

The Village School Bullying Policy

Bullying is a form of social interaction- not necessarily long standing- in which a more dominant individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behavior that is intended to, and does, in fact, cause distress to a less dominant individual (the target). The aggressive behavior may take the form of a direct physical and/or verbal attack or may be indirect. More than one bully and more than one target may participate in the interaction. –Dorothea Ross 1996

Bullies tease, hit, threaten, start rumors about, and/or otherwise harass targets. They pressure others to keep silent about the bullying and to exclude targets from friendship. Bullies experience a wish for power that is stronger than their empathetic sense, so they are willing to hurt others to feel powerful. Stan Davis Schools Where Everyone Belongs: Practical Strategies to Reduce Bullying

I. Introduction

This Plan is intended: (a) to prevent bullying and cyber-bullying among our students; (b) to encourage students and their parents to have confidence in the School's procedures and to come forward promptly whenever a student is subject to behavior that is prohibited by this or any other School policy; and (c) to implement appropriate discipline or other corrective measures when they are found to be warranted.

The Village School promotes personal growth in an atmosphere of warmth, kindness and mutual respect.

It is the policy of the Village School to provide a learning and working environment for students, employees and visitors that is free from bullying.

The Village School Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, set forth below, is published in response to the recently enacted Massachusetts law against bullying and is an integral part of our efforts to promote learning and to prevent behavior that can impede the learning process. Our Plan spells out the Village School's comprehensive approach to addressing bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation.

This Plan is consistent with broader protections at the Village School against discrimination, harassment, bullying, and retaliation that appear in our Parent Handbook, our Staff Handbook, and in the bylaws and other policies of our School.

II. Definitions under the Law

The following definitions are drawn from the Massachusetts law against bullying.

Bullying is the repeated use by one or more students or employees of a written, verbal or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that: (a) causes physical or emotional harm to the targeted student or damage to the targeted student's property; (b) places the targeted student in reasonable fear of harm to her or himself or of damage to her or his property; (c) creates a hostile environment at school for the targeted student; (d) infringes on the rights of the targeted student at school; or (e) materially and substantially disrupts the education process, orderly operation of a school or the working environment at a school.

Cyber-bullying is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, fax machines, and the internet. It includes, but is not be limited to, e-mail, instant messages, text messages, and internet postings, whether on a webpage, in a blog, or otherwise. Cyber-bullying also includes (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identify of another person or (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying. Cyber-bullying also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

Hostile Environment is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a student who reports bullying,

provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Legal Definitions and School Policy: It is important to bear in mind that stricter standards of behavior may apply under the Village School's policies in order that we may prevent inappropriate verbal and physical conduct before a student has been subject to bullying as it is defined under the law. For example, although the law defines bullying as "repeated use" of certain expressions, acts, and/or gestures, the School reserves the right to apply disciplinary measures and other corrective action in a case of a single expression, act, or gesture, if the School determines that it is of sufficient severity to warrant disciplinary measures or other remedial action or that the repetition of that expression, act, or gesture might reasonable result in bullying as defined under the law.

III. Policy against Bullying, Cyber-bullying, and Retaliation

Village School will not tolerate any form of bullying or cyber-bullying, nor will we tolerate retaliation against any person who reports bullying, has reliable information about bullying, or investigates an incident of bullying.

Bullying and cyber-bullying are prohibited by the Village School:

1. On school grounds, property immediately adjacent to school grounds, at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds, on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by the School, or through the use of technology or an electronic device owned, leased or used by the School; and,
2. At a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related, or through the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned leased or used by the School, if the bullying creates a hostile environment at school for the targeted student, infringes on the rights of the targeted student at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process, the orderly operation of the school or the working environment.

This policy does not require the Village School to staff any non-school related activities, functions or programs.

IV. Prevention of Bullying and Cyber-bullying

The way we manage behavior at the Village School is intended to help children feel safe, secure and respected. Teachers have clear expectations for student behavior. When necessary, parents are notified and asked to reinforce standards that apply to everyone who is part of the Village School community.

All Village School classes participate in processing about and reflecting on their actions and activities. At the beginning of the academic year, each class collaboratively creates its own set of guidelines to help the classroom run more smoothly. Morning meetings are a time when students are reminded of these guidelines, and positive behaviors are reinforced.

The administration and staff recognize that it is essential that expectations for student behavior extend to corridors, outside time, class trips, and the like. The School strives to ensure that ample adult supervision is provided on School premises, and on School-provided transportation as well as at School-sponsored events. This policy does not require the Village School to staff any non-school related activities, functions or programs.

The following book reflects the school's bullying prevention plan: *Schools Where Everyone Belongs: Practical Strategies for Reducing Bullying* by Stan Davis.

V. Reporting Bullying, Cyber-bullying, or Retaliation

Any student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying or has witnessed an incident of bullying or cyber-bullying or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying prohibited by this policy is strongly encouraged to promptly report the matter orally or in writing to the Director or to any other staff member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. Also, any student who is subject to retaliation in violation of this policy or who knows of another student who has been subject to retaliation is urged to report it as soon as possible.

A parent of a student who is the target of bullying or cyber-bullying or of a student who has witnessed or otherwise has relevant information about bullying or cyber-bullying is strongly urged to promptly notify the Director. Furthermore, any parent who has her or himself witnessed bullying or cyber-bullying or has relevant information concerning such an incident is strongly urged to come forward to the Director. A parent should also

report any incident of retaliation in violation of this policy to the Director.

Any member of the staff of the School who witnesses or otherwise becomes aware of bullying or cyber-bullying in violation of this policy or who becomes aware of retaliation against a student who reported information concerning a violation of this policy is required to report it immediately to the Director or her/his designee. There are to be no exceptions. A member of the staff may not make promises of confidentiality to a student or parent who informs her/him of an allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation.

Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made anonymously, provided, however, that no disciplinary action shall be taken against a student solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Staff may not make anonymous reports. The School urges students and their parents not to make reports anonymously. Although there are circumstances in which an anonymous report can be better than none at all, it is far more difficult to determine the facts of what occurred if complaints are made anonymously. Students and parents are encouraged to bear in mind that the School takes its policy against retaliation seriously. Also, while the School cannot promise strict confidentiality, because information must be shared in order to conduct an effective investigation, the School releases information concerning complaints of bullying, cyber-bullying, and retaliation only on a legitimate need-to-know basis.

The Director or her/his designee in charge of receiving complaints should keep accurate documentation of all complaints received. The Director or her/his designee should document the following:

- 1) The name of the complainant
- 2) The status of the complainant (i.e. student, staff, third party)
- 3) The name of the alleged bully
- 4) The date the complaint was received
- 5) How the complaint was received (i.e., written, oral)
- 6) The nature of the complaint (i.e. facts of the complaint)
- 7) The names of witnesses

False accusations of bullying or retaliation shall be subject to disciplinary action.

VI. Responding to a Report of Bullying, Cyber-bullying, or Retaliation

Preliminary Considerations: When a complaint of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation is brought to the attention of the Director or her/his designee, an assessment is made as to whether any initial steps need to be taken to protect the well-being of students and to prevent disruption of their learning environment while the investigation is being conducted. As appropriate, strategies such as increased supervision may be implemented to prevent further bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation during an investigation.

Obligation to Notify Parents: It is the policy of the School to notify the parents of any student who is an alleged target of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation and the parents of any student who may have been accused of engaging in such behavior promptly after a complaint has been made.

Investigation: The following is an outline of the procedure that is pursued once a complaint has been brought to the attention of the Director or her/his designee:

An impartial investigation of the complaint is conducted by the Director or her/his designee. That investigation may include (but will not necessarily be limited to) interviews with the person who made the complaint; with the student who was the target of the alleged bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation; with the person or persons against whom the complaint was made; and with any students, staff, or other persons who witness or who may otherwise have relevant information about the alleged incident.

The law requires that the following be part of the investigation and be included in the meetings with the targeted student and the person against whom the complaint was made:

- 1) What action will restore the targeted student's sense of safety
- 2) If the targeted student is in need of protection, and if so, what type
- 3) What professional services are appropriate to recommend or require

Depending on the circumstances, the Director or her/his designee conducting the investigation also may choose

to consult with other teachers and/or consult with a psychologist or mental health professional.

If the incident involves students from more than one school, the Director or her/his designee shall promptly notify the appropriate administrator of the other school or schools.

Resolution, Notification, and Follow-up: Following interviews and any other investigation undertaken, as the School deems appropriate, the Director or her/his designee will determine whether and to what extent the allegation of bullying, cyber-bullying, or retaliation has been substantiated. If it is determined that the policy set forth in this Plan has been violated, the Director or her/his designee will determine what disciplinary action and/or other remedial action is appropriate and how it will be implemented.

The goal of an investigation and any disciplinary or other remedial process that is imposed following the investigation is to correct the situation to the extent it is reasonably possible and to take such steps as can be taken to prevent a repetition of the incident and to prevent the student or students targeted and others who participated in the investigation from being subject to retaliation.

In appropriate circumstances, such as when a crime may have been committed or a child may have been subject to abuse or neglect of the type that is reportable under Section 51A of the Massachusetts laws, law enforcement or another appropriate government agency may be notified.

Upon completion of the investigation, the Director or her/his designee who conducted the investigation will meet individually with the student or students who were the target of the alleged incident and the student or students against whom the complaint was made and their parents to report the results of the investigation and, where disciplinary or other corrective action is determined to be appropriate, to inform the parties of the steps that will be taken to correct the situation. The amount of information provided in these meetings may be limited by confidentiality laws protecting student records.

Depending on the circumstances of the case, if it is determined that bullying has occurred, the Director or her/his designee may discipline the offending party by ordering:

- a. counseling
- b. stay away order
- c. an educational component
- d. a verbal warning
- e. a written warning
- f. suspension
- g. expulsion
- h. any other remedy deemed appropriate by the Director or her/his designee

Any discipline should be viewed in the light of balancing accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior.

Follow-up contacts will be made with any student found to have been targeted in violation of this policy and her/his parents to inquire as to whether there have been any further incidents.

VII. Implementation of the Plan

The Director will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of this Plan. The staff and Board will review the plan before it is public. Each family of students attending the school will be given notice of the plan, and will have opportunity to participate in the public comment period. All parents receive a revised Parent Handbook each August. The Parent Handbook section on Discipline refers to the bullying policy published on the website. The Plan will be reviewed and updated biennially and published on the School web site, accessible to the public.

The school will provide written notice of the Plan to all staff, in the Employee Handbook. All staff will be trained in the Plan annually, and provision for faculty and staff duties will be included in the Employee Handbook.

This Policy was approved by the Board of Directors of Village School on December 5, 2012.