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Bullying Prevention and Intervention

The Hazard – Bullying

Bullying is the repeated and intentional behaviour of causing fear, distress or harm towards another person that involves an imbalance of power. It can involve humiliation, domination, intimidation, victimisation and harassment. In any bullying incident there are likely to be three parties involved: the bully, the person being bullied, and bystanders.

Bullying can take many forms including:

- **Physical bullying** which involves physical actions such as hitting, pushing, obstructing or being used to hurt or intimidate someone. Damaging, stealing or hiding personal belongings is also a form of physical bullying.
- **Psychological bullying** which is when words or actions are used to cause psychological harm. Examples of psychological bullying include name calling, teasing or making fun of someone because of their actions, appearance, physical characteristics or cultural background.
- **Indirect bullying** which is when deliberate acts of exclusion or spreading of untrue stories are used to hurt or intimidate someone.
- **Cyber bullying** which is the ongoing abuse of power to threaten or harm another person using technology. Cyber bullying can occur in chat rooms, on social networking sites, through emails or on mobile phones.

What Isn't Bullying?

There are many negative situations which, whilst being potentially distressing for students, are not bullying. These include:

- **Mutual Conflict Situations** which arise where there is disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Mutual conflict situations need to be closely monitored as they may evolve into a bullying situation.
- **One-Off Acts** (of aggression or meanness) including single incidents of loss of temper, shouting or swearing do not normally constitute bullying.

Signs of Bullying

Major behavioural changes in a student may be indicative of bullying. Such behavioural changes may include:

- crying at night and having nightmares
- refusing to talk when asked "What's wrong?"
- having unexplained bruises, cuts or scratches
- an unwillingness or refusal to go to school
- feeling ill in the mornings
- a decline in quality of school work
- becoming withdrawn and lacking confidence
- beginning to bully siblings
- acting unreasonably.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to recognise signs of bullying and notify the College through a trusted staff member immediately (such as a class teacher or College counsellor), if they suspect their child is a victim of bullying.

Philosophical Basis

The dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching and inherent to our education ministry. Consequently, the principle that the person is made in the image and likeness of God, is central to the mission of all our school communities. Essential to this is the creation and maintenance of a respectful, safe and supportive learning environment that promotes student wellbeing and enables school communities to engage an inclusive and diverse range of learners.

In particular, it is vital that learning technologies are used ethically and responsibly in the school environment, so that communication is respectful and human dignity valued.

The prevention of and responses to incidents of bullying, inappropriate use of technology and disrespectful behaviour in schools is more readily achieved in a caring and supportive school culture that promotes positive relationships and reflects Gospel values.

Bullying, cyber-bullying, harassment, aggression and violence disregard core values of our faith including dignity, respect, justice, equity, compassion, trust and courage. Importantly, such actions can adversely affect the wellbeing of students and are therefore unacceptable. All members of our college community are expected to prevent and challenge such actions in order to build respectful relationships that respond effectively and sensitively to the needs of each person.

O'Connor Catholic College's Policy

O'Connor Catholic College recognises its duty to students to provide a safe and positive learning environment where individual differences and diversity within the College is respected and accepted. If bullying occurs which is foreseeable (a teacher or other school staff member knew of, or ought to have known of, a bullying incident) this could give rise to a breach of the college's duty of care towards students. Refer to **Student Duty of Care (Summary)**.

Bullying is not tolerated at O'Connor Catholic College.

It is our policy that:

- bullying be managed through a 'whole-of-College community' approach involving students, staff and parents/guardians
- bullying prevention strategies are implemented within the College on a continuous basis with a focus on teaching age-appropriate skills and strategies to empower staff, students and parents/guardians to recognise bullying and respond appropriately
- bullying response strategies are tailored to the circumstances of each incident
- staff establish positive role models emphasising our no-bullying culture
- bullying prevention and intervention strategies are reviewed on an annual basis against best practice.

Bullying Prevention Strategies

O'Connor Catholic College recognises that the implementation of whole-College prevention strategies is the most effective way of eliminating, or at least minimising incidents of bullying within our community.

The following initiatives form part of our overall bullying prevention strategy and our strategy to create a 'no-bullying' culture within the College:

- a structured curriculum and peer group support system, that provides age-appropriate information and skills relating to bullying (including cyber bullying) and bullying prevention, to students over the course of the academic year
- education, training and professional development of staff in bullying prevention and response strategies
- regular provision of information to parents/guardians, to raise awareness of bullying as a College community issue to equip them to recognise signs of bullying, as well as to provide them with clear paths for raising any concerns they may have relating to bullying directly with the College

- promotion of a supportive environment that encourages the development of positive relationships and communication between staff, students and parents/guardians
- promotion of responsible bystander behaviour amongst students, staff and parents/guardians
- reporting of incidents of alleged bullying by students, bystanders, parents/guardians and staff are encouraged, and made easy through the establishment of multiple reporting channels (as specified below)
- regular risk assessments of bullying within the College are undertaken by surveying students to identify bullying issues that may ordinarily go unnoticed by staff
- records of reported bullying incidents are maintained and analysed, in order to identify persistent bullies and/or victims and to implement targeted prevention strategies where appropriate
- statements supporting bullying prevention are included in students' College diaries
- education of staff, students and parents/guardians on health conditions to promote understanding and to reduce stigma and fear
- anti-bullying posters are displayed strategically within the College
- promotion of student awareness and a 'no-bullying' environment by participating in events such as the National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence.

Reporting Bullying

Students and their parents/guardians are sometimes reluctant to pursue bullying incidents, for fear that it will only make matters worse.

A key part of the College's bullying prevention and intervention strategy is to encourage reporting of bullying incidents as well as providing assurance to students who experience bullying (and parents/guardians) that:

- bullying is not tolerated within the College
- their concerns will be taken seriously
- the College has a clear strategy for dealing with bullying issues.

Bullying incidents can be advised to the College verbally (or in writing) through any of the following avenues:

- informing a trusted teacher
- informing the College counsellor
- informing a student's Pastoral Academic Care Leader or Pastoral Academic Care Teacher
- informing the Assistant Principal or the Principal.

Responding to Bullying

Bullying behaviours vary enormously in their extent and intent and, as a consequence, each incident needs to be dealt with on its facts.

In all circumstances the College:

- takes bullying incidents seriously
- provides assurance to the victim that they are not at fault and their confidentiality will be respected
- takes time to properly investigate the facts including discussing the incident with the victim, the bully and any bystanders
- takes time to understand any concerns of individuals involved
- maintains records of reported bullying incidents
- will escalate its response when dealing with persistent bullies and/or severe incidents.

Actions that may be taken when responding to bullying may include the "Restorative Justice" Approach (McCold & Wachtel).

This approach may be used to intervene in group or relational bullying situations. It is only appropriate during the initial stages. It is not appropriate for persistent or severe bullying incidents.

- notification of/consultation with parents/guardians
- offering counselling to persistent bullies/victims
- implementing effective follow up strategies
- disciplinary action as deemed appropriate by the Principal may include suspension and/or expulsion in accordance with Diocesan policy.

CSO Armidale Alleged Bullying Initial Action Tool

CSO Armidale has developed an Initial Action Tool for dealing with alleged bullying. The purpose of the Tool is provide a clear procedure for staff to follow once they become aware of an alleged bullying incident/s and to record details of the incident/s.

The Initial Action Tool can be accessed [here](#).

Bullying and Other Support Services

The following support services are available to students and staff:

Youth Liaison Officers

Youth Liaison Officers are NSW Police Force members who are responsible for administering the Young Offenders Act 1997 (NSW). They are responsible for delivering cautions, referring children to youth justice conferences, and implementing strategies to reduce crime by juveniles in the community.

The Youth Liaison Officer contact is Fiona McCormack
Phone: 02 67710652
Email: mcco1fio@police.nsw.gov.au

Other Support Services

O'Connor Catholic College also provides access to **Counselling Services (Student)**.

Staff Responsibilities

All staff are responsible to:

- model appropriate, respectful and supportive behaviour at all times
- deal with all reported and observed incidents of bullying in accordance with this policy
- ensure that any incident of bullying that they observe or is reported to them, is recorded appropriately
- be vigilant in monitoring students that have been identified as either persistent bullies or victims
- acknowledge the right of parents/guardians to speak with the College if they believe their child is being bullied.

Signage

Anti-bullying posters may be posted in strategic locations in the College to promote appropriate behaviour and encourage students to respect individual differences and diversity.

Implementation

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- staff training
- student and parent/guardian education and information
- effective incident reporting procedures
- effective management of bullying incidents when reported
- the creation of a 'no-bullying' culture within the College community
- effective record keeping procedures
- initiation of corrective actions where necessary.

Discipline for Breach of Policy

Where a staff member breaches this policy O'Connor Catholic College will take disciplinary action, including in the case of serious breaches, summary dismissal.