



# ASSUMPTION COLLEGE

## IN RESPONSE TO BULLYING – PROCEDURE

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### INTRODUCTION

Assumption College promotes safety and belonging by respecting diversity and encouraging harmonious relationships. All members of the College community have the right to a safe and supportive environment, in which they can reach their full academic, emotional, physical and spiritual potential.

There has been a growing awareness over the last two decades, both in Australia and internationally, of the harmful impact of bullying. Recent legislation in Australia ensures the protection of victims of bullying. The adverse effects of bullying on all students are well documented and anti-bullying initiatives in schools are also consistent with the current approaches to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in young people.

### PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Gospel values underlying this document include a strong sense of service to others, mutual respect, justice, and reconciliation. The aim of the Assumption College community is to create an environment in which each person is treated with tolerance, where an openness to those holding different opinions and views is encouraged and developed, and where respect for each other is upheld.

The purpose of these procedures is to provide agreed actions for when staff are managing behavioural issues with students at all year levels. These pathways are to be adhered to, and not circumnavigated for expediency. The roles of staff at the various levels of responsibility need to be respected and fulfilled. Any concerns about the implementation of this procedure in specific incidents should be raised by following the 'Issue Resolution' Procedure.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Incidents where students are understood to have acted inappropriately will be investigated and responded to based on the following principles:

- Restorative Practice: is a way of dealing with inappropriate behaviours of wrongdoers in a manner that requires them to take responsibility for their behaviour by acknowledging what has happened and the people who have been affected by their behaviour, and focusing on repairing the harm that has been done. It encompasses a shift in thinking from blame and punishment to addressing the impact on others, harm done and restoration of relationships with the goal of the wrongdoer taking responsibility for their behaviour and re-joining their class or social situation respectfully and with care.
- Impartiality: the matter will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner. No judgements or assumptions will be made, and no action will be taken until the investigation is complete. If a complaint is made against a person, their rights will be protected and they will be given an opportunity to have their side of the story heard.
- Confidentiality: as far as is reasonable and safe, matters will remain confidential. The only people who will have access to information about the behaviour will be those responsible for bringing the matter to a reasonable outcome.
- Timeliness: each matter will be finalised within as short a period as possible.



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- No victimisation: the school will make every reasonable effort to ensure that a person involved in behaviour management processes is not victimised in any way.
- Forgiveness: as a Catholic school, we promote and build opportunities for forgiveness to arise and be expressed.

In responding to alleged bullying behaviours, the staff involved will take into account the following:

- Students who frequently bully others are more likely to:
  - feel disconnected from school and dislike school;
  - demonstrate low levels of moral reasoning and high levels of egocentric reasoning;
  - believe that the use of aggression is an acceptable way to achieve their own goals;
  - be preoccupied with their own goals and not concerned about the rights of others;
  - show emotional instability;
  - be less friendly and less cooperative than other students; have reasonable levels of peer acceptance and social status, but are more disliked than non-bullying peers;
  - associate with other aggressive and anti-social peers;
  - be less anxious than peers;
  - have high self-esteem and an inflated view of themselves;
  - have lower levels of empathy;
  - have poor impulse control and poor anger management skills;
  - feel less confident about using non-violent strategies to resolve conflict;
  - be less likely to consider the negative consequences of their actions;
  - feel angry often and be inclined to attribute hostile intentions to other people;
  - be skilled at finding a student to bully who will pose little threat to them.
- Students who frequently bully others are more likely to come from family backgrounds in which:
  - their parents are not supportive and tend to use an authoritarian and harsh, punitive style of parenting;
  - their parents have a history of having bullied others (when they were at school) or have a history of criminal activity;
  - family relationships are strained and conflicted;
  - their parents supervise the children less;
  - the child has been maltreated by family members, been bullied by their siblings, or has bullied their siblings;
  - the child has high levels of disagreement with his/her parents;
  - their parents are relatively uninvolved with the child;
  - their parents are permissive towards aggressive behaviour;
  - the child has witnessed domestic partner abuse;
  - the child is part of a large family.

There are two sub-types of students who persistently bully:

1. Students who bully proactively and see their aggressive mistreatment of other students as 'instrumental' in achieving their goal of social dominance. These students show low levels of remorse and moral reasoning and have been described as cold and callous schemers with the capacity to socially manipulate others; and



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2. Students who bully reactively are quick to anger and lash out impulsively and usually with physical aggression. These students have low levels of social competence and poor emotional control. These are often the students who have been described as 'bully-victims'.

Some students who persistently bully may have one or more of the following behaviour disorders:

- childhood psychopathy, conduct disorder and oppositional defiance disorder. These students will require additional support.

*Students who are frequently bullied (or bullied over time)*

Any student can become the target of bullying. Research suggests students who are frequently bullied are more likely to:

- feel disconnected from and dislike school;
- lack quality friendships with peers and teachers at school (but not necessarily outside school);
- display emotional behaviour that indicates vulnerability (e.g. look sad or anxious and cry, or become sad or angry easily) and a lack of resilience;
- be less accepted by peers, avoid conflict and be socially withdrawn;
- have low self-esteem;
- be relatively non-assertive;
- lack confidence and skills in effectively interacting with peers;
- be less likely to have other children come to their defence when they are bullied;
- be different in some way (e.g. they have an unusual physical characteristic, choose to dress differently, minority ethnic group, same sex attracted groups, have different musical preferences or have a disability of some kind).

## DEFINITIONS

**Bullying:** is a pattern of two or more instances of physical, verbal, psychological or social aggression that is directed towards a specific person by someone with more power and causes harm, distress and/or fear. Bullying may be carried out overtly (e.g. face-to-face) or covertly (e.g. through repeated social exclusion or via technology).

Conflict or fights between equals and single incidents are not defined as bullying.

*The different types of bullying*

1. Face-to-face bullying (sometimes referred to as direct bullying) involves physical actions such as punching or kicking or overt verbal actions such as name-calling and insulting.
2. Covert bullying (sometimes referred to as indirect bullying) is a subtle type of non-physical bullying which isn't easily seen by others and is conducted out of sight.
3. Cyberbullying: occurs through the use of information or communication technologies such as Instant Messaging, text messages, email and social networking sites. It has many similarities with offline bullying but it differs in that the student(s) who is/are bullying can be anonymous, it can reach a wide audience and the sent or uploaded material can be difficult to remove.



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## *Bystanders*

Bystanders (i.e. those students who witness bullying or know about it) are now recognised as a critical part of the group dynamics of bullying. Student bystanders can be divided into several categories:

- Students who assist the students who are bullying and actively join in.
- Students who encourage and give silent approval to the students who are bullying.
- Students who watch the bullying (or hear about it) but are passive and do nothing.

## STUDENT MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

*Student:* responsible for acting in a way that is respectful of others and the rules of our College.

*Parent:* responsible for helping son/daughter to understand and enact positive behaviours; supporting the College in the implementation of this procedure.

*Teacher:* responsible for maintaining an engaging, positive learning space, effective working relationships with students and a safe environment.

*Learning Mentor:* responsible for day-to-day pastoral care and organisational management of the student; first point of call for parents and for teachers of the student; responds to bullying concerns.

*House Coordinator:* responsible for overseeing the management of bullying issues; assisting in the repair of damaged relationships (student-student; student-teacher); assisting students to proceed with their learning in the least disruptive manner possible.

*Deputy Principal Wellbeing (Leadership Team):* responsible for the pastoral care of all students, especially when there are serious concerns about student behaviour.

*Learning Enhancement Leader:* responsible for the dissemination of information in relation to students with special needs. Must be consulted and informed of all issues surrounding students identified with special needs. Often is the point of call for parents and staff when there are issues with special needs students.

*Koori Education Worker:* responsible for the day-to-day support for the education of Koori students. Must be a point of reference when dealing with issues around Koori students. Contact with Koori parents must be passed by the Koori Education Worker.

*Wellbeing Leader:* responsible for high level intervention and support where other avenues have been exhausted.

## IMPLICATIONS

### *Communication*

The Deputy Principal will ensure that there is a variety of safe means for students, parents and staff to report alleged bullying to an appropriate staff member. This could include a secure email, verbal or written report mechanism and guidelines for written notification, appropriate training of House Coordinators and ensuring that teachers are sufficiently trained, and are aware of, this procedure.

### *When an incident is reported*

Take it to the House Coordinator in the first instance, it is important to ascertain the facts of the allegation. This will require interviewing those directly involved, and potentially any witnesses. This should be done in a timely



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manner and all efforts should be made to remain impartial and to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all parties (students, teachers and parents/carers). It is often useful to have students write an account of what they believe has occurred. It will be necessary for the House Coordinator to make some assessment of the impact of the bullying on the alleged victim. They may seek the assistance of School Counsellors in making this assessment.

The House Coordinator and the staff member responsible for the investigation will determine a way forward for the victim and the bully. Responses may include:

- A mediation session and subsequent apology.
- A behavioural contract.
- Referral for counselling (internal or external to the school).
- A sanction by the school may ultimately (but not initially) be necessary in some circumstances (e.g. withdrawal from yard/class). However an approach that engages students who are bullying and attempts to enhance their feelings of empathy and understanding for the student they are harming is more likely to bring about a change in behaviour. Fear of retaliation and social exclusion as a result of classmates being punished often prevents students from letting teachers know that they are being bullied.
- Communication with parents/guardians regarding matters of bullying should always be made by the House Leader.

The House Leader will be responsible for recording the details of the alleged bullying incident on SIMON ensuring that all students whether directly involved or bystanders have something recorded on their SIMON page.

*Mediation:* because we value the restoration of positive working relationships any party can request a restorative conversation between those who have become aggrieved. Alternatively, the senior staff member responsible for managing the resolution of a matter may insist a restorative conversation must take place, in this instance they will consult with the Wellbeing Leader to determine the best course of action.

## RECURRENCE

Having been managed by the abovementioned protocols, and recorded on SIMON, if there is a recurrence of the bullying behaviour towards the same victim, the matter will now be handled solely by the Deputy Principal Wellbeing.

In the event the bullying is determined to have recurred, the Deputy Principal will have the option of placing the student on restrictive measures of engagement with other students to ensure the safety of other students, or some equivalent practice.

The student will also be referred to the school Counsellor for counselling regarding their bullying behaviours. Mediation - with the expectation of restorative practice - will be utilised. The Deputy Principal is responsible for recording all matters at this time on SIMON.

Should a third instance of bullying be determined, the matter will be referred to the Deputy Principal, who will again attempt mediation, and where necessary employ an internal suspension for the bully.

Students whose severe bullying behaviour resists school efforts and represents a significant threat to the safety and wellbeing of others may be referred to the Principal for consideration of the student's enrolment. Where necessary at any stage throughout this process the Principal may determine that the bullying matter needs to be



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referred to the Victoria Police for investigation. The school will fully cooperate with any bullying matter brought to the attention of Victoria Police.

Mediation: because we value the restoration of positive working relationships any party can request mediation between those who have become aggrieved. Alternatively, the senior staff member responsible for managing the resolution of a matter may insist mediation must take place, in this instance they will consult with the Wellbeing Leader to determine the best course of action.

## STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Students with special needs are those who have been identified as requiring an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Where, in an ILP, procedures other than those outlined in this document are outlined or implied, they shall take precedence. Teachers must familiarise themselves with the ILPs of the students whom they teach, and any uncertainty should be directed to the Learning Enhancement Leader.

## CHALLENGE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROCEDURE

Students, staff or parents wishing to challenge the school's decision on any matters for which this procedure is applied are to be directed to the 'Issue Resolution Procedure'.