

Guidelines for Handling School Bullying

Definition of Bullying

Various scholars have defined bullying somewhat differently; however, most cases of bullying involve the following three elements:

- Repetition over time: The bullying behavior is not a single incident but occurs multiple times.
- Hostile intent: The bully mistreats and harms the victim deliberately.
- Imbalance of power: The bully is obviously more powerful than the victim and bullying takes place as the victim is unable to protect himself or herself.

(Beane, 1999; DFES, 2002; Newman, Horne & Bartolomucci, 2000; Olweus, 1993)

Only behavior exhibiting all three characteristics mentioned above is defined as bullying. Generally speaking, bullying refers to the sort of behavior where a person or a group of people repeatedly harm or mistreat others deliberately based on their superiority in power or numbers.

Types of Bullying

There are roughly four types of bullying (DFES, 2002):

| Types of Bullying | Examples |
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| bullying involving physical or behavioral violence | hitting, kicking, slapping, shoving, tripping somebody up, pulling somebody's hair, obtaining money or things by extortion, etc. |
| bullying involving verbal abuse | intimidating, using abusive language, swearing, slandering, ridiculing, nicknaming, mocking or insulting somebody on the basis of physical appearance, ability or ethnicity, etc. |
| indirect bullying | spreading rumors, being unfriendly intentionally, ignoring somebody, isolating somebody, boycotting somebody, turning somebody away, etc. |
| cyberbullying | spreading rumors about somebody, insulting somebody, making personal comments about somebody, mocking somebody or slandering somebody, all done via internet-related means such as e-mail, website, online chatting or messaging with one's cell phone |

Handling Bullying and Follow-up Procedures

1. In the event of bullying, the staff members on duty should get to the spot as soon as possible and stop it from continuing; if it is necessary, they should
 - call other staff members for assistance without delay;
 - take any injured students to hospital (refer to “Procedures for Reporting Student Injury” for details)
 - conduct a preliminary inquiry on the spot and make a record of the incident;
 - notify school management;
 - notify parents;
 - consult with a police school liaison officer.

2. On the very day when the bullying takes place, relevant staff members, class teachers, social workers as well as student growth team members should take time to meet with the students involved, including the bullies, the victims and the bystanders, so as to understand what has happened, devise a strategy to deal with it and prevent it from happening again.

3. Invite parents of both the bullies and the victims for a meeting, each at an appropriate time, and make sure that
 - there is sufficient preparation before the meeting, including having an outline for the conversation and relevant information handy;
 - the parents realize that the purpose of the meeting is to show concern for the students, understand the incident and find ways to cope;
 - the conversation is centered around the bullying incident;
 - the parents understand that the school management concerns itself with the bullying incident and will see to it that it will not occur again;
 - the parents are only presented with what is known before the facts are dug out completely, so as to discourage wild guesses and premature judgment;
 - the incident is given an objective and matter-of-fact account where subjective wordings are avoided;
 - there is discussion with the parents as to how the students involved could be protected in case their safety is threatened;
 - the incident is given a detailed analysis and a balance is struck between the opinions of every party and the position of the school management before the parents are informed of the punishments;
 - the parents’ cooperation has been sought so that a consensus is reached between them and the school management;
 - the parents’ emotions are attended to, and if they become too emotional, steps are taken to cool them down before discussion is continued;
 - information of other students is not disclosed to the parents, and no arrangement is made for the parents to meet with other students;

- the gist of the conversation is recorded for follow-up and future reference;
- the parents could be referred to social workers for follow-up if they need additional assistance in handling their emotions or disciplining their children.

Procedures for Handling Bullying Incident by School

