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## Conflict Resolution and Anti-Bullying Policy

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*Alphington Grammar School is committed to providing a safe and caring environment that fosters respect for self and others and does not tolerate bullying. In accordance with our Child Safe Policy, the physical, social and emotional well-being of our students is a priority.*

### **Introduction:**

Bullying can happen anywhere: at school, at home and at work. It can happen to anyone. Bullying is never ok. The first step to address bullying is to understand exactly what bullying is. A formal definition of bullying for Australian schools has been developed by *the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group*. This national group includes all state, territory and federal education departments, as well as national Catholic and Independent schooling representatives.

The definition says:

*Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons. Bullying can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert).*

It's important to know that - single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying. Disagreements or fights between equals or single occurrences of fights or nastiness are unacceptable, but are not considered bullying. Bullying of any form or for any reason can have long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

### **Conflict Resolution:**

#### **1. Introduction:**

- 1.1. Not every disagreement or incident at school is bullying. As students develop their social skills they develop better ways of coping with their own emotions. Forming friendships can be a difficult process, especially in the early years. Friendship groups can be very fluid, new students join the school and seemingly established relationships change. Students can become possessive of friends right throughout school and seek exclusivity in the friendship group. All of these are complex problems that may or may not involve bullying.
- 1.2. Students' ability to understand others and take their needs and views into account develops over time. Young students are naturally self-focussed. They often play beside, rather than with, other students and tend to think that everyone sees things the same way that they do. In early primary school students learn that others may see things differently from them. Then, as their thinking skills develop, students are more able to understand another person's point of view and, finally, to appreciate multiple ways of looking at the same event or situation.
- 1.3. By secondary school students are expected to have developed better self-control and conflict resolution strategies, but problems will still occur. Puberty, social media, popularity and self-esteem all play a part in the complex relationships that develop. Patience, education and guidance is needed to ensure that all students feel safe, protected and valued.

#### **2. Resolving Conflict:**

- 2.1. Conflict is a normal part of life. Having different needs or wants, or wanting the same thing when only one is available, can easily lead students into conflict with one another. "She won't let me play," "He took my ...", "Tom's being mean!" are complaints that parents and school staff often hear when students get into conflict and are unable to resolve it. Common ways that students respond to conflict include arguing and physical aggression, as well as more passive responses such as backing off and avoiding one another.



- 2.2. When conflict is poorly managed it can have a negative impact on student’s relationships, on their self-esteem and on their learning. However, teaching students the skills for resolving conflict can help significantly. By learning to manage conflict effectively, student’s skills for getting along with others can be improved. Students are much happier, have better friendships and are better learners at school and later on, in the workplace, when they know how to manage conflict well.
- 2.3. Since students have different needs and preferences, experiencing conflict with others is unavoidable. Many students (and adults) think of conflict as a competition that can only be decided by having a winner and a loser. The problem with thinking about conflict in this way is that it promotes win-lose behaviour: students who want to win try to dominate the other person; students who think they can’t win try to avoid the conflict. This does not result in developing effective conflict resolution skills.
- 2.4. Students may try to get their way in a conflict by using force. Some students give in to try to stop the conflict, while others try to avoid the situation altogether.
- 2.5. When introducing younger students to the different ways that conflicts can be handled, talking about the ways the animals included as examples below might deal with conflict can help their understanding. It introduces an element of fun and enjoyment.

Conflict style	Animal example	Child’s behaviour
Force	Shark, bull, lion	Argues, yells, debates, threatens, uses logic to impose own view
Give in	Jelly fish, teddy bear	Prevents fights, tries to make others happy
Avoid	Ostrich, turtle	Thinks or says, “I don’t want conflict.” Distracts, talks about something else, leaves the room or the relationship

- 2.6. Sometimes these approaches appear to work in the short-term, but they create other sets of problems. When students use force to win in a conflict it creates resentment and fear in others. Students who ‘win’ using this approach may develop a pattern of dominating and bullying others to get what they want. Students who tend to give in or avoid conflict may lack both confidence and skills for appropriate assertive behaviour. They are more likely to be dominated or bullied by others and may feel anxious and negative about themselves.
- 2.7. It is possible instead to respond to conflict in positive ways that seek a fair outcome. Instead of being seen as a win-lose competition, conflict can be seen as an opportunity to build healthier and more respectful relationships through understanding the perspectives of others.

2.8. Win-some, lose-some: Using compromise to resolve conflict:

Adults have a significant impact on how children deal with conflict. Often adults encourage children to deal with conflict by compromising. Compromising means that no-one wins or loses outright. Each person gets some of what they want and also gives up some of what they want. Many children learn how to compromise as they grow and find ways to negotiate friendships. It is common around the middle of primary school for children to become very concerned with fairness and with rules as a way of ensuring fairness. This may correspond with an approach to resolving conflict that is based on compromise.

Conflict style	Animal example	Child’s behaviour
Compromise	Fox	I give a bit and expect you to give a bit too

2.9. Win-win: Using cooperation to resolve conflict:

Using a win-win approach means finding out more about the problem and looking together for creative solutions so that everyone can get what they want.

Conflict style	Animal example	Child’s behaviour
Sort out the problem (Win wisely)	Owl	Discover ways of helping everyone in the conflict to get what they want



2.10. Skills required for effective conflict resolution:

Effective conflict resolution requires children to apply a combination of well-developed social and emotional skills. These include skills for managing feelings, understanding others, communicating effectively and making decisions. Children need guidance and 'coaching' to learn these skills.

Learning to use all the skills effectively in combination takes practice and maturity. However, with guidance children can begin to use a win-win model and gradually develop their abilities to resolve conflicts independently.

Skill	What to encourage children to learn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage strong emotions</li> <li>Verbally express own thoughts and feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use strategies to control strong feelings</li> <li>Identify and communicate thoughts and feelings</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the problem and express own needs</li> <li>Understand the other person's perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talk about their own wants/needs/fears/concerns without demanding an immediate solution</li> <li>Listen to what the other person wants/needs</li> <li>Understand the other person's fears/concerns</li> <li>Understand without having to agree</li> <li>Respond sensitively and appropriately</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generate a number of solutions to the problem</li> <li>Negotiate a win-win solution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think of a variety of options</li> <li>Try to include the needs and concerns of everyone involved</li> <li>Be flexible</li> <li>Be open-minded</li> <li>Look after own needs as well as the other person's needs (be assertive)</li> </ul>

2.11. Guiding children through the steps of conflict resolution:

<p><b>1 Set the stage for win-win outcomes</b></p> <p>Conflict arises when people have different needs or views of a situation. Make it clear that you are going to help the children listen to each other's point of view and look for ways to solve the problem that everyone can agree to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask, "What's the problem here?" Be sure to get both sides of the story (eg "He won't let me have a turn" from one child, and "I only just started and it's my game," from another).</li> <li>Say, "I'm sure if we talk this through we'll be able to sort it out so that everyone is happy."</li> </ul>	<p><b>2 Have children state their own needs and concerns</b></p> <p>The aim is to find out how each child sees the problem. Help children identify and communicate their needs and concerns without judging or blaming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask, "What do you want or need? What are you most concerned about?"</li> </ul>
<p><b>3 Help children listen to the other person and understand their needs and concerns</b></p> <p>In the heat of conflict it can be difficult to understand that the other person has feelings and needs too. Listening to the other person helps to reduce the conflict and allows children to think of the problem as something they can solve together.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask, "So you want to have a turn at this game now because it's nearly time to go home? And you want to keep playing to see if you can get to the next level?"</li> <li>Show children that you understand both points of view: "I can understand why you want to get your turn. I can see why you don't want to stop now."</li> </ul>	<p><b>4 Help children think of different ways to solve the problem</b></p> <p>Often children who get into conflict can only think of one solution. Getting them to think of creative ways for solving the conflict encourages them to come up with new solutions that no-one thought of before. Ask them to let the ideas flow and think of as many options as they can, without judging any of them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage them: "Let's think of at least three things we could do to solve this problem."</li> </ul>
<p><b>5 Build win-win solutions</b></p> <p>Help children sort through the list of options you have come up with together and choose those that appear to meet everybody's needs. Sometimes a combination of the options they have thought of will work best. Together, you can help them build a solution that everyone agrees to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask, "Which solution do you think can work? Which option can we make work together?"</li> </ul>	<p><b>6 Put the solution into action and see how it works</b></p> <p>Make sure that children understand what they have agreed to and what this means in practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Say, "Okay, so this is what we've agreed. Tom, you're going to show Wendy how to play the game, then Wendy, you're going to have a try, and I'm going to let you know when 15 minutes is up."</li> </ul>

2.12. At Alphington Grammar School we recognise that teaching students about conflict resolution is vital. Teachers will use every available opportunity to teach about this:

- on any occasion that conflict arises;
- as part of the formal educational program (YCDI, Kids Matter, Mind Matters, Leadership Programs etc.).



### **3. Gender Considerations for Conflict and Bullying:**

- 3.1. Some schools have found that even after lots of work to counter bullying, for example, students still report the presence of bullying and intimidation. The same can be the case for strategies that targeted the eradication of sex-based harassment, teasing and homophobia.
- 3.2. While single-focused strategies like getting rid of bullying or sex-based harassment can overcome significant difficulties for students, the limited success of such strategies suggests that more powerful influences are at work.
- 3.3. From a gender perspective, at least some of these powerful influences could be the gender foundations of such behaviours that are so often left unexposed.
- 3.4. Students may hear messages from the school that bullying, sex-based harassment, teasing and homophobia are not acceptable, but stronger opposing messages can come from:
  - authoritarian school and classroom discipline practices that rely on fear, threat and intimidation;
  - peer group pressures among boys and girls that value bullying and harassment as badges of courage and strength;
  - family, friends and community attitudes suggesting that bullying, harassment, intimidation and homophobia are valid responses if an individual feels threatened or is not getting their own way;
  - popular culture that praises personalities with the identified behaviours, for example the excessive 'masculine' behaviours of some football players on and off the field, or the 'bitch' or 'bastard' character in popular soap operas.
- 3.5. The way to challenge these influences is not additional attention on the inappropriateness of the behaviours. Rather it is to expose and directly challenge the influences themselves and the ideas about gender that support them.
- 3.6. At the heart of these influences are ideas about how individuals exert and maintain authority and power over others. Men have traditionally asserted their authority and power with the threat of violence. Over time this has been accepted as 'masculine' behaviour.
- 3.7. There are many women and an increasing number of men who recognise that there are better ways to maintain authority and influence than by bullying and harassment. Staff at Alphington Grammar School are mindful of their approaches to behaviour management, of their labelling of gender stereotypical behaviour and of implicit support of casual gender based bias.

### **Bullying:**

#### **4. Alphington Grammar School's Definition of Bullying:**

- 4.1. Bullying is an ongoing act of aggression causing embarrassment, pain or discomfort to another.
- 4.2. Elements of bullying include wanting to hurt someone, acting on this desire, the action is hurtful, an imbalance of power, no reason for the action, is persistent and the bully gets satisfaction from hurting the victim.
- 4.3. It can be planned and organized; or it may be incidental and sporadic.
- 4.4. Individuals or groups may be involved.
- 4.5. It may be indirect i.e. enticed or encouraged by others.

#### **5. Strategies to Deal with Bullying:**

- 5.1. At Alphington Grammar School we will:
  - openly talk about bullying – what it is, how it affects us and what we can do about it;
  - 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. This could be part of the You Can Do It Program, the Kids Matter Program, the Mind Matters program and other associated well-being initiatives;

- use regular opportunities, both planned and as they arise, to address social issues as they occur and monitor behaviours on a daily basis if necessary; and
- implement the policy which clearly states what actions we will take to deal with bullying behaviour.

## **6. Responsibilities of Staff:**

- 6.1. Be role models in word and action at all times.
- 6.2. Ensure the YCDI, Kids Matter and Anti Bullying curriculum is implemented.
- 6.3. Ensure that our classroom management practices support respect for others (i.e. no name calling, singling out students, using sarcasm, using intimidation or threats, putdowns, gender stereotypes).
- 6.4. Be observant to signs of distress or suspected incidents of bullying.
- 6.5. Deal with all reported and observed incidences of bullying as set out in this policy.
- 6.6. Ensure that students are supervised in accordance with school supervision guidelines.
- 6.7. During yard duty make efforts to remove occasions for bullying by actively patrolling.
- 6.8. Arrive at class on time and move appropriately between lessons (including specialist lessons in the primary school).
- 6.9. Report incidences of bullying to the relevant pastoral manager.

## **7. Responsibilities of Students:**

- 7.1. To 'tell' (e.g. a parent, teacher, staff member) if they are being bullied or if they see or know of someone else being bullied – both at school and on the way to or from school.
- 7.2. To help someone who is being bullied.
- 7.3. To not bully others or encourage others to bully.

## **8. Responsibilities of Parent/Parent Liaison:**

- 8.1. To make every effort to differentiate between bullying, disagreements, friendship issues and social skill development.
- 8.2. To watch for signs that their child may be being bullied e.g. unwillingness to attend school, a pattern of headaches, missing equipment, requests for extra money, damaged clothes or bruising, sleep problems.
- 8.3. To speak to someone on staff (classroom teacher/ house mentor first) at school if their child is being bullied, or they suspect that this is happening.
- 8.4. To encourage their child to 'tell' if they are bullied.
- 8.5. To not inflame situations through the passing on of hearsay to other parents.
- 8.6. To not confront a child who is not their own about a situation.
- 8.7. To avoid 'labelling' a child as a bully.

## **9. Reporting Bullying:**

- 9.1. Incidences of bullying can be reported to any teacher, Head of House, Deputy Principal or the Principal by students and their parents, siblings or friends. Any bullying incidences that are dealt with will be recorded and fully documented.

## **10. Procedures for reported incidence of Bullying:**

- 10.1. Steps to be followed upon report of bullying:
  - incidents of bullying reported;
  - incidents relayed to appropriate person if necessary; and
  - appropriate person interviews alleged perpetrator, victim and any bystanders to establish facts.

**11. If Act of Bullying is verified:**

- 11.1. Parents/parent liaisons of all parties notified and arrangements to discuss made.
- 11.2. Safety and well-being of victim is prioritised; counselling/support arranged if needed.
- 11.3. Appropriate person counsels so that person who bullied is aware of the effect on victim.
- 11.4. Appropriate person ensures the perpetrator acts in a responsible and constructive way to remedy the situation (written or verbal apology also needs to be given).
- 11.5. Behaviour reflection may be actioned.
- 11.6. Teacher puts appropriate steps from Behaviour Management Policy in place (withdrawal, suspension, etc.).
- 11.7. Behaviour contract may be implemented.
- 11.8. Referral may be made to psychologist or external support agency.
- 11.9. Contact with parents/parent liaisons finalised.
- 11.10. Incident is recorded in Schoolbox in Pastoral file.
- 11.11. Ongoing monitoring of the situation with periodic 'check ins' with all parties.

**12. If Further incidence of the Bullying cycle occurs:**

- 12.1. Teacher, in collaboration with relevant Pastoral Manager, to interview student and their parents/parent liaisons.
- 12.2. Pastoral Manager to make clear consequences of repeat occurrence.
- 12.3. Counselling (on a private basis) is recommended for student who bullied.
- 12.4. Further action (internal/external suspension, termination of enrolment) is the prerogative of the Principal.

**13. Act of Bullying reported but not verified:**

- 13.1. Teacher to record incident in Pastoral file in Schoolbox and communicate with parents/parent liaisons as well as students involved.
- 13.2. Investigate possible reasons for incorrect report as needed.
- 13.3. Situation closely monitored.