



Merinda Park Learning & Community Centre Inc

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BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY

Merinda Park Learning and Community Centre is committed to providing a safe, flexible and respectful environment for all staff, volunteers, and clients as they have the right to an atmosphere free of all forms of harassment and bullying, and have the responsibility to help prevent it.

In accordance with the United Nations declaration on the Rights of the Child, the Centre respects and upholds the right of children to protection against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. Bullying is a clear form of harassment.

Harassment is any conduct which is unwelcome, demeaning unreciprocated, intimidating and/or offensive including any verbal, physical or sexual conduct (including gestures). Harassment can occur without any overbearing acts and without fright or intimidation. Harassment merely means to vex someone or to cause them trouble, especially repetitiously. Harassment is usually directed at a person because of their gender, race, creed or abilities. It can be subtle or explicit.

Bullying is repeated and persistent oppression, physical or psychological, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group which destroys self esteem and confidence. Bullying means that in some way the victim is intimidated or frightened. There are variations but they all have to do with someone being overbearing towards another and are intentionally exposed regularly and over time to negative or harmful actions by one or more other people. Bullying may include verbal abuse, physical assault, unjustified criticism, sarcasm, insult, spreading false or malicious rumours, isolating a person, putting people under unnecessary pressure with overwork or impossible deadlines, or sabotaging someone's work or their ability to work.

Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching and pushing or damaging property.

Verbal bullying includes name calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse.

Covert bullying - Is often harder to recognise and can be carried out behind the bullied persons back. It is designed to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Covert bullying includes:

- Lying and spreading rumors
- Negative facial or physical gestures, menacing or contemptuous looks
- Playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
- Mimicking unkindly
- Encouraging others to socially exclude someone
- Damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance.

Cyber bullying Is overt or covert bullying behaviors using digital technologies. Examples include harassment via a mobile phone, setting up a defamatory personal website or deliberately excluding someone from social networking spaces. Cyberbullying can happen at any time. It can be in public or in private and sometimes only known to the target and the person bullying.

Sexual Harassment is unacceptable behaviour, which will not be tolerated. It is unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Amendment Act (1991) and the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. Extreme forms of sexual harassment can lead to criminal prosecution.

Sexual Harassment can be such things as:

- sexually offensive staring, leering or gesturing.
- sex-oriented verbal suggestions.
- sexually based jokes or innuendo directed at an individual.
- displays of erotic pictures or publications.
- offensive telephone calls.
- physical conduct of a sexual nature such as brushing up against a person unnecessarily.
- requests for sexual favours.
- indecent assault or rape.

Sexual Harassment is quite different from sexual attraction, which occurs when a relationship is based on feelings of mutual attraction.

The Centre will provide a positive culture where bullying and harassment is not accepted. In so doing, all will have the right of respect from others, the right to learn, teach or to be cared for, and a right to feel safe and secure in the Centre's environment.

Everyone within the Centre is to be alert to signs and evidence of bullying and have a responsibility to report it to staff whether they are an observer or victim.

The Centre's staff need to ensure that all reported incidents of bullying and harassment are documented on the form attached. Incidents need to be followed up appropriately and that support is given to both victims and perpetrators. Any reported case will be investigated by the C.E.O.

Children will be encouraged to report any bullying and harassment involving themselves or others. Parents will be encouraged to contact the Centre if they become aware of a bullying or harassment problem.

Parents, staff, children and the community will be made aware of the Centre's position on bullying in the staff and parent handbooks.

HARASSMENT: Harassment can be categorised by the following:-

Subtle: (The most common)

They include:

- Offensive staring and leering.
- Unwanted comments about physical appearance and sexual preference.
- Racist or smutty comments or jokes.
- Questions about another's sexual activity.
- Persistent comments about a person's private life or family.
- Physical contact e.g. purposely brushing up against another's body.
- Offensive name calling.
- Excluding others from the activity or the group;
- Spreading untrue stories about others;
- Making inappropriate gestures;
- Taking, hiding or damaging something which belongs to someone else;
- Sending nasty emails or text messages; and

Explicit: (obvious)

They include:

- Grabbing, aggressive hitting, pinching and shoving etc.
- Unwelcome patting, touching, embracing.
- Repeated requests for dates, especially after refusal.
- Offensive gestures, jokes, comments, letters, phone calls or e-mail.
- Sexually and/or racially provocative remarks.
- Displays of sexually graphic material– pornography.
- Requests for sexual favours.
- Forcing others to hand over food, money or something that belongs to them; and
- Making someone do something they don't want to do.

Verbal:

- Name calling;
- Teasing, insults, putdowns;
- Threatening of any kind;
- Making fun of someone because of their appearance, physical characteristics or cultural background; and
- Making fun of someone's actions.

Comments and behaviour, which do not offend one person, can offend another; the Committee of Management and staff accepts any persons right to react as an individual and expects fellow employees and Centre users to respect this right.

PROCEDURE

If possible make it clear to the person that you object to their behaviour. Because bullying is usually denied it is often difficult to prove so you should keep notes of any meetings and the offensive behaviour. Harassment / Bullying often works in a cumulative way and individual incidents may, when taken in isolation, seem trivial but it is vital that every incident is logged in order to build a bigger picture. Seek advice from a colleague or a trusted friend if not sure whether an action constitutes harassment.

An informal approach of having someone accompany you while you speak directly to the person you feel is harassing you may be the first option particularly if they are unaware that their behaviour is objectionable.

However if this does not solve the issue or you feel that a more formal approach is required then a formal complaint should be lodged.

All incidents of harassment or bullying will be investigated by the C.E.O within 3 working days. Once an incident of bullying is identified: the bully, victim and witnesses will take part in confidential meetings and all incidents or allegations of bullying will be fully investigated and documented. Following the investigation the C.E.O. will decide what further action will need to be taken including advising the staff member to report the matter to the Victorian Police

If a student sees another person being harassed or bullied they should tell the person that you witnessed the incident and advise them to report it to an appropriate person (eg Co-Ordinator / Manager or C.E.O.).

However, if your friend is harassing another person, let them know that their behaviour is unacceptable. Bystanders who do nothing to stop bullying or harassment may be contributing to the problem by providing an audience for the bully.

The bully, the victim and any witnesses shall be offered counselling and support if required or requested.

If bullying is ongoing, parents will be contacted and consequences implemented where students are under the age of 18.

Consequences may involve:

- Meeting with the Education Manager / Co-Ordinator and parent
- Warning system as per handbook implemented if continued
- Exclusion of privileges maybe an option or total exclusion

Responsibilities of staff:

- To model appropriate behaviour, respecting individual differences and diversity;
- To reinforce the message that bullying and harassment is not accepted or tolerated;
- To treat seriously all reports or observed incidences of bullying or harassment;
- To report incidents of bullying to the Manager/Co-Ordinator responsible for the area and C.E.O.
- To be observant of signs of distress or suspected incidents of bullying;
- To ensure that students are supervised at all times.
- To treat every complaint of harassment or bullying with strict confidentiality
- To inform students of this policy and the actions to be followed if they believe they are being harassed.

Responsibilities of students:

- To model appropriate behaviour, respecting individual differences and diversity;
- To reinforce the message that bullying and harassment is not accepted or tolerated;
- To help someone who is being bullied or harassed;
- To refrain from bullying or harassing others;
- To inform the authorities if they are being bullied or harassed or if they see someone else being bullied - both at the Centre and on the way to and from the Centre.

Responsibilities of parents:

- To model appropriate behaviour, respecting individual differences and diversity;
- To reinforce the message that bullying and harassment is not accepted or tolerated;
- To instruct their children to tell the appropriate authorities if they are bullied or harassed;

- To watch for signs that their child may be bullied or harassed;
- To speak to the Area Co-Ordinator (eg VCAL or Children's Services) / Education Manager if their child is being bullied or harassed, or they suspect that this is happening.
- The Area Co-Ordinator/Manager will then report the incident to the C.E.O. for investigation

Students can expect that their concerns will be responded to by the staff and that they will be provided with appropriate support and confidentiality.

Further information can be obtained at:

www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/education

MPLCC handout on bullying for Children



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BULLYING / HARASSMENT INCIDENT REPORT

DATE OF REPORT

STAFF COMPLETING REPORT SIGNATURE

DETAILS OF REPORT	STAFF REPORT	OUTCOME OR ACTION TO BE TAKEN
Where did the incident occur?		
Who was involved?		
How long has bullying / harassment been occurring?		

What happened		
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Date

Parent Signature (if under 18 yrs old)

Signature - victim or witness

Co-Ordinator / Manager or CEO Signature

COMMENTS

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