

BULLYING/HARASSMENT POLICY - STUDENTS

Review date: 16th February 2010



1. Rationale

Christian College is committed to providing a safe and caring environment which fosters respect for others and does not tolerate harassment in any form. Our aim is to make this College one at which all students and all staff feel safe, valued, listened to and spiritually nurtured.

2. Definition

Our Definition of Harassment

Not all unusual behaviour of pupils in school may be labelled as harassment. For example, occasional fights or name calling between two pupils of equal power may not be labelled as harassment.

Bullying/Harassment is defined as repeatedly hurting another person who is less powerful – either physically or psychologically. It involves a desire on the part of the bully to hurt, followed by the carrying out of a hurtful action in a context where there is an imbalance and the unjust use of power. This behaviour is typically repeated.

Cyber bullying is when someone is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed, or otherwise targeted by another using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or mobile phones.

Bullying/Harassment can take many forms. We consider the following behaviour to be completely unacceptable behaviour:

Physical

- Hitting, kicking, punching
- Pushing, shoving, spitting
- Making rude or threatening gestures
- Taking or damaging something which belongs to someone else
- Forcing others to hand over food, money or something which belongs to them
- Making someone do something they don't want to do
- Sending threatening SMS or Email messages (Cyber Bullying)
- *Verbal*
- Name Calling

- Teasing
- Threatening
- Making fun of someone because of their appearance, physical characteristics or cultural background
- Making fun of someone's actions
- Unfair criticism

Indirect

- Excluding others from the game or group
- Spreading untrue stories about others

Victimisation is the key to bullying. The victims of bullying feel powerless, intimidated, threatened and too weak to stop it from happening to them. They may feel angry, depressed or bewildered. The victims of bullying report the effects as loss of sleep and appetite, dreading the thought of going to school, and inability to concentrate. Bullying has both long-term and short-term effects on victims. The long-term effects may range from mental and psychological damage to personal loss, such as poor parenting skills, effects on relationships and loss of employment opportunities. (refer to ***The Legal Situation*** below for legal implications).

Key target groups for bullying appear to be children with some form of physical or mental disability or difference. Children from different ethnic backgrounds with low self-esteem and weak personal power are more vulnerable to bullying. The research shows that high achievers and low achievers may equally be victims of bullying. Victims of bullying show emotional stresses such as absenteeism, under-achievement, childhood depression and suicidal tendencies.

Bullying affects both the victims and the bully. Research shows that bullies are generally disliked at school. They are likely to experience abuse at home and tend to have lower self-esteem and happiness than others. Aggressive behaviour on the part of the bully can contribute to anti-social behaviour later in life.

At Christian College we will:

Teach our students the skills which will build their self-esteem and empower them to take the responsibility for themselves – and give them the opportunity to practise these skills. (Resources can be obtained from the Chaplain at each Campus).

Responsibilities of Staff

- to model appropriate behaviours at all times
- to deal with all reported and observed incidences of harassment as set out in this policy
- to ensure that students are supervised at all times

- to report incidences of bullying/harassment to the Home Room Teacher and/or Year Level Coordinator

Responsibilities of Students

- to inform if they are being harassed or if they see someone else being harassed – both at school and on the way to and from school
- to help someone who is being harassed
- to not harass others

3. Procedure

Cyber Bullying Procedures

Staff at Christian College have the responsibility to ensure that:

- all forms of cyber bullying are prohibited at Christian College
- staff are aware of cyber bullying and are able to identify and look for signs of occurrence among the students
- students are aware of the consequences of cyber bullying
- a code of conduct is in use for technology, including computers and mobile phones, whilst on the school premises
- all cases of cyber bullying are reported to an Year Level Coordinator and responded to promptly
- there is supervision of technology that is effective for monitoring and deterring cyber bullying

Students at Christian College have a responsibility to ensure that they:

- do not participate in cyber bullying during school or after hours
- do not use mobile phones, cameras or other digital devices to record audio and visual material that is not authorised as part of the school curriculum program
- do not breach the privacy of students, staff and members of the school community through any unauthorised recording or filming
- do not disseminate inappropriate information through digital media or other means
- report incidents of cyber bullying to a member of staff
- advise students being victimised by cyber bullying to talk to an adult
- offer to speak to an adult on behalf of the student who is being victimised by cyber bullying

Awareness breaks the cycle

We will endeavour to bring harassment into the open, because it thrives on secrecy. We must encourage victims to speak out. This in itself will immediately stop some of the harassment.

It is of the utmost importance that we urge our students to tell – and make it safe for them to do so. In our Australian society, from the time we are very young, we learn that it's not okay to "dob". Dobbing is something that it just not done. Those who do are made to feel like traitors and seen as being unable to fend for themselves.

In this way we sow the seed of secrecy in our children. If others make us feel unloved, inadequate or belittled when we "dob" then we learn not to do so. **Anne Fine**, in her children's book, **The Angel of Nitshill Road**, writes:

"The rule not to tell tales was invented by bullies –and the people who don't really want to stand up to them."

We must teach our students to discriminate between actions about which they need to speak up and those which they should keep to themselves. When someone is hurting us and we don't feel safe, or our life is being made miserable, then we need to tell someone what is going on.

Any action we take to reduce harassment must deal with this issue of secrecy; it is what keeps the offender powerful and the victim powerless. Our aim must be to empower the victim and dis-empower the offender.

Responsibilities of Parents:

To watch for signs that their child may be being bullied/harassed – such as:

- not wanting to attend school
- patterns of headaches, stomach aches
- missing equipment or belongings
- asking for extra pocket-money
- sudden drop in standards or work output
- fear about walking or travelling to school

Parents then need to:

- speak to someone on staff at Christian College if their child is being harassed, or they suspect that this is happening
- instruct their children to 'tell' if they are being harassed or bullied

Reporting of Harassment

Incidences of harassment can be reported to any teacher, Chaplain, Year Level Co-ordinator, Head or Deputy Head of Campus by children and/or their parents.

Responding to Reported Incidences of Harassment

When an incident is reported or observed, the following procedure will be implemented.

The Home Room Teacher and/or Year Level Coordinator will talk to the student involved about the incident to obtain the necessary facts.

The staff member investigating a complaint should establish:

- what was said and done to the complainant
- the time and the place when the incident(s) occurred
- the reaction (if any) of the complainant
- whether the complainant had faced that treatment before (if yes, the staff member should establish if it was from the same person/pupil)
- whether the complainant knows of someone else who has also faced similar treatment

From this discussion/report (and with other relevant input – parents) the following action will be taken:

- the alleged offender will be spoken to and the consequences of further incidences explained i.e. detention/suspension/expulsion
- the need for the victim or the alleged offender to undertake counselling will be determined between the Year Level Coordinator and Home Room Teacher
- parents of the alleged offender will be notified by use of the diary that an incident has occurred and the action taken, with a request for an interview if deemed appropriate
- other staff will be informed so that the situation can be monitored both inside and outside the classroom
- the Home Room Teacher/Year Level Coordinator will keep a record of the incident
- if the alleged offender continues to harass, the Year Level Coordinator/Head of School/Home Room Teacher will meet with the parents to seek their co-operation in stopping the harassment and discuss the need for counselling either at school or with other designated professionals
- disciplinary action will be instigated i.e. Detention, suspension
- the complainants will be advised that they may take the matter further if they are not satisfied with the way that the school handled their complaint

For serious breaches, where students'/teachers/ safety is an issue, the abovementioned process can be short-circuited. In these cases, a student's place in the school is suspended until professional help can be obtained. If the safety of other students/teachers continues to be an issue, the student may forfeit their place in the school.

Implementing the Program

- The implementation of the Anti-harassment Policy will be under the proactive whole school concepts of ACCEPTANCE, CARE and SAFETY. These concepts will be given a whole school focus at least once a year.
- ongoing staff development sessions each year, including opportunities for staff to case-study various situations; will be built into the regular staff development program, as per the Staff Development Policy, under the coordination of the Chaplain
- ongoing and yearly parent education will be coordinated by the School's Chaplain and counsellors, with reference to the year's overall program

Evaluating the Program

We will evaluate the program regularly. It will be evaluated by:

- noting if there has been a reduction in reported or observed incidences of Harassment
- speaking to parents who have reported incidences to find out if the problem has been resolved

Reviews

We will review the program each year by:

- reminding students and teachers of our policy
- revising the classroom activities on harassment (Completed each semester)
- noting the results of class surveys to determine whether harassment is still a problem

The Legal Situation

There is no legislation at the state, territory or federal level that deals with the issue of bullying directly. However, in equal opportunity, racial vilification, sexual harassment and anti-discrimination legislation at state, territory and federal levels, there are specific provisions which provide that school authorities may be liable to pay damages to victims if they breach the duties imposed by such legislation. In recent years, much litigation against school authorities has been in relation to equal opportunity and anti-discrimination matters.

School authorities, including teachers and principals, may also be liable to pay damages to pupils if their physical welfare is not protected in schools. The law of negligence provides that the school and school authorities are under legal duty to protect pupils in their care. The breach of duty of care, which leads to physical damage to pupils, is recoverable under the law of negligence. It is not clear at

this stage that the victim of bullying, who suffers mental or psychological loss or other long-term effects of bullying, can recover from the defendant school or school authority. No case law has been attempted on the issue in Australia to date. School authorities and principals may be liable to pay damages to pupils for the actions and inactions of their employees under the vicarious liability principle.

Physical assault or threat of assault is a civil wrong and a crime under Australian law. Children over the age of 10 (generally) may stand trial for their crimes in the Children's Court, although the age of children for the commission of a crime may differ from state to state.

Parents of complainants may make a complaint to the appropriate authorities such as the Anti-Discrimination Board or the relevant educational authority if they are dissatisfied with the College's action. The bully may complain about the way that the College handled the issue or about inappropriate disciplinary action or punishment. The victim's complaints may be based on common law actions in negligence, breach of contract with the College, claims regarding equal opportunity, anti-discrimination, sexual harassment, and racial vilification legislation.

The College should not hinder the parties if they wish to pursue their complaint further. The Principal should make sure that he or she acted fairly and reasonably in handling the complaint about bullying.

External Organisations

Kids Help Line provides anonymous and confidential telephone counselling service to the victims of bullying. It offers support to these victims by assisting them to identify their strengths and by encouraging them to stay in an environment where they are believed and supported. **Kids Help Line** is available 24 hours toll free on **1800 55 1800** from anywhere in Australia.

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