

ANTI-BULLYING

POLICY

My Choice School strives to maintain a happy, safe and secure environment in which students will thrive both educationally and personally. Bullying will not be tolerated in any form.

What is bullying?

We define bullying as:

"The wilful desire to hurt, threaten, frighten or belittle someone"

Bullying also definable as repeated often over a period of time and often includes behaviours which are difficult for victims to defend themselves against.

Specific types of bullying include bullying according to:

- Gender
- Race
- Religion
- Culture
- SEN (Special Educational Needs) or disabilities
- Appearance
- Health conditions
- Sexual or gender orientation
- Homophobic and transgender bullying
- Care status or other personal circumstances
- Sexist or sexual bullying

Bullying can take place between students, between students and staff, between staff, by individuals or groups.

Bullying can occur via the following methods:

- **Verbal** – name calling, teasing, insulting, criticising, making offensive remarks (including racial, sexual or other forms of discriminatory comments), intimidating by shouting or using threatening language
- **Physical** – hitting, kicking or other forms of physical assault or unwanted contact, taking, damaging or hiding belongings
- **Indirect** – exclusion from social groups, spreading rumours about someone, making allegations, graffiti
- **Cyberbullying** - using technology particularly mobile phones and the internet to deliberately upset someone else. Cyberbullying is an extension of direct bullying however it also differs in that it is invasive

of home and personal space, the size of the audience and difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages and perceived anonymity. Cyberbullying includes sending texts to or about a person, impersonation, posting messages on the internet, silent or threatening calls, taking and passing on images of people. Cyberbullying and e safety is included in the Computer and internet policy.

Bullying may be instigated by one person however others may reinforce the bullying by joining in or showing approval by laughing while not being directly involved. Others may also reinforce the bullying by remaining resolutely uninvolved and remaining silent.

Who is involved?

Anyone can be the victim of a bully at any time, for a variety of reasons and for no reason. Certain factors as perceived by the bully may make a child more susceptible to bullying:

- Being perceived as different (by ethnicity, gender, sexuality, SEN or physical ability or disability)
- Behaving inappropriately either verbally or physically
- Having low self-esteem and poor social skills
- Behaving passively or submissively signalling to others that they are unlikely to retaliate if bullied

Anyone can also be a bully at any time. Bullies may be **occasional** or **chronic**.

Occasional bullies may bully others once or infrequently. Occasional bullies:

- May be experiencing stress, frustration, anger, loss and bereavement or other mental health issues and may not know how to communicate their distress other than by causing distress in others
- May have been bullied themselves and do not know how to protect themselves other than by adopting the behaviours directed at them

Chronic bullies may have a repeated pattern of bullying behaviour towards others and may have been excluded from schools as a result of their behaviours. Chronic bullies:

- May have noticeably predominant aggressive or disruptive behaviours
- May have difficulty controlling themselves or have impulsive behaviours
- May have a positive attitude towards violence and aggression
- May be insecure, feel different or have low self esteem

- May have poor social skills or difficulties empathising
- May have ongoing mental health issues or other unmet needs

The risks of bullying to both victim and bully

Bullying affects the behaviour and emotional wellbeing of both victim and bully. The risks of being bullied cover three categories:

- **Emotional** –the development of anxiety, low self-esteem, insecurity and withdrawal from social interactions. Persistent bullying leads to a feeling of helplessness and depression. Both victim and bully can experience poor mental health.
- **Physical** – headaches, stomach aches, disrupted sleep patterns, enuresis and general malaise are some of the symptoms of bullying and are very real experiences for victims.
- **Behavioural** – avoidance of situations where bullying is a risk (school in general, communal and outside areas, school activities, assembly room), any change in behaviour which is out of character (increase in risk taking and damaging behaviours), increase in aggressive behaviours and incidents of bullying others.

Prevention and reduction of bullying

The prevention and reduction of bullying is as essential to the provision of a happy, safe and secure environment as are clear guidelines on responses to incidents and disclosures of bullying. My Choice School uses as reference the DfE guidance ***Preventing and tackling bullying: advice for Headteachers, staff and governing bodies 2017.***

The prevention and reduction of bullying takes three approaches:

Curricular intervention – the My Choice School curriculum can be used to:

- raise awareness about bullying and the anti-bullying policy to create classroom expectations and ethos
- increase understanding of the effects of bullying and why people bully
- teach students how to be assertive and how to constructively manage their relationships with others

Resources and activities that may be used by staff include PSHE; role play to explore issues and different responses to situations; assertiveness and empowerment training and strategies for students; the use of code words and signal words to indicate distress and time out requests. Curricular intervention will be needs led and details of anti-bullying awareness projects and classroom activities will be recorded on each students IEPs with further details in Student Planning Files.

Additional resources are available for teachers in the form of guidance and activities from the PSHE Association, membership of this is available for all staff.

Opportunities throughout the academic year and during the school day will be used e.g. Anti-Bullying Week every November, opportunities for discussion at lunchtimes and other transition times and during registration when setting the expectations for the day. Assemblies will also be used as interventions and preventions.

Peer intervention and mediation - A culture in which students are monitored pro-actively and inclusively and where appropriate behaviours are reinforced will create a culture in which students recognise that bullying is not tolerated. Students are not expected to manage bullying without adult intervention or knowledge however empowerment to use suggested strategies and the opportunity to disclose incidents of bullying experienced or witnessed must be provided through curricular and adult intervention.

Adult intervention and mediation – All staff working with students are responsible for monitoring and supervising students and for taking action to identify and take action on incidents of bullying. When staff are working with students they must be aware of:

- **Areas of risk** – assessing seating positions in classrooms, assembly room and other communal areas to minimise opportunity for potential conflicts and inappropriate interactions between students and identifying areas within the school environment and in outside spaces where additional vigilance may be required such as areas of poor visibility.
- **Times of risk** – assessing levels of supervision required during unstructured and undirected times during the day such as break times, lunch time and home time (including shared taxi travel, after school and at weekends). Also assessing need for adult direction and intervention during group activities such as lunch time and organised educational visits.
- **Changes in student behaviours and emotional presentations** – assessing changes in avoidance behaviours and strategies, increase in verbal and physical aggression and frequencies of student illness. Also assessing verbal and non-verbal exchanges between students and intervening as appropriate (such as defusing verbal conflicts and attitudes) and assessing group dynamics (such as exclusions from activities by peers or individuals withdrawing from activities).

Bullying behaviour must be directly challenged by My Choice School staff and all staff are required to report and record all concerns.

Staff are to listen to all young people involved in the incident and to record the discussions. This is to be passed to the DSL (Deputy Headteacher) or DDSL Headteacher at the school. The young person can be offered a complaints form or a student voice form to complete with or without staff support.

Staff must consider if the young people involved need to be separated while the situation is assessed and reviewed.

Staff must consider if there were any witnesses involved and to include this in the record. Staff members to consider if the issue is also a Child Protection concern, and to then follow the Child Protection Procedure.

Incidents of bullying must be shared as a team so that prevention and intervention is a whole school strategy and response.

The Social Worker and parent / carer of the young person must be informed, this can be through a Cause for Concern report or an Incident report.

At My Choice School, we use a **Restorative Justice Approach** and use the following key questions (if appropriate) when intervening with young people who have been bullying others and with victims of bullying:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- How were you feeling at the time?
- Who do you think has been affected by what has happened?
- What needs to happen to put things right?

Mental Health Interventions can be provided during the school week to support students who are experiencing difficulties with their peer interactions or with their emotional regulation.

The Headteacher will review strategies and discuss this with the Head of Education, who will review risk assessments for all involved to ensure safe practice is adhered to at all times.

The young people will be informed of the professionals that will be notified in incidents of bullying.

My Choice Senior Management will be involved in serious cases of bullying.

Where students do not respond to preventative strategies DfE guidelines state that tougher measures are required. A range of permitted sanctions are detailed in the My Choice School Behaviour Policy.

Policy link:

Safeguarding policy

Behaviour management policy

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Annual review due June 2025