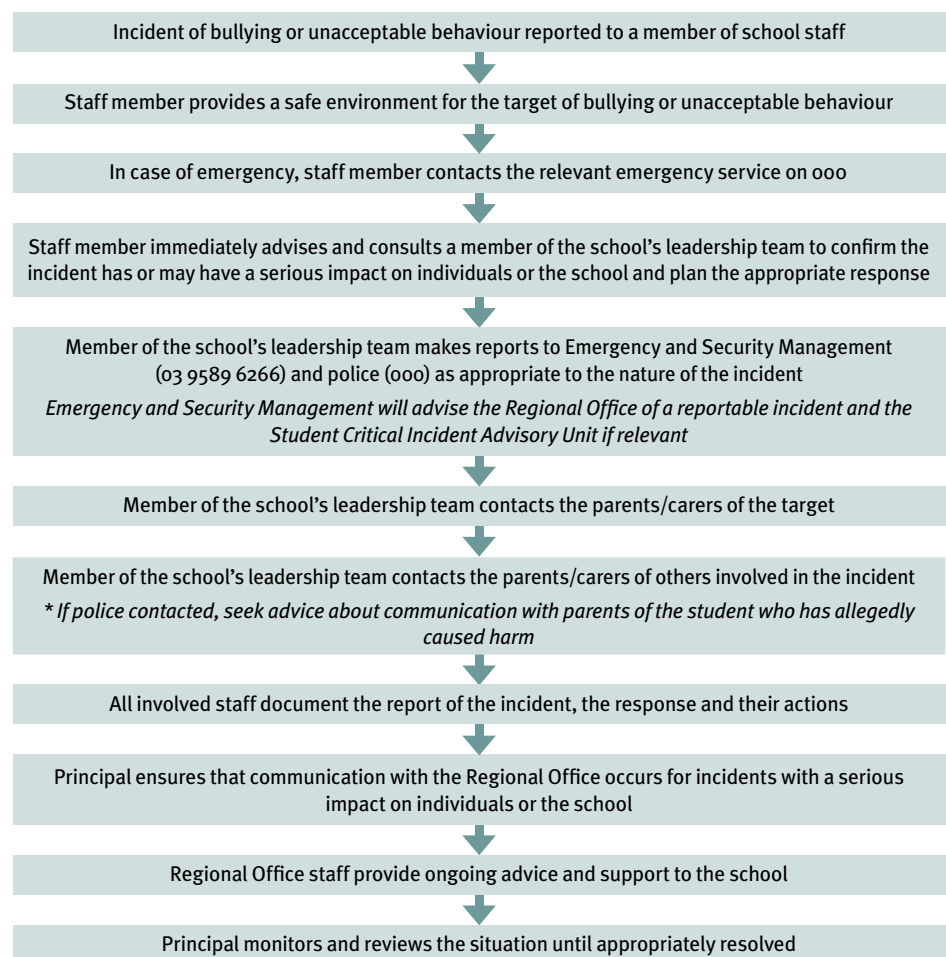
- providing debriefing and support for those involved

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<sup>40</sup> For information on evidence-based strategies, refer to <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/ideasbox/things-work/info-manage-2-1.shtml>

- regularly monitoring the behaviour of the people involved in the incident
- ensuring that the person who was harmed has a clear plan to report any further concerns to someone they have chosen
- providing the opportunity for staff to have their questions answered and to talk about the incident among themselves if it has affected a broader group or the whole school
- enabling parents of the students involved to have the opportunity to discuss the incident with staff
- using specialist support staff – Primary Welfare Officers, Student Welfare Coordinators, Chaplains, Student Support Services Officers, Secondary School Nurses and other health and wellbeing professionals employed by schools to assist staff, students and parents in the medium to long-term
- reviewing incidents and implementing improvements to school responses and policies.

Figure 3: Response flowchart for incidents that have a serious impact on individuals or the school



## 7. Advice for parents and carers

Parents and carers play an essential role in identifying and responding to bullying and unacceptable behaviour. It is important to recognise if bullying may be occurring and to establish if the behaviour is in fact bullying or unacceptable behaviour (refer to section 2 for definitions of bullying and unacceptable behaviour).

Children who are being bullied or harmed by unacceptable behaviour may<sup>41</sup>:

• be frightened of walking to and from school	• become distressed and anxious or stop eating
• change their usual route	• attempt or threaten suicide
• not want to go on the school bus	• cry themselves to sleep, or have nightmares
• beg to be driven to school	• have their possessions go missing
• be unwilling or refuse to go to school	• ask for money or start stealing (to pay a bully)
• feel ill in the mornings	• continually 'lose' their pocket money
• begin wagging school	• refuse to talk about what's wrong
• begin doing poorly in their school work	• have unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches
• come home regularly with clothes or books destroyed	• begin to bully other children, or siblings
• become withdrawn, start stammering, lack confidence	• become aggressive and unreasonable
• continue to visit the online spaces or use the digital technology that is being used to bully them	• be reluctant to disclose cyberbullying in case their computer or phone is removed
• give improbable excuses for any of the above	

### What parents/carers can do if their child is being bullied or targeted by unacceptable behaviour

There are a range of suggested actions that parents/carers can utilise when their children are being bullied or are bullying or harming others.

#### Listening and understanding

If a parent/carer thinks their child is being bullied or targeted, they can ask them directly about it or initiate a discussion about bullying and behaviour at the school in general. Parents/carers can talk about whether there are any students at school who bully or harm others. It is important for parents/carers to listen carefully to what their child has to say without interrupting, and to show concern and support by letting their child know that they understand how distressing it is for them to be in this situation. It is important that children are reassured that it is normal for them to feel hurt, lonely, scared, angry and lost.

Parents/carers can congratulate their child for having the courage to confide in them and emphasise to their child that all students at school have the right to be treated with respect and to be safe from bullying and unacceptable behaviour.

<sup>41</sup> Adapted from <http://www.kidscape.org.uk/parents/signsof.shtml>

Comments such as *‘What did you do that made them behave like that towards you?’* are not helpful. Children should not be dismissed with statements such as *‘Don’t worry about it’* or *‘Lots of kids get bullied it helps make you tough’*. Most children who are bullied or targeted by unacceptable behaviour are worried about payback if they tell an adult. Parents/carers should be clear that they are not prepared to keep this secret, but can reassure their child that they will handle the situation sensitively. The focus should be on solving the problem rather than trying to get anyone in trouble.

### **Providing support**

Parents/carers can ask questions such as *‘What have you tried so far to stop the bullying/behaviour?’* and *‘How well do you think these actions have worked so far’*. Parents/carers should not encourage children to fight back, as it may increase the level and duration of the bullying or unacceptable behaviour, lead to the involvement of more students and result in injuries and repercussions.

At home, parents/carers can help their child to develop these positive strategies:

- practise saying *‘Leave me alone’* and then calmly walking away
- problem-solve ways to avoid people or situations that might expose them to further bullying or unacceptable behaviour
- discuss ways in which they can make new friends.

Parents/carers should encourage their child to continue to talk with them about incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour. They should also stay calm and focus on solving the problem with their child. Discovering their child is being bullied or harmed is very stressful and upsetting and most parents/carers initially experience anger, confusion and guilt. Trying to keep an open mind is important; parents/carers should remember they are hearing only one part of the story.

Parents/carers should avoid directly approaching any student who they believe may have been involved in the bullying or unacceptable behaviour toward their child. Parents/carers should also avoid trying to sort out the issues with the family involved. This usually does not work and makes the situation much worse.

### **Collecting information**

It is helpful for parents/carers to try to obtain as many facts as they can through discussion with their child so that they can understand what is occurring and identify if there is a repeated pattern. Parents/carers should try to identify and write down:



- what happened
- who was involved on each occasion
- where and when these things happened
- who witnessed each situation
- when the bullying or unacceptable behaviour first began
- what solutions have been tried so far
- the names of any teachers who may be aware of the problem.

### **Working with the school to solve the problem**

Schools take their responsibilities in relation to bullying and unacceptable behaviour very seriously and they have more success when parents/carers see the school as an ally and work with the school to solve the issues. Once parents/carers have a reasonably clear picture of the situation and the facts they can talk to their child about approaching the school. Parents/carers are encouraged to make an appointment with their child's teacher rather than arrive unexpectedly at school as this will enable the teacher to gather relevant information. It is a good idea for parents/carers to make notes of the points they want to make before the meeting.

At the meeting:

- it is important that parents/carers stay calm and avoid making accusations against the school. If parents/carers become angry, make accusations or demand certain actions, it may make the situation worse
- parents/carers should present information in a way that makes it clear to the school that they see themselves, the student and the school as partners in trying to fix the problem
- it can be helpful to remember that if a parent/carer was not aware that their child was being bullied or harmed, then perhaps the child's teachers would not have known about it either
- parents/carers and teachers can discuss the policies and procedures the school has to deal with bullying and unacceptable behaviour.

The school will need time to investigate, to talk to teachers and, perhaps, other students. Parents/carers can ask the school when they will be contacted. At the next meeting, parents/carers and the school can establish a plan for dealing with the current situation and future incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour. Children should have some say in the strategies used. Before parents/carers leave, they can ask to confirm the next steps in the plan.

## **Follow up**

Parents/carers can ask for an appropriate specialist staff member to become involved such a Primary Welfare Officer, Student Welfare Coordinator, Chaplain, Student Support Services Officer, Secondary School Nurse or other health and wellbeing professional employed by the school. Parents/carers should encourage their child to report any further incidents of bullying or unacceptable behaviour to a teacher or staff member they trust at the school.

## **What parents/carers can do if their child is responsible for bullying or unacceptable behaviour**

Parents/carers should acknowledge the possibility their child may be bullying or behaving in an unacceptable manner towards another student. Parents/carers should respond calmly and non-defensively, and commit to working with the school to manage the problem in a helpful way. A situation can be made worse for a child if parents/carers directly approach the bullied or targeted student or their family or try to get other parents to take their child's side. Parents/carers should be encouraged to see the situation as a learning opportunity for their child to understand the impact of their behaviour on others and the importance of interacting in safe and respectful ways.

## **What parents/carers can do to reduce bullying and unacceptable behaviour at school**

Parents/carers should let their children know how much they disapprove of bullying and unacceptable behaviour and why. Any type of bullying or unacceptable behaviour at home should be avoided, and respect for others should be modelled and encouraged. Emphasis should be given to seeing things from another child's point of view.

Supporting any child who is being bullied or harmed should be encouraged. It is helpful for the school if parents/carers report all incidents of bullying and unacceptable behaviour they are aware of at the school, not just incidents that happen to their own child. Differences should be respected and embraced rather than ridiculed. Parents/carers should talk to their child about the qualities associated with caring friendships and discourage them from remaining in friendships or relationships where they are mistreated or not respected.

## 8. Resources and further information

### Department of Education and Early Childhood Development resources

*Building Respectful and Safe Schools curriculum guidance*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respect>

*Catching On-Line*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/health/sexuality>

*Drug Education*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/drugeducation>

*Education for Global and Multicultural Citizenship: a Strategy for Victorian Government Schools 2009-2013*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm>

*Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/engagement/default.htm>

*Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools*

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/lem/Guidelinesforschools.pdf>

*Learning Online*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/learningonline>

*Respectful Relationship Education: Violence prevention and respectfulrelationships education in Victorian secondary schools*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/respect>

*Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/referenceguide/default.htm>

### Useful websites

Disclaimer: The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provides these sources as information only. The Department does not necessarily endorse their content.

Anti-Bullying Network (Scotland) <http://www.antibullying.net/>

Bullying. No Way! (Australia) <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/>

Bullying.org (Canada) <http://www.bullying.org/>

Bullying UK (United Kingdom) <http://www.bullying.co.uk/>

Bullying UK (United Kingdom) <http://www.bullying.co.uk/>

Family – School and Community Partnerships Bureau (Australia)  
<http://www.familyschool.org.au>

Kidscape (United Kingdom) <http://www.kidscape.org.uk/>

No Bully (New Zealand) <http://www.police.govt.nz/service/yes/nobully/>

Racism no way (Australia) <http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>

rightsED: Human rights education resources for teachers (Australia)  
<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education>

Safe Caring and Orderly Schools (Canada) <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/resources.htm>

Stop Bullying Me (Canada) <http://www.stopbullyingme.ab.ca/>

Stop Bullying Now (United States) <http://www.stopbullyingnow.com/>

The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (Australia) <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcs/hs/>

### **Websites for students**

Bullying. No Way! (Australia) <http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/>

Kids Helpline (Australia) <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/>

### **Websites on cyber-safety and cyberbullying**

Australian Communications and Media Authority Cybersafety Website (Australia)  
<http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/>

Australian Federal Police and Microsoft Australia ThinkUKnow internet safety program (Australia) <http://www.thinkuknow.org.au/site/index.asp>

CyberBullying UK (United Kingdom) <http://cyberbullying.co.uk/>

Cyberbullying.ca (Canada) <http://www.cyberbullying.ca/>

### **Books**

Berne, S. (1996), *Bully-Proof Your Child*, Lothian, Melbourne.

Field, E. (1999), *Bully Busting*, Finch Publishing, Sydney.

Fuller, A. (1998), *From Surviving to Thriving: Promoting Mental Health in Young People*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

Maines, B. and Robinson, G. (1992), *Michael's story: The 'No Blame' Approach*, Lame Duck Publishing, Bristol.

McGrath, H. and Noble, T. (eds.) (2005), *Bullying Solutions: Evidence-based*

*Approaches to Bullying in Australian Schools*, Pearson Education, Sydney.

Rigby, K. (2010), *Bullying Interventions in Schools – Six Basic Approaches*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

– (2000), *Stop the Bullying: A Handbook for School*, available in Australia through Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

### **Journal articles and research**

Australian Communications and Media Authority (2009), ‘Click and connect: Young Australians’ use of online social media’, Canberra. Access at [http://www.acma.gov.au/web/standard/pc=PC\\_311797h](http://www.acma.gov.au/web/standard/pc=PC_311797h)

Child Health Promotion Research Centre (2009), Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study, Edith Cowan University. Access at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/schooling/nationalsafeschools/pages/research.aspx>

Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (1999), *Responding to School Violence: An Annotated Bibliography of Teachers’ Resources*, Canberra.

Petersen, L. and Rigby, K. (1999), ‘Countering bullying at an Australian secondary school’, *Journal of Adolescence*, 22, 4, 481–92.

Rigby, K. (2002), A meta-evaluation of methods and approaches to reducing bullying in pre-schools and in early primary school in Australia, Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, Canberra. Access at <http://www.education.unisa.edu.au/Bullying/meta.pdfh>

Rigby, K and Griffiths, C (2007), *Applying the Method of Shared Concern in Australian Schools: An Evaluative Study*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Access at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/research.aspxh>

