

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Strategic Plan

Reviewed February 2024



**DURHAM CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**
Learning and Living in Faith

Introduction

Providing students with an opportunity to learn and develop in a safe, inclusive, and accepting school climate is a shared responsibility in which the Durham Catholic District School Board and its schools play an important role. Schools that have bullying prevention and intervention plans foster a positive learning and teaching environment that supports student achievement and well-being, and helps students reach their full potential.

A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education, as well as our Catholic Graduate Expectations and Catholic School Teachings, are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of bullying prevention.

Building and sustaining a positive school climate is a complex challenge requiring evidence-informed solutions. A whole-school approach involving all education and community partners is needed to bring about necessary systemic change.

DCDSB Commitment to Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Bullying will not be accepted on school property, at school-related activities, on school buses, or in any other circumstances (e.g., online) where engaging in bullying will have a negative impact on the school climate.

All employees of the Board will take seriously all allegations of bullying behaviour and act in a timely, sensitive, and supportive manner when responding to students who disclose or report bullying incidents.

Definitions

Bullying: For the purposes of policies on bullying prevention and intervention, school boards must use the following definition of bullying, given in subsection 1(1) of the Education Act. “

Bullying” means aggressive and typically repeated behaviour by a pupil where,
1) the behaviour is intended by the pupil to have the effect of, or the pupil ought to know that the behaviour would be likely to have the effect of,
a) causing harm, fear or distress to another individual, including physical, psychological, social or academic harm, harm to the individual’s reputation or harm to the individual’s property; or

- b) creating a negative environment at a school for another individual; and
- 2) the behaviour occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the pupil and the individual based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education.

Bullying

- (1.0.0.1) For the purposes of the definition of “bullying” in subsection (1), behaviour includes the use of any physical, verbal, electronic, written, or other means.

Cyber-bullying

- (1.0.0.2) For the purposes of the definition of “bullying” in subsection (1), bullying includes bullying by electronic means (commonly known as cyber-bullying), including,
 - i) creating a web page or a blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;
 - ii) impersonating another person as the author of content or messages posted on the internet; and
 - iii) communicating material electronically to more than one individual or posting material on a website that may be accessed by one or more individuals.

Aggression

Aggressive behaviour is conflict that may be intentional or unintentional, direct, or indirect. It can take many forms, including physical, verbal, and social. It can be experienced in a number of ways including physical, mental, emotional, and psychological harm.

Teasing

Teasing can be positive or negative.

- Positive Teasing:
 - illustrates closeness, affection, and familiarity with another person
 - person being teased is not distressed
 - takes place within a strong relationship
 - strengthens the relationship
- Negative Teasing:
 - alienates, criticizes, and embarrasses the other person
 - the person being teased is distressed
 - takes place within a weak relationship
 - undermines the relationship

Principles for Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Bullying awareness and prevention strategies should focus on fostering learning environments that promote a positive sense of self, spirit and belonging where social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs are met (Ontario's Well-Being Strategy, 2016.)

Positive mental health, safe and accepting schools, healthy schools, and equity and inclusive education are all interconnected components at the foundation of *Ontario's Well-Being Strategy* and provide context for the development of a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (BPIP).

There are many bullying prevention programs on the market. It is important to recognize that implementing a bullying prevention program in a school takes a significant investment of time and resources. If a school is looking to select a bullying prevention program, the school should choose a program that is evidence-based, evidence-informed, or a promising practice (see www.prevnet.ca.)

Bullying prevention strategies provide children and youth with awareness and skills:

- to initiate and engage in positive relationships;
- to prevent from bullying others; and
- to cope effectively with being bullied (e.g., walk away or tell someone).

All children and youth need this awareness and social-emotional skill to be successful in school and in their relationship with peers. All adults involved with children and youth need to know how to provide support for developing social understanding and responsibility.

Principles for Bullying Prevention and Intervention (Evidence-based)

- Principle 1: Bullying is a relationship problem.
- Principle 2: Bullying interventions require a developmental approach.
- Principle 3: Bullying interventions require a systems approach.
- Principle 4: Leadership is the Foundation for Systems Change.

Principle 1: Bullying is a Relationship Problem

Bullying prevention and intervention are not just about eliminating bullying – it is also about promoting the development of healthy relationships. The goal is to help ensure that all students and staff within the Durham Catholic District School Board have

healthy, safe, respectful, and caring relationships with everyone in their lives.

Relationship problems require relationship solutions. Students who bully require interventions to teach that bullying is unacceptable, and to learn awareness, social skills, empathy, and positive leadership. Interventions focused on the peer group have the potential to shift the power dynamics and promote positive relationships. Students' positive peer relationships depend on positive relationships with adults. Teachers, parents/guardians, and other adults not only model relationship skills, language, and attitudes, but they are also active in creating positive experiences in which students interact with each other.

Principle 2: Bullying Interventions Require a Developmental Approach

Bullying and victimization can start in early childhood and persist through the school years, peaking during school transitions. The use of power and aggression in relationships generally drops off as children and youth learn that this is an ineffective means of maintaining relationships.

Understanding the complexity and diverse developmental pathways of bullying and victimization is critical for recognizing and responding to the use of power and aggression in relationships.

Curriculum Integration

The Ontario Curriculum and Religious Education programs include cross-curricular and program specific expectations that relate to components of bullying prevention and intervention. Every aspect of the Curriculum is taught considering Gospel values and the teachings of the Catholic Church so that we build a strong, caring community of faith. Students can be encouraged to explore the issues and solutions to bullying through visual arts, drama, dance, and music. There is much to be learned through science and health about social- emotional development, social behaviour and the brain, stress and functioning, mental health, and many other aspects of human behaviour that shed light on the complex dynamics of bullying and its impact. There are opportunities to help students' skills for bullying prevention when planning instruction with the overall expectations for oral communication, reading, writing and media literacy in the Ontario language curriculum.

Schools are now required to do formal surveys on bullying and school climate. While focusing on numeracy, students can:

- analyze data from their school's climate survey (where applicable);

- develop observation strategies or questions that are relevant for their school; and
- collect and manage additional data from students, parents/guardians, teachers, or community leaders, and analyze the responses and report on the findings.

When Catholic teachings and values are the foundation, we are able to teach students about socially appropriate behaviours while respecting their dignity and promoting their self-worth. This is shown through:

- acknowledging and celebrating the positive behaviours modeled by staff and students;
- providing interventions and support networks for those members of the school community in need;
- integrating opportunities for students to develop knowledge and skills in moral living, self-management, healthy relationships, equity and diversity, and strategies for responding to safety concerns; and
- utilizing support services and resources to effectively assist members of the school community.

Within the context of Catholicism, the call to live a moral life is seen in a positive light. Each school's mission statement is an affirmation of moral living. For students to experience this affirmation on a daily basis they need to develop the capacity to:

- distinguish right and wrong;
- analyze society's values and messages;
- build and maintain healthy relationships;
- handle interpersonal conflicts;
- handle violence;
- obtain and show forgiveness; and
- recognize and respond to others in need.

School Supports

There are many different resources that educators can reference and implement to support the Board's BPIP. These may include, but are not limited to:

- **Seconds Steps:** a research based Social Emotional Learning program that fosters safety and respect within the school community.
- **Restorative Practice:** constructing positive, inclusive, and safe school cultures by fostering respectful and responsible relationships among school community members that are rooted in mutual respect, care, concern, and dignity.

Accessing the many resources and programs provided by Child and Youth counsellors

Principle 3: Bullying Interventions Require a Systems Approach

A positive school climate means that students, parents/guardians, staff, and community members feel safe, welcome, and respected in each Durham Catholic school.

Everyone has a role to play in promoting healthy relationships and a school climate which encourages appropriate student behaviour. This includes:

- collaboratively promoting positive student behaviour through the code of conduct;
- building healthy and respectful relationships throughout the whole school community;
- preventing inappropriate behaviour through initiatives like bullying prevention programs; and
- addressing inappropriate behaviour through progressive discipline.

Through the use of progressive discipline, principals determine appropriate consequences and/or support to help students improve their behaviour, while taking into account each individual's circumstance, such as:

- the students' stage of growth and development;
- the nature and severity of the behaviour; and
- the impact of the behaviour on the school climate.

Therefore, bullying interventions and supports should be evidence-informed, timely, developmentally appropriate, and take a whole-school approach.

Bullying interventions may:

- Use “teachable moments” within a progressive discipline approach to address inappropriate behaviour. Consider mitigating factors like the student's age, the circumstances of the behaviour, and the student's history before determining the most appropriate way to respond to each situation. Consider a range of options to address the behaviour and help the student learn from his or her choices.
- Have in place processes and strategies to identify and respond to bullying when it happens.
- Follow up after bullying incident(s) with students, parents/guardians, teachers, and other school staff, where appropriate.
- Identify strategies for supporting students who engage in bullying, who have been bullied, and others who may have witnessed or been affected by bullying while respecting privacy. These strategies could include school-based resources and/or referrals to community agencies, e.g., mental health services or public health.

Communicate to the school community the progressive discipline approach to address inappropriate behaviour and the procedures that are in place to support students, as well as their parents/guardians, who have been harmed or who have engaged in serious behaviour incidents. These policies and procedures must outline what schools

are required to do to support students, including the development of specific plans to protect students who have been harmed. It must also outline a process for parents/guardians to follow if they are not satisfied with the supports that their children received.

Responding to Bullying

Various pieces of legislation outline the reporting mechanisms that must be followed to report bullying.

DCDSB is committed to the BPIP whereby any member of the school community can use the anonymous “Report It” button located on the Board website, as well as each individual school website.

Schools should include the language below in their BPIP to outline how students, staff and parents/guardians can report bullying.

Student Reporting

- Reporting bullying to a trusted adult (e.g., parent/guardian, teacher, administrator, support staff, police liaison officer.)
- Using the “Report It” button on the school/board website.

Staff Reporting

- “The *Education Act* states that an employee of the board who becomes aware that a student at the school of the board may have engaged in a serious student incident shall report the matter to the principal as soon as reasonably possible.” (PPM144)
- When appropriate, staff complete and submit the “Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form” to the principal. The principal provides written acknowledgment to the employee using the “Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form” (PPM 144)

Parent/Guardian/Community Reporting

- Reporting bullying to the classroom teacher, support staff and/or administration.
- Using the “Report It” button on the school/board website.

Responding to Teasing

Teasing is hostile when the person being teased is distressed by the teasing. For example, teasing about physical appearance is most often perceived as hostile and hurtful because it has so many implications for social acceptance, and it is out of the

individual's control.

Research indicates that individuals are aware of the impact their teasing has on the individual being targeted. This is likely due to their knowledge of the effect their teasing will have on the victim:

- Will it serve to reject or include the target?
- What will be the verbal and nonverbal responses to the teasing?

Teasing becomes bullying when there is a power imbalance between the children/youth involved and the person who is teasing has more social power or social value among peers compared to the person being teased. This includes when the child who is teasing intends to distress or harm the child being teased and the child being teased is distressed or hurt by the interaction.

Teasing

- is equal and reciprocated
- is fun and not hurtful
- often occurs prior to aggression

Aggression

- is conflict
- can be intentional or unintentional
- could be one time
- can lead to bullying

Bullying

- a form of typically repeated, persistent, and aggressive behaviour
- directed at an individual or individuals that is intended to cause fear/distress

Principle 4: Leadership is the Foundation for Systems Change

DCDSB is committed to providing on-going professional development and learning in the areas of Safe and Accepting Schools and Bullying Prevention and Intervention. Some professional development opportunities include:

- Restorative Practices
- Self-Regulation Practices
- Mindfulness Practices
- Professional Activity days

School staff should participate in on-going professional development and learning to:

- understand the “whole school approach” to developing a positive school climate for student achievement and well-being;
- understand the factors that contribute to a safe, inclusive, and accepting school climate;
- identify ways to teach students how they can help prevent and respond to bullying;
- identify strategies that students and parents/guardians can use to safely report incidents of bullying;
- identify ways to engage parents/guardians in preventing bullying and promoting a positive school climate;
- become knowledgeable about community partners and resources available in the community; and
- understand the Principles of Equity and Inclusive Education.

Safety Plans – Ministry of Education PPM

A Student Safety Plan is a plan developed for a student whose behaviour is known to pose an ongoing risk to themselves, other students, workers, or other people in general. It can serve as a crisis-response plan that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the workers in dealing with specific problem behaviours.

Notifying Parents/Guardians

Section 300.3 of the *Education Act* specifies when principals are required to notify the parents/guardians of the students who have been harmed as the result of a serious student incident. Principals shall disclose the following information:

- the nature of the activity that resulted in harm to the student;
- the nature of the harm to the student;
- the steps taken to protect the student’s safety, including the nature of any disciplinary measures taken in response to the activity; and
- the supports that will be provided for the student in response to the harm that resulted from the activity.

This section of the Act also specifies that principals are required to notify the parents/guardians of students who have engaged in serious student incidents. Principals shall disclose the following information:

- the nature of the activity that resulted in harm to the other student;
- the nature of the harm to the other student;
- the nature of any disciplinary measures taken in response to the activity; and
- the supports that will be provided for the student in response to their engagement in the activity.

When notifying parents/guardians of these incidents, the principal must invite parents/guardians to have a discussion with them about the supports that will be provided for their child.

Under subsection 300.3(3) of the *Education Act*, a principal shall not notify a parent/guardian of a student if, in the opinion of the principal, doing so would put the student at risk of harm from a parent/guardian of the student, such that notification is not in the student's best interest.

Under subsection 301(5.5) of the *Education Act*, when principals have decided not to notify the parents/guardians that their child was involved in a serious student incident, as described above, they must, in accordance with *Ontario Regulation 472/07*, document the rationale for this decision and notify both the teacher who reported the incident and the appropriate supervisory officer of the decision. Principals shall also, if they determine it is appropriate to do so, inform other board employees of this decision. In addition, principals should refer the student to board resources or to a community-based service provider that can provide the appropriate type of confidential support when the student's parents/guardians are not called (e.g., counselling; a sexual assault center, Kids Help Phone; LGBT Youth Line.)

In circumstances where board employees have reason to believe that a student may be in need of protection, board employees must call a Children's Aid Society according to the requirements of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*.

Safe and Accepting School Teams

Each school must have in place a safe and accepting schools' team responsible for fostering a safe, inclusive, and accepting school climate that should include at least one student and must include at least one parent/guardian, one teacher, one non-teaching staff member or one community partner, and the principal. An existing school committee (e.g., the healthy schools committee) can assume this role. The chair of this team must be a staff member.

Goal Setting

Results of the Safe and Accepting School Climate Survey inform the development of the bullying prevention and intervention goals, including the selection strategies, practices, programs, etc. A pre- and post-evaluation strategy is critical. The pre-evaluation creates a baseline and identifies gaps and areas of concern for the school as well as areas of strength and success. A post-evaluation phase gathers evidence to test the efficacy of the prevention, responses, interventions or supports provided in order for changes to be made where necessary.

- Identify the main issues of concern in a particular school raised by students, school staff, parents/guardians, as well as identify issues in the physical environment.
- Conduct a needs assessment, e.g., what are the current processes for reporting, response, support and follow up on issues.
- Develop a pre- and post-evaluation strategy. These should be informed by the results of school climate surveys and other relevant information which may include suspension and expulsion data, the board violent incident report, and

reviews of programs and strategies. Steps in an evaluation strategy would include:

- Creating a baseline and identifying areas of concern
- Measuring success
- Making changes where necessary
- Creating an action plan to address areas of concern
- Identify children and youth involved in bullying (including the bully, the person being bullied, and those who may have witnessed or been affected by the bullying). Consider a risk assessment approach in order to do this.
- Identify learning and training opportunities that are needed.
- Review and update plan as a result of gathering new information and share with the school community.

Monitoring and Review

Boards should monitor, review, and evaluate the effectiveness of board policies and guidelines, using indicators established in consultation with teachers, other school staff, students, parents/guardians, and school councils. They should also consult with their Special Education Advisory Committee and their Indigenous Education Advisory Council. Boards may also consult with their Parent Involvement Committee and other appropriate community partners. Boards will conduct a cyclical review of their policies and guidelines in a timely manner.

Resources

- DCDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (PO612)
- DCDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
- [The Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network \(PREVNet\)](#)
- [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144: Bullying Prevention and Intervention](#)
- [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 145: Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour](#)
- [Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation](#)
- [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools](#)
- [Ontario's Parent Engagement Policy](#)
- [Progressive Discipline: Part of Ontario's approach to making schools safe places to learn](#)
- Bill 13: When establishing the bullying prevention and intervention plan, a board shall solicit the views of the pupils, teachers and staff of the board, the volunteers working in schools, the parents and guardians of the pupils, school councils and the public.
- Policy/Program Memorandum No. 144: Boards must ensure that schools have in place a Safe and Accepting Schools Team responsible for fostering a safe, inclusive and accepting school climate that must be chaired by a staff member and include the principal, at least one parent, teacher, non-teaching staff member or community partner. It should also include at least one student.