



Bullying Prevention (including Cyberbullying) Policy

Mercy Regional College operates with the consent of the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat and is owned, operated and governed by Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL).

Rationale

At Mercy Regional College the dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching and is intrinsic to our education ministry. Consequently, the principle that the person is made in the image and likeness of God is central to the mission as a Catholic school.

It is essential that Mercy Regional College creates and maintains a respectful, safe and supportive learning environment that promotes student wellbeing, personal growth and positive self-esteem amongst a diverse range of learners. Child safety, and bullying prevention is a shared responsibility. Every person in the school has a key role in promoting child safety and wellbeing and promptly raising any issues or concerns about a child or young person's wellbeing.

Particular attention is given to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, international students, children and young people with disabilities, those unable to live at home, children and young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQ+) and other students experiencing risk or vulnerability.

Inappropriate or harmful behaviour targeting students in physical or online environments based on these or other characteristics, such as racism, sexism or homophobia, is not tolerated at Mercy Regional College and any instances identified will be addressed with appropriate responses.

The prevention of and responses to incidents of bullying, inappropriate use of technology and disrespectful behaviour are more readily achieved in a caring and supportive school culture that promotes positive relationships and reflects Gospel values. Bullying, cyber-bullying, harassment, aggression and violence disregard core values of the Catholic faith tradition, including dignity, respect, justice, equity, compassion, trust and courage. Importantly, such actions can adversely affect the wellbeing of students and are therefore unacceptable.

Mercy Regional College is committed to regularly reviewing child safe practices, and seeking input from students, families, carers or guardians, staff and volunteers to inform proactive strategies.

Mercy Regional College acknowledges that school staff owe a duty of care to children and young people to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm, which can include harm that may be caused by bullying behaviour.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- explain the definition of bullying so that there is shared understanding amongst all members of the *[Insert school name]* community
- make clear that no form of bullying at *[Insert school name]* will be tolerated
- outline the strategies and programs in place at *[Insert school name]* to build a positive school culture and prevent bullying behaviour
- ask that everyone in the school community be alert to signs and evidence of bullying behaviour, and understands the importance of reporting bullying behaviour to school staff
- ensure that all reported incidents of bullying are appropriately investigated and addressed
- ensure that support is provided to all students who may be affected by bullying behaviour (including targets, bystanders, witnesses and students engaging in bullying behaviour)
- seek parental or caregiver and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour at *[Insert school name]*.

When responding to bullying behaviour, Mercy Regional College aims to:

- be proportionate, consistent and responsive
- find a constructive solution for everyone
- stop the bullying from happening again
- restore the relationships between the students involved.

This policy is grounded in the beliefs that:

- every person has the right to be treated respectfully and feel safe from any form of verbal, physical and emotional abuse, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children and young people with a disability, children and young people who are unable to live at home, international students and LGBTIQ+ students
- the school is committed to building and nurturing a community that values diversity
- families, carers and guardians are the primary educators of their children
- the school community is involved in the development of school policies
- identification and reporting of unacceptable behaviour is essential to the effective implementation of this policy
- complainant(s) and witness(es) will be protected from victimisation
- learning technologies are used ethically and responsibly in the school environment, and in a way that minimises the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed
- communication is respectful and human dignity is valued
- regular monitoring of school policies is necessary, and improvements are made where appropriate.

Policy Statement

Mercy Regional College understands the school environment to include any physical, online or virtual space made available for a child or student to use at any time, including:

- online or virtual school environments (including email, intranet systems, software applications, collaboration tools, and online services);
- other locations provided by the provider or through a third-party provider for a child or student to use including, but not limited to, locations used for:

- (i) excursions and camps (including overseas);
- (ii) approved homestay accommodation;
- (iii) delivery of education and training such as registered training organisations, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers or another school; or
- (iv) sporting events, excursions, competitions or other events.

Mercy Regional College will ensure that physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing through the provision of:

- child safety and wellbeing policies, procedures and practices which enable staff and volunteers to identify and mitigate risks in school without compromising a child or young person's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities and practices and child safety code of conduct of the school or provider of school boarding services
- procurement procedures for facilities and services from third parties that ensure the safety of children and young people.

Mercy Regional College is committed to providing a safe and respectful learning environment where bullying will not be tolerated.

Definitions

Categories of Bullying: There are three broad categories of bullying:

1. **Direct physical bullying:** This form includes hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property
2. **Direct verbal bullying:** This form includes name calling, insults, sexist, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse
3. **Indirect bullying:** This form of bullying is harder to recognise and often carried out behind the bullied person's back. It is designed to harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation. Indirect bullying includes:
 - lying and spreading rumours
 - playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
 - sexist comments or gestures
 - mimicking
 - encouraging others to socially exclude someone
 - damaging someone's social reputation and social acceptance
 - cyber-bullying, which involves the use of email, text messages or chat rooms to humiliate and distress someone.

Bullying: is repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person that creates a risk to health and safety. It occurs when an individual or a group upsets or hurts another person, their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion. Forms of bullying include:

- **Physical bullying:** pushing, shoving, fighting, pinching and any other unwelcome physical contact used intentionally to intimidate or hurt someone
- **Verbal/written bullying:** put downs, particularly those referring to physical characteristics, can result in loss of self-esteem. Racial discrimination of any kind is a form of bullying
- **Gesture bullying:** non-verbal signals used to silence and intimidate a victim
- **Extortion bullying:** physically stronger and more powerful students may bully other students into giving up their possessions, buying food and drink, or taking part in rule breaking activities
- **Social bullying:** deliberately being left out of activities is a most hurtful form of bullying.

- **Visual bullying:** offensive notes or material, graffiti, or damaging other people's possessions.
- **Sexual bullying:** touching, sexually orientated jokes, drawings of, or writing about someone's body, using rude names or commenting about someone's morals, unwanted invitations of a sexual nature, asking questions about someone's private life
- **Cyber-bullying:** the use of various forms of electronic media to spread text and visual messages to cause hurt, embarrassment, intimidation.

What Bullying is Not

Many distressing behaviours are not examples of bullying, even though they are unpleasant and often require teacher intervention and management. There are three socially unpleasant situations that are often confused with bullying including:

- **Mutual conflict:** In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the problem. However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation, with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way
- **Social rejection or dislike:** Unless the social rejection is directed towards someone specifically and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others, it is not bullying
- **Single-episode acts:** Single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different students is not the same as bullying.

References

- [Privacy Compliance Manual](#) (2020). Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) (CEVN website)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. [Bullying Prevention and Response Policy](#)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2021. [Cybersafety and Responsible Use of Digital Technologies](#)
- Department of Education and Training (Vic). 2020. [Mobile Phones - Student Use](#).

Resources

[Australian Student Wellbeing Framework \(2018\)](#)

[Bully Stoppers](#) – a resource containing information and advice for the school community, including students, families, carers and guardians and school staff.

[Bullying. No Way!](#) – a website for Australian schools, managed by the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group (SSSC) which has representatives from all states and territories, including the Catholic and independent schooling sectors.

DOBCEL Student Wellbeing Framework

[eSmart](#) – assists schools to develop a culture that promotes the safe, smart and responsible use of technology.

[eSafety Commissioner](#) – provides a range of up-to-date information and resources, coupled with a complaints system to assist children who experience serious cyberbullying and image-based abuse.

[Student Wellbeing Hub](#)

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV). (2018). [Positive Behaviour Guidelines](#)

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV). Child Safety Commitment Statement

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools. (2018). [eXcel: Wellbeing for learning in Catholic school communities](#)

[Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission](#)- Sex discrimination

Related Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies:

- School Vision and Mission Statement
- Mercy Regional College Duty of Care Policy
- DOBCEL Complaints Handling Policy
- DOBCEL Diversity and Equity Policy
- DOBCEL Enrolment Policy
- DOBCEL Student Safety & Wellbeing Policy
- DOBCEL Student Empowerment and Participation Policy
- DOBCEL Recordkeeping Policy

Policy Review and Approval

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's two-year review cycle of its child safety practices.