

Newsletter item 1

SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS PROJECT

Our School's Goals for the Project

Our school is continuing to implement the Supportive Schools Project this year to enhance our excellent pastoral care program. The aim of the project is to help secondary schools and parents to prevent bullying and improve social skills. Twenty-one metropolitan Catholic Education Office secondary schools (3,700 Year 9 students and 280 school staff) are participating in the project across Perth and Mandurah. These Year 9 students have been completing surveys from when they were in Year 7 (2005) to the end of this year (2007) to assist in the evaluation of the project.

Our school's involvement in the project includes a review of our bullying policy, activities to prevent or reduce bullying, as well as strategies to help students to discourage and cope adaptively with bullying should it occur. Some of the goals we will be working towards this year include:

- Providing Year 9 students with learning activities to discourage bullying, empathise with others who are bullied, identify how bullying occurs in friendship groups as well as understand and respond to bullying as a bystander;
- Enhancing the positive social environment within our school which actively discourages bullying;
- Further modifying the school grounds and supervision during morning and lunch breaks to discourage bullying;
- Continuing to encourage all staff, students and parents to treat all school community members with respect and tolerance;
- Implementing a clear and consistent approach to managing reported bullying incidents; and
- Providing parents with information about bullying and how to help their son or daughter cope adaptively and consistently with the school's response.

We hope you and your son or daughter enjoy the activities of the Supportive Schools Project this year.

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Parents and our Supportive School

Research has demonstrated that efforts to positively influence the attitudes and behaviour of students are more likely to be successful if parents are actively involved and feel a sense of shared ownership with the school of the process.

How can you support our Supportive School?

- Get to know the school's bullying policy and discuss it with your son or daughter.
- Maintain regular contact with your son or daughter's teachers.
- Try to attend our school functions such as assemblies and/or help out on sports days or camps to demonstrate your support for your son or daughter and our school.
- Read the newsletter and discuss items of interest with your son or daughter.
- Model a positive attitude towards our school and encourage your son or daughter to see the positive aspects of school life.
- If your son or daughter is having a problem at school, please contact us to work together to overcome the problem.

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What is bullying?

Bullying behaviours deliberately aim to make a person feel upset, angry, humiliated or afraid. Bullying is a behaviour used by a person or group to gain power over a less powerful person, who has difficulty stopping the situation. It is something that happens again and again to the same person. The following provide examples of bullying behaviours some students may experience. Thankfully only approximately 7% of Year 8 students were bullied regularly (once a week or more) last year in WA metropolitan secondary schools.

Physical bullying

- Deliberately touching, bumping, pulling, shoving or tripping someone
- Hitting, punching or slapping, pinching, biting, scratching or throwing things at someone

Verbal bullying

- Teasing, calling people names or offensive nicknames or being sarcastic in a way that is hurtful and upsetting
- Racial comments about someone and their family
- Rude comments or jokes about someone's religion

Threatening

- Making someone feel afraid they are going to be hurt, e.g. aggressive gestures or looks that make someone afraid
- Pressuring someone to do things they don't want to do

Property Abuse

- Damaging someone's belongings
- Stealing or hiding someone's money or belongings

Emotional bullying

- Ignoring someone, keeping someone out of group conversations or encouraging others not to have anything to do with them (known as exclusion)
- Spreading lies or stories about someone to try to get others to dislike someone or to get someone into trouble

Use of communicative technology and bullying

- Harassing, abusing, spreading rumours or offending someone using the internet (email, chat rooms, websites, MSN), phone messages or SMS or mobile phone cameras.
- Making silent or abusive phone calls

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I think my son or daughter might be being bullied

Your son or daughter may be reluctant to tell anyone if he/she is being bullied. There are many things your son or daughter may do or say which may be taken as warning signs that he/she may be being bullied at school.

These signs include:

- Less interest in school or not wanting to go to school;
- Lower school performance;
- Frequent complaints of headaches or stomach aches;
- Frequent damage or loss of items such as clothing, property or school work;
- Frequent injuries such as bruises or cuts and a reluctance to say why;
- Difficulty sleeping or having nightmares;
- Asking for extra lunch or pocket money;
- Generally unhappy, miserable, moody and/or irritable;
- Having no friends to share free time with; and/or
- Rarely invited to parties or other social activities with peers.

How to raise your concerns with your son or daughter

If you think your son or daughter may be being bullied try the following:

- Talk with your son or daughter at an 'informal' time such as when you are driving, shopping or doing a chore together;
- Sit side by side rather than face to face as this may be too confrontational for your son or daughter;
- Try to discuss your son or daughter's friends rather than ask him/her about bullying in the first instance;
- Ask your son or daughter how he/she is enjoying school and his/her classes;
- Use open ended questions such as 'What did you do at school today?' and 'Which friends do you sit with at lunch time?';
- Encourage your son or daughter to talk with a teacher at school he/she trusts if he/she is having any problems with his/her school work or friends;
- Ask another family member or significant adult in your son or daughter's life to also talk with him/her about school.

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What should I do if my son or daughter tells me he/she is being bullied?

It is natural for you to feel upset and want to protect your son or daughter if he/she is being bullied. However, being upset may cause your son or daughter more distress.

How should I respond?

- Tell your son or daughter you are glad he/she has talked to you about the situation;
- Be aware of your own response and react in a calm, helpful and supportive manner; and
- Remind your son or daughter that the bullying is not his/her fault.

What can I do to help?

- Ask your son or daughter what you could do to help make the situation better;
- Make sure your son or daughter knows how to get help and support at school;
- Talk with your son or daughter's teachers to find out what can be done;
- Once you have spoken with staff at the school and decided on some actions, support these decisions at home;
- Help your son or daughter work out a plan of what he/she could do to help make the situation better;
- Keep a record of what happens each day;
- Arrange follow-up meetings with teachers to discuss outcomes; and
- Keep in contact with the school even if the situation seems to have improved to ensure the changes continue.

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Talking with your son or daughter about being bullied

Just over 60% of students who were bullied in a Western Australian school last year, reported they told someone after they were bullied. This means almost 40% of students who were bullied told no-one. Students often think that talking about a bullying incident is like 'dobbing' on one another. Talking about bullying is not 'dobbing'.

'Dobbing' is when a person tries to get attention or to deliberately get someone else into trouble.

Asking for help is when someone feels the situation is out of their control and they are unable to deal with it alone. If anyone sees someone in this situation they should also ask for help.

What your son or daughter is learning to do at school if he/she is bullied?

1. **Be assertive** – Stand up for yourself in a positive way. Looking confident when you respond will show you mean what you are saying. Try to talk with the person you are having a problem with.
2. **Use humour** - This can be very effective in teasing verbal bullying situations but may not be appropriate for every situation.
3. **Avoid the situation** – Walk away and stay away from the people bullying you or the place where it is occurring.
4. **Ignore the bullying** – Ignore the bullying completely and carry on with what you were doing. Use positive self-talk to help boost your confidence. e.g. I don't deserve to be treated like this. I am not the one with the problem.
5. **Ask for help** – When other strategies you have tried are not working or if you feel you can't deal with the situation yourself, you should ask for help. Asking for help is not dobbing. It is always okay to ask for help. Ask a teacher or your parents for help or talk to a friend to get some ideas to help you to decide what to do.

You can reinforce these messages by discussing them with your son or daughter at home.

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Talking with your son or daughter about bullying others

All students are capable of bullying at some time and it is important for you to respond in a calm and helpful manner if your son or daughter is bullying others.

How to encourage your son or daughter not to bully others

- Talk with your son or daughter about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not e.g. we should not tease people because they look different;
- Work together with your family to establish simple rules and expectations about how to treat each other especially other siblings;
- Encourage and provide opportunities for your son or daughter to openly discuss bullying issues with the family;
- Discuss friendship and help your son or daughter to make friends by facilitating or encouraging him/her to socialise with other students, at home or in the neighbourhood;
- Encourage your son or daughter to invite friends over for visits and make his/her guests feel welcome; and
- Improve your son or daughter's self esteem by encouraging him/her to have a go at new activities and thinking about his/her abilities in a realistic way.

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Talking with your son or daughter about being a bystander

Bullying involves more than the students who are bullied and those who bully others. Most students report having witnessed bullying. Bullying often continues because people who are involved do not talk about it and seek help. This includes people who observe bullying – the bystanders.

Bystanders can be:

- friends in the group of the person bullying;
- friends in the group of the person being bullied;
- people who see the bullying; and
- people who are aware of the bullying.

What can bystanders do?

If your son or daughter sees another student being bullied he/she could:

- Ask a teacher or support person for help;
- Let the person bullying others know what they are doing is bullying and is wrong;
- Refuse to join in with the person bullying and walk away;
- Support the student who is being bullied; and
- Support and protect your friends from bullying by being there for them. Students who are alone are more likely to be bullied, so encourage your son or daughter to be aware of other students who are left out or are on their own in the school yard.

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The Use of the Internet and Mobile Phones and Bullying

Students may bully others using communicative technology such as the internet and mobile phones. Examples of the way the internet or mobile phones are used to bully others include:

- Harassing, abusing, spreading rumours or offending someone using the internet (e.g. email, chat rooms, websites, MSN), phone messages, SMS or mobile phone cameras; and
- Making silent or abusive phone calls.

The lack of face-to-face contact associated with using communicative technology in this way means those bullying others rarely witness the pain inflicted and are less likely to feel sympathy or compassion for the person they are bullying.

There are a number of useful websites and online resources that can help you ensure your son or daughter's safety online.

<http://www.netalert.net.au/02074-Parents-Toolkit.asp>

The NetAlert Parent's Internet Safety Toolkit provides parents with information and resources to keep online activities safe and enjoyable.

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/internetsafety.html>

This Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse website provides a list of online resources covering safety issues and guidelines for parents of children and young people in using the Internet.

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How can I encourage my son or daughter to talk more about school and his/her friends?

Regular conversations help your son or daughter to know he/she can talk with you about the good experiences as well as the difficult things that happen to him/her each day. Here are some tips for talking with your son or daughter:

Try to talk in casual situations

Your son or daughter may talk more if he/she is in a casual situation. Some students don't like to make eye contact if they are talking about difficult experiences (particularly boys). Try talking with your son or daughter:

- At a meal time
- When walking
- With the TV off
- When he/she is in bed
- When driving in the car
- When outside the house
- Away from brothers and sisters
- When he/she gets home from school, at the table
- When hanging out the washing

Ask questions that need a sentence to answer

Questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' are conversation stoppers. Ask questions that start with "What" or "How". Try these:

- What happened at school today?
- What do you think about ...?
- It sounds like you are pretty unhappy with what has gone on, what can we do about it?
- How are you feeling? You look sad.

Remember that your reaction to what your son or daughter tells you will either encourage or discourage him/her from telling you things again. Always remain positive and calm in your reaction and response.

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Peer Influence

Many students who tease or bully others to go along with their peer group feel uncomfortable about their own behaviour.

What should I tell my son or daughter to say if he/she feels pressured by friends to bully others?

If another student wants your son or daughter to do something, he/she may threaten not to be friends with your son or daughter anymore, call your son or daughter names, use physical threats or reject your son or daughter from the group. Discuss with your son or daughter possible responses he/she could try if his/her friends are pressuring him/her to bully others.

General

- I don't want to bully other people
- How would you feel if someone did that to you?

Leaving someone out

- Why not just let him/her join in?
- I don't see the need to make him/her feel bad

Teasing

- I don't think it is fair to tease someone about that
- I would feel terrible if someone did that to me, so I am not going to do it

Threatening

- I don't want to be involved in this
- Threatening people is wrong

Gossip / Rumours

- How do you know this story is true?
- I don't want to be involved in spreading gossip