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INFORMATION FOR PARENTS Bullying and Harassment

St Hilda's School will put into place procedures that will encourage staff and students to work together to maintain an environment where all staff, students and visitors can feel safe and free from bullying and harassment.

St Hilda's School considers bullying or harassment an unacceptable form of behaviour which will not be tolerated under any circumstances. The School has the responsibility to foster an educational environment where there are no barriers to learning and where all students and staff feel safe and valued. Students or staff who bully or harass others and do not respond to counselling, may be asked to leave the School.

What is Bullying and Harassment?

Bullying and Harassment includes discrimination, sexual harassment or behaviours that are considered offensive, belittling or threatening by any person. It may be verbal, non-verbal, cyber or physical behaviour which repeatedly causes the person to feel offended, humiliated or intimidated and which will also create an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

Examples of Bullying:

- Social:** Deliberately making someone feel left out, unwanted or alone; stand-over tactics; picking on others for their differences, or race, sex or religion.
- Verbal:** Spreading rumours; putting people down behind their backs; sending offensive e-mails; name calling; offensive language; slander; offensive notes or materials; setting up web pages which are intended to hurt or offend; graffiti; threatening to 'get' people.
- Physical:** Damage to others' possessions; fighting; pushing; offensive gestures or invasions of personal space.
- Cyber:** (or e-bullying) Is a reasonably recent type of bullying which involves the use of information and communication technologies such as email, (mobile) phone and text messages, instant messaging (SMS), chat rooms and video internet sites e.g. YouTube. It can be particularly harmful because it can happen anywhere and at any time. Thus young people who are the victims of cyber-bullying have no place where they feel safe. If the bullying is of a serious and threatening nature then obviously it becomes a legal issue and students and parents should seek advice by reporting the matter to the police.

There are many types of harassment. The behaviour becomes harassment when the individual has said that it is unwelcome or unwanted, and it does not stop immediately.

Student Procedures

- Even if not involved themselves, report all incidents of bullying and harassment to: Form Teacher (Junior School), Head of Year or Head of School (Junior, Middle, Senior or Boarding).
- Actively support students they know are being bullied or harassed.

- Refuse to become involved in bullying or harassment, including as a bystander.
- Sexual Harassment of a student will be treated under the *Student Protection in Anglican Schools – Policies and Procedures 2015*.

If bullying is reported, the School needs to collect information about what has happened and take measures to stop the problem recurring.

Bullying and Teasing

Bullying is different from ordinary teasing. What makes it different is that the incidents are ongoing, and there is usually an imbalance of size, strength and power between the children involved. The bully might have power because other children side with her to protect themselves.

What are the signs?

Bullying may be very hard to see. Bullying usually happens out of sight, away from teachers or other adults. The people who are most likely to know what is going on are other children.

Children who are being bullied often don't like to tell anyone because they feel weak or ashamed, or are frightened that it will only make things worse. They also feel it is wrong to 'dob in' or tell tales on other children.

If they tell anyone, it is most likely they will tell their parents, or their friends before they will tell a teacher.

Watch for signs of distress in their child, such as:

- unwillingness to attend school;
- a pattern of headaches or stomach aches;
- damaged clothing or bruising;
- unexplained tears or depression;
- unusual outbursts of temper;
- not wanting to play with friends;
- equipment that has gone missing;
- request for extra pocket money;
- wanting changes in the way she travels to and from school;
- school work falls off in quality.

Early contact is essential at this point.

- Take an active interest in their child's social life.
- Report to the Form Teacher (in the Junior School), the Head of Year (in the Middle or Senior Schools), or the Head of School (Junior, Middle, Senior or Boarding) if they know, or think, their child is being bullied.
- Keep a written record if the bullying persists: Who, What, Where and When?
- Advise their child to tell a trusted teacher.
- Tell their child that there is nothing wrong with them.
- NOT encourage their child to hit back or respond verbally.
- Ensure they do not model bullying behaviour in interactions they have with the school staff and administration.

What parents can do?

By the time children tell their parents they are being bullied, they may have tried everything they can to deal with it on their own. Telling parents is often a very hard step to take.

Children need to:

- feel believed and listened to;
- develop trust in how parents will handle it;
- talk more openly about what has happened;
- gain some control over what is happening;
- learn things they can do to protect themselves; and
- regain self-confidence.

It helps if parents:

- involve the children in making decisions about what to do;
- listen to what children say;
- tell them they understand.

It does not help if parents:

- get angry or upset;
- feel guilty or ashamed;
- make the children think it is not important;
- blame the children;
- blame the school;
- accuse people without knowing the facts;
- look for scapegoats;
- demand to know all the details at once; and
- look for easy solutions.

What the school can do.

The School encourages parents to contact the School to discuss the best ways to solve the problem. Teachers may not be aware the bullying is occurring. Children are often reluctant to tell teachers or for their parents to contact the School, they might want to keep the matter private, they might think nothing can be done or they believe adult intervention will only make the bullying worse.

When the School is involved, the Form Teacher (in the Junior School), the Head of Year (in the Middle or Senior Schools), or the Head of School (Junior, Middle, Senior or Boarding), will need to investigate the matter and to talk to teachers, other students and even other parents if that is the best thing to do. Remember the school staff may not have seen the incidents and it is not always easy to judge if it is bullying or harmless fun which has gone too far. It is important to find out:

- what happened;
- who was involved;
- where;
- when; and
- did anybody else see it, and, if so, who?

This will take some time, but the outcome will be reported to the parents.

The School can help with bullying at school. The bullying must be stopped, but the School is also concerned to help find a good solution for all the students involved, because the students will continue to encounter each other at school and sometimes in the wider community. The victim needs to understand what is happening and be empowered to cope and the bully needs to understand what is happening and find more positive ways of interacting.

The School has procedures in place for counselling, mediation and behaviour management. If the bully does not take advantage of the opportunities to change their behaviour, the student may be asked to leave the School.

Helping at Home

As a first step in helping at home, parents can:

- encourage the child to talk through the problem as far as the child wants to, so they get the basic facts straight;
- try to keep an open mind, remembering they are hearing one part of the story only;
- ask questions gently;
- help the child reflect on what has been done so far; and help the child work out what might be done.

In dealing with the problem parents should:

- never try to sort out the bullies themselves. This rarely works and often makes matters worse.
- work with the School as partners in trying to fix the problem.
- tell the School what they and their child would like to do, and ask them for ideas as well.
- remember the School has a policy on bullying and is as concerned as a child's parents to deal with the problem, but needs time to investigate.
- be aware of the need to monitor children's social activities outside school, set reasonable limits and communicate with the parents of their children's friends. There has been an increasing trend for problems arising from social life outside school and disputes between families to be brought to school by students and seen as harassing or bullying behaviour between individuals or groups of students while at school.

Helping your Child cope

If the bullying is happening on the way to or from school, see if your child can go a different way or join up with other children. This might help while things are being sorted out. It might also be possible for your child to be paired with another more robust child for the time being too. The School could help with this.

If your child finds it hard to make friends, encourage them to make a special effort. One good friend can make a big difference.

Invite school friends home to strengthen the relationships begun at school.

Talk to your child about some of the things that have happened, and discuss some ways of dealing with them, such as:

- pretending not to hear hurtful comments;
- using silent 'self-talk' such as, 'That's their problem, not mine', or, 'I'm OK', to reinforce self-confidence;
- developing greater self-assertiveness, so as to be able to face the bully without becoming scared, upset, abusive or violent; and
- believing that it is OK to tell someone when bullying happens--that it is not 'dobbing'.

It is important that children understand the difference between 'dobbing in' and reporting something that is serious. Bullying is serious. People get hurt, and some are harmed for a long time. Children have said that being bullied is almost the worst thing that can happen to them. Bullying is a problem that students, parents and staff can work together to solve.