Bullying is a concern that happens in all schools and research has shown that bullying commonly increases between Years 3 and 8. At James Sheahan, we are a microcosm of society, and as such, we are not immune to this situation. We do not tolerate bullying of any kind and our policy is to address this so as to keep our commitment that “Everyone has a right to feel safe all the time”.

In dealing with this, we need to firstly understand what bullying is. Bullying is unfair and one-sided. It happens when someone keeps hurting, frightening, threatening, or leaving someone out on purpose.

Today, more than ever, this involves the use of technology and sites such as Facebook have contributed to bullying being taken to another dimension.

Children who bully may be former or current victims of bullying themselves. Both boys and girls use face-to-face and behind-the-back bullying behaviours. Boys tend to use more face-to-face behaviours, while girls tend to use more behind-the-back behaviours. Both are equally harmful to the victim of bullying.

However, in dealing with bullying, it is very important to understand what bullying is not. Many times, a single act or behaviour is out of proportion, but it is not considered bullying. Some people think that bullying is any aggressive behaviour and although such behaviours are a source of concern and need attention, it is important to separate them from bullying.

It is not easy for children to understand the difference between a deliberate act and an accidental one, and may interpret things others do to them as if they were done intentionally to hurt them. Such perception is very dangerous, because every minor act of conflict, done without any intention to harm, can escalate and become a big conflict.

**It’s important to distinguish the difference between bullying and conflict.**

*Conflict is a disagreement that happens when people want different things. It is a normal part of human interaction. The people involved in a conflict have equal power to solve the problem. They can work it out together. They are not purposely trying to hurt each other.*

*Bullying is a pattern of repeated physical, verbal, psychological or social aggression that is directed towards a specific student by someone with more power and is intended to cause harm, distress and/or create fear.*

Thus, it is important as a school, to ensure that when a situation occurs, we step back and look at the whole picture. This, initially, is based on the premise of procedural fairness. The process that the school follows is known as being **F.A.I.R.**

- Find out the facts
- Ascertain and acknowledge the situation
- Initiate appropriate actions
- Restore Respect and Responsibility
Everyone has a right to feel safe all the time

We ask that our students speak to someone if they are not sure what type of situation they find themselves in for we encourage them to know that:

Nothing is that bad that you cannot tell someone about it

When a student comes to us and tells us that they are not feeling safe, or that they are being picked on, we listen to what they have to say. Once we’ve listened to them, we begin the investigation immediately and if need be, isolate the students from one another to ensure everyone’s safety.

Then we step back and look at the whole picture. This is important as it is based on the premise of procedural fairness, both for the student who has come to us, and for the student to whom the allegation is made against.

The process that the school follows is known as being F. A. I. R. The first of this process is:

Find out the facts

In this phase of the process, the school looks to:

- Speak with and record the details from:
  - the student who has come to us
  - the student(s) who have been named as being involved
  - other students who may have witnessed the situation.
  - Teachers and Year Co-ordinators who may be aware of the situation
- Explore reasons for this situation to have occurred
- Check the student records for any similar incidents
- Focus on the behaviour – separate the behaviour from the person
  - Types of questions that might be asked but not limited to, include:
    - What happened?
    - Why do you think this happened?
    - How did this make you feel?
    - What were you thinking about at the time?
    - Who do you think has been affected by your actions?
    - How have they been affected?

While this is happening, we will inform the parents/carers of the situation and seek their support in helping their child throughout this whole process. Once we have all the facts, we are ready to move onto the next phase of this process.

Ascertain and acknowledge the situation

There is a difference between conflict and bullying. Traditionally when students are in conflict, both involved in the disagreement are equally upset. In a bullying situation you have one student overpowering another. Conflict can be when one or both person’s ego is hurt and it usually occurs one time. Bullying is going below the belt so to speak, to insult, tease, threaten on a regular basis.

Students experience conflicts at school and at home as part of growing up. Studies have shown that through conflict we learn how to give and take and to improve on our social interaction and developmental skills. Bullying on the other hand can cause unneeded stress and in some cases depression issues.
As parents, teachers and caregivers we must observe the situation and know the difference between conflict and bullying in order to act appropriately to the needs of the students.

Children and adults sometimes find it difficult to recognise bullying. For example, fights between friends or rough play between children with equal power are not bullying situations. They become bullying, however, when one person has more power and uses it to hurt, frighten, or exclude the other person.

The incidents on this list are NOT considered bullying but are some examples of conflict situations:

1. Not liking someone
2. Being excluded
3. Accidentally bumping into someone
4. Making other children play things a certain way
5. A single act of telling a joke about someone
6. Arguments
7. Expression of unpleasant thoughts or feelings regarding others
8. Isolated acts of harassment, aggressive behavior, intimidation or meanness

All the behaviors above are unpleasant and need to be addressed, but they are not to be treated as bullying. Anything that happens once is NOT an act of bullying. Many times, labeling a single act of aggression can turn it into bullying just by perceiving it that way – but it doesn't make it bullying. However, if the above situations happen more frequently, then it may become bullying.

As parents, teachers and caregivers, it is important that once we have ascertained the situation, we acknowledge the decision. If we disagree with the decision, and continue to call it the opposite of what it is, then we will not be able to address the issues and come to a resolution. This then provides conflicting messages to our children which we need to avoid. We need to work in partnership on this.

Once we have ascertained and acknowledged the situation, we are ready to move onto the third phase.

Initiate Appropriate Actions.

When initiating the appropriate actions, it is important to take into account the nature and seriousness of the situation. The school cannot merely warn a student if the incident has been malicious and continuous nor on the other hand can the school ask a child to leave for a one-off minor incident.

The school and the staff need to be trusted to find the right answer when determining the appropriate action. This is guided by one's professional judgement, built up over many years, and giving consideration to the inspiration of our founders Catherine McAuley and John Baptist de La Salle. This inspiration informs our Mission Statement, which in part, states: “We provide opportunities for excellence, growth and success in a caring environment”.

We would be doing a disservice to all our students if the only action we took was a punitive one that did not take into account the Gospel values our founders espoused.

This is extremely important as our Mission Statement also embraces the notion that through: “Valuing compassion, courage and hope, our students will be prepared for a changing world”.

So, initially, in all but the most serious of situations, the school’s practice from the past will continue. This means that a no-blame approach, utilising discussion, mediation, empathy training and some form of counselling will be adopted.
If the problem remains unsolved after this process then the consequences may include a variety of strategies and will be based on the seriousness of the incident. This may well comprise: parent interviews, loss of playground privileges, afternoon detentions, withdrawal from school events, mandatory counselling, internal time-out from classes, reflection time away from school with time away made up later and possible police intervention.

As a school, we always strive to determine the appropriate action for each situation and this is based on both our Gospel value of compassion and our professionalism in being objective. We now look to restore respect and responsibility for all within our community.

**Restoring Respect and Responsibility**

This process is inspired by the philosophy and teachings of our founders Venerable Catherine McAuley and St John Baptist de la Salle which puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the need for assigning blame and only dispensing punishment. Our aim is to bring all those involved together so as to rebuild their relationships by restoring respect for one another.

The Key values in this approach create an ethos of respect, inclusion and accountability in taking responsibility for what has occurred. It also helps to prevent harm and conflict occurring again in the future so as to build a sense of belonging, safety and social responsibility.

Part of this process includes asking a series of questions:

- In your own words, what happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since the incident?
- Who do you think has been affected by your actions?
- How have they been affected?
- What do you need to do to make it right?

The potential advantages of this approach at James Sheahan include:

- A safer, more caring environment
- A greater commitment by everyone to taking the time to listen to one another
- A reduction in bullying and other interpersonal conflicts
- A greater awareness of the importance of connectedness to young people. The need to belong and feel valued by peers and significant adults
- Greater emphasis on responses to inappropriate behaviour that seek to reconnect, and not further disconnect, young people
- An increased belief in the ability of young people to take responsibility for their choices, and more people giving them opportunities to do so

The basis for this approach of being FAIR to our students, are taken from the words of our Founders:

For our teachers from St John Baptist de la Salle:

"Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the Gospel who seeks the lost sheep, places it upon his shoulders, and carries it back to restore it to the fold. Since you are taking his place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same. Ask him for the grace needed to procure the conversion of their hearts”.

For our students from Venerable Catherine McAuley:

“It is not sufficient that Jesus Christ be formed in us; He must be recognised in our conduct. It is by being united to Jesus Christ that we will be united with each other. The spirit of union is the greatest blessing Almighty God can bestow on a community”.

**STOP PRESS – FACEBOOK**

Any Information given to the school on the inappropriate use of Facebook may immediately be passed onto the police to investigate.