



STUDENT BULLYING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

Legal References:	<i>Education Act, as amended;</i> <i>Ontario Human Rights Code;</i> <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;</i> <i>Provincial Code of Conduct;</i> <i>Policy/Program Memorandum 144 – Bullying Prevention and Intervention;</i> <i>Policy/Program Memorandum 145 – Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour;</i> <i>Safe Schools: Creating a Positive School Climate;</i> <i>Ontario Regulation 474/00 – Access to School Premises;</i> <i>Ontario Regulation 472/07 – Suspension and Expulsion of Pupils;</i> <i>Trespass to Property Act.</i>
Related References:	<i>Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario;</i> <i>Realizing the Promise of Diversity, Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy;</i> <i>Board Policy 6000 – Safe Schools;</i> <i>Board Policy 6008 – Student Discipline;</i> <i>Board Policy 6001 – Code of Conduct;</i> <i>Board Policy 1008 – Equity and Inclusion;</i> <i>AP1200 Student Bullying Prevention and Intervention;</i> <i>AP1260 Student Discipline;</i> <i>Administrative Procedure 1270 - Traumatic Events Response;</i> <i>Administrative Procedure 1280 - Threat Risk Assessment;</i> <i>Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans</i> <i>School Board Police Protocol.</i>
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1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) believes that every student has the right to be treated with respect, dignity and to feel safe at school. Research tells us students who feel safe and respected at school are able to reach their full potential.
- 1.2 The Board recognizes that bullying:
 - 1.2.1 adversely affects a school’s ability to educate its students;
 - 1.2.2 adversely impacts a student’s ability to learn;
 - 1.2.3 affects the dignity and self-esteem of students who are bullied;
 - 1.2.4 damages healthy relationships;
 - 1.2.5 adversely impacts school climate, including healthy relationships; and

- 1.2.6 will not be tolerated on school property, at school-related activities, on school buses or in any other circumstances (e.g. electronically or cyber) where bullying will have a negative impact on the school climate.
- 1.3 The impact of bullying can lead to long-term social and emotional problems not only for the victims of bullying, but for the bully and those who watch or are aware it is happening. Bullies have an increased risk of becoming adults who engage in illegal activities, substance abuse, dating/relationship violence, child abuse and elder abuse. As a society, for many decades bullying was either viewed as a relatively harmless “rite of passage” or ignored altogether. It has taken high-profile acts of school violence and youth suicide to change the public perception of bullying behaviour, and to reach an understanding of what it actually is: a form of physical, emotional and/or psychological abuse.
- 1.4 At the WRDSB we believe it is everyone’s responsibility to stop bullying behaviour which is why we partner with families/caregivers, community organizations and agencies to put a stop to bullying. Principals are required by legislation to review annually with all staff the “*duty to respond*” to all incidents that can negatively affect school climate, including bullying; the “*duty to report*” all suspected bullying activities; bullying definitions, means and forms; as well as education around the difference between rough play, conflict and bullying. Serious incidents of bullying are defined as, but not limited to, racist, homophobic, sexual and sexist remarks, body image, disability, slurs, jokes or graffiti that could lead to suspension and/or expulsion. All incidents of bullying will result in a consideration of suspension and/or expulsion pursuant to sections 306(1) and 310(1) of the Education Act.

2.0 Definitions of Bullying

- 2.1 **Bullying** means aggressive and typically repeated behaviour by a student where,
 - 2.1.1 the behaviour is intended by the student to have the effect of, or the student ~~pupil~~ ought to know that the behaviour would be likely to have the effect of;
 - 2.1.2 causing harm, fear or distress to another individual, including physical, psychological, social or academic harm, harm to the individual’s reputation or harm to the individual’s property; or
 - 2.1.3 creating a negative environment at a school for another individual; and
 - 2.1.4 the behaviour occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the student and the individual based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education; (“intimidation”);
 - 2.1.5 for the purposes of the definition, “bullying” behaviour includes the use of any physical, verbal, electronic, written or other means.

2.2 Cyber-bullying

For the purposes of the definition, “bullying” includes bullying by electronic means (commonly known as cyber-bullying), including, but not limited to texting, instant messaging tools, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, and other web-based platforms.

2.3 Positive School Climate

- 2.3.1 Positive school climate is the sum total of all the personal relationships within a school. When these relationships are founded in mutual acceptance and

inclusion, and modeled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm. A promotion of a positive school climate means that all members of the school community are inclusive and accepting of all, including persons of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status and disability.

2.3.2 The following are some characteristics of a positive school climate:

- Students, staff members, and parents feel safe, and are safe, included, and accepted.
- All members of the school community demonstrate respect, fairness, and kindness in their interactions, building healthy relationships that are free from discrimination and harassment.
- Students are encouraged and given support to be positive leaders and role models in their school community.
- Open and ongoing dialogue takes place between the principal, staff members, families/caregivers, and students. All partners are actively engaged.
- The learning environment, instructional materials, and teaching and assessment strategies reflect the diversity of all learners.
- Every student is inspired and given support to succeed in an environment of high expectations.
- Bullying prevention and awareness-raising strategies for students and staff are reinforced through curriculum-linked programs.

2.4 Means and Forms of Bullying

Bullying is a dynamic of unhealthy interaction that can take the following means and forms¹:

- 2.4.1 *Physical bullying* includes behaviours such as: hitting, kicking, shoving, spitting, beating up, stealing, or damaging property.
- 2.4.2 *Verbal bullying* includes behaviours such as: name-calling, mocking, hurtful teasing, humiliating or threatening someone, racist comments, or sexual harassment.
- 2.4.3 *Social bullying* includes behaviours such as: rolling your eyes or turning away from someone, excluding others from the group, gossiping or spreading rumours, setting others up to look foolish and damaging friendships.
- 2.4.4 *Electronic or Cyber-bullying* includes bullying by electronic means including, but not limited to texting, instant messaging tools, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, and other web-based platforms to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, or damage reputations and friendships.
- 2.4.5 *Racial bullying* includes behaviours such as: treating people disrespectfully because of their racial or ethnic background, saying inappropriate things about a cultural background, verbal and non-verbal racist acts.
- 2.4.6 *Religious bullying* comprises treating people disrespectfully because of their religious background or beliefs, saying bad things about a religious background

¹ Definitions of Means and Forms of Bullying based on *PREVnet.ca*

or belief, name calling or telling jokes based on others' religious beliefs and practices.

- 2.4.7 *Sexual bullying* includes behaviours such as leaving someone out or treating him/her disrespectfully because of their gender, making sexist comments or jokes, unwanted touching, pinching or grabbing someone in a sexual way, making crude comments about someone's sexual behaviour, spreading a sexual rumor about someone, using transphobic/homophobic slurs or epithets, or making inferences about their sexual orientation or gender identification.
- 2.4.8 *Disability bullying* includes behaviours such as: leaving someone out or treating them disrespectfully because of a disability, making someone feel uncomfortable because of a disability, using slurs or epithets regarding ability, or making comments or jokes to hurt someone with a disability.

2.5 Rough Play vs. Conflict vs. Bullying

- 2.5.1 Interactions between students are often difficult to classify. The following provides an assessment tool to help with the situation at hand. Even where conduct is not necessarily labeled as bullying, staff should consider what appropriate responses may be used to support students and to encourage positive student behaviour.
- 2.5.2 Staff are reminded that, in resolving issues in a healthy manner, students often need adult assistance to resolve rough play or conflict, and that rough play or conflict resolved in a healthy manner is much less likely to result in bullying.

Rough Play	Conflict	Bullying
Usually friends or friendly. Often repeated. Same players.	Acquaintances or friends. Occasional. Usually issue-centred, until resolved; could centre around misunderstanding, misinformation or no common ground.	Typically not friends; however may have had a relationship previously or have a relationship currently. Intentional target. Repeated and persistent.
Balance of power	Power relatively equal	Unequal power
Equal, consensual reaction.	Equal or near equal emotional reaction.	Bully's reaction meets own intrinsic need for power and control (consciously or unconsciously). Strong emotional, mental and physical reaction for target.
Not seeking power or attention	Not seeking power or attention	Attempt to gain power and control, possessions or popularity
No intent to harm.	Intentionally to sort out who is right.	Intentionally harm-doing

Intention is fun. If something goes wrong, then remorseful.	Remorse – takes responsibility	Bully may or may not show remorse. May or may not know what they are doing is wrong. May blame target or believe the target deserves it.
Not regarded as a problem.	Effort to solve a problem.	Bully may deny there is a problem. Target may not be able to articulate.
Not serious, unless something goes wrong.	Usually not serious and can be resolved on their own or with the aid of third party.	Threats of physical or emotional harm; intent to humiliate, exclude or victimize.

3.0 Reporting of Bullying Incidents by Students

- 3.1 Bullying is a covert activity that we all have a responsibility to stop. Reporting instances of bullying to an adult in the school is the socially responsible thing to do and encourages a positive school climate. Students are encouraged to report instances of bullying not only for themselves, but on behalf of bullies, victims or bystanders in a timely manner, to a teacher, Child Youth Worker, Principal, Vice-Principal, Guidance Counselor, bus or taxi driver, social worker either by phone, email or in person. The Board will take steps to ensure that bullying incidents can be reported safely and in a way that will minimize the possibility of reprisal.

4.0 Reporting of Bullying Incidents by Families/Caregivers

- 4.1 When families/caregivers notice a change in their child's behaviour, desire to attend school or loss of interest in hobbies and interests or if their child discloses a bullying situation, it is advised to contact the school immediately. Initial reporting can be made to an adult with whom the family member/caregiver has a relationship, the classroom teacher, Child Youth Worker, Vice-Principal or Principal. The Principal or Vice-Principal will work with the student, the family, other students and staff to investigate the report and work to resolve it. It is important to stay connected with the school following the report to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

5.0 Responding to Bullying by Board Staff

- 5.1 All WRDSB staff who work directly with students MUST respond to all student bullying behaviours as well as any other behaviours that have a negative impact on school climate. This includes administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff, as well as board resource staff visiting schools. When bullying is observed, the response may include a request to stop the behaviour because it is disrespectful or inappropriate. Board employees are not required to respond to incidents of bullying when, in their opinion, responding would cause immediate physical harm to a student or themselves or another person. This behaviour and the response (or lack of response) must be reported to an administrator.

6.0 Reporting of Bullying Incidents by Board Staff

- 6.1 All bullying incidents must be reported using the appropriate form (*IS-15-03 Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form*). Bullying incidents must be reported by the end of the school day and as soon as possible after the incident. Where immediate action is required, the report can be made verbally, with submission of the written form by the following day.

7.0 Principals Response to Reports of Bullying

- 7.1 After a report is submitted, the Principals will investigate any reports of inappropriate behaviour and specifically bullying, and communicate the results of the investigation to the employee. Principal must acknowledge the receipt of the report to the employee who reported. The receipt will identify if further action is being taken or if no action is required.
- 7.2 If no action is taken, it is not necessary to retain the report.
- 7.3 If action is taken, the report will be kept for a period of one year in the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR); however the names of all other students on the form (co-aggressors and victims) must be removed. No record of the incident shall be placed in the victim's or victims' OSRs.
- 7.4 Principals are required to inform families/caregivers of victims, as a result of any incident for which suspension/expulsion is being considered, in respect of all bullying conduct and all other incidents referenced in section 306(1) and 310(1) of the *Education Act*.
- 7.5 When notifying the families/caregivers of the victim, the Principal must disclose the nature of the incident that caused harm, the nature of the harm to their child, the steps being taken to keep their child safe, including the nature of the discipline in response to the incident, and the supports that will be provided for the student in response to the harm that resulted from the incident. Principals must not share the name of the student who caused harm or any identifying information with the family/caregiver of the victim, except to the extent that it is necessary to comply with the requirements of subsection 300.3(4) of the *Education Act*.
- 7.6 Principals must not inform the families/caregivers of the student who caused harm when, in the Principal's discretion, doing so would put the student at risk of harm from the family/caregiver. If the Principal decides not to notify the family/caregiver for this reason, the Principal must document the rationale for the decision and advise the Supervisory Officer. The Principal is required to inform the teacher or, if appropriate, the other staff member who reported the harm of this decision. In addition, the principal shall not inform the parent of a student who is 18 years old or older or who is 16 or 17 years old and has withdrawn from parental control.
- 7.7 When notifying the family/caregiver of the student who caused harm, the Principal must disclose the nature of the incident that caused harm, the nature of the harm to the other child, the nature of any disciplinary measures taken in response to the incident, and the supports that will be provided to the student in response to his or her engagement in the activity. Principals must not share the name of the student who was harmed or any identifying information with the family/caregiver of the student who caused the harm, except to the extent that it is necessary to comply with the requirements of subsection 300.3(6) of the *Education Act*.
- 7.8 When notifying a family/caregiver under these sections, the Principal shall invite the family/caregiver to have a discussion with the Principal about the supports that will be provided for their child.

8.0 Supports for Victims and for Students who Bully

- 8.1 All WRDSB staff must take allegations of homophobia, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and inappropriate sexual behaviour (PPM 145) and bullying (PPM 144) seriously. Incidents of this nature must be dealt with in a sensitive, supportive and timely manner.
- 8.2 All staff must support students who disclose they are being bullied by providing programs, interventions or other supports and by making available information on community agencies that can provide professional support.
- 8.3 Schools will develop specific plans to protect students who have been bullied and must outline a process for families/caregivers to follow if they are not satisfied with the supports their children receive.
- 8.4 If it is deemed necessary that students need to be separated to protect a student or to preserve school safety, it is preferable if the victim remains in the home school, unless parents make a specific request for a move.
- 8.5 Students who bully need help developing problem-solving skills that do not involve aggression and rechanneling their leadership skills. Formative consequences are designed to send the message that bullying is unacceptable while helping them learn the social skills and empathy they may lack. Assure students who bully that they can change their behaviour.

9.0 Supports for Bystanders

- 9.1 When bullying does happen, it is imperative to debrief the incident with bystanders. This is a teachable moment and the best tool for building empathy. See *AP1200 - Student Bullying Prevention and Intervention* for debriefing suggestions.
- 9.2 The Board shall provide programs, interventions or other supports to these individuals who witness bullying.
- 9.3 Schools should value and encourage active intervention in bullying situations by all members of the school community so these situations are more likely to be challenged.

10.0 Prevention Strategies

- 10.1 **Code of Conduct** – All WRDSB staff will familiarize themselves with both the Board Code of Conduct and the School's Code of Conduct which set out standards for behaviour. Schools will incorporate into their Code of Conduct the stipulations of this policy, associated procedures and the responsibilities for staff, students and parents/guardians/caregivers as outlined in this policy.
- 10.2 **Safe, Caring & Inclusive Schools Team** - Every school will have a SCIS Team consisting of an administrator, teacher, paraprofessional, family/caregiver and a student. The team will meet a minimum of 3 times per year for the purpose of monitoring the school climate. Members will review the data from biennial surveys of students, staff, and parents, and recommend appropriate measures to address areas of concern. The Chair of this team must be a staff member.
- 10.3 **Positive School Climate** - A positive school climate is defined by the Ministry of Education as "the sum total of all the personal relationships within a school". When these relationships are founded in mutual acceptance and inclusion, and modeled by all, a culture of respect becomes the norm. Confirmation of a positive school climate is when all members of the school community feel safe, accepted and included.

- 10.4 **Collaborations with Community Agencies** - The WRDSB pursues collaborations with community organizations and agencies to work towards the elimination of bullying.
- 10.5 **Training** - Bullying Awareness and Prevention Training will be provided to staff and students on an on-going basis, and, at a minimum, annually.
- 10.6 **Leadership Activities** - All students should participate in bullying prevention and leadership initiatives within their own school, such as daily classroom teaching with curriculum links, character education initiatives, mentorship programs, citizenship development, student leadership, student success strategies, healthy lifestyles initiatives and social skills development.
- 10.7 **Teaching Strategies** - Teaching strategies will support the school-wide Ministry of Education bullying prevention strategies by integrating prevention and intervention strategies into curriculum. Teaching strategies will focus on developing healthy relationships by promoting inclusion, respect and empathy. Prevention messaging will be reinforced through programs addressing discrimination based on age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, faith, special needs, ethnicity, social status and family circumstances.

11.0 Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

- 11.1 The Board will support schools in the implementation of the WRDSB's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans, which will comply with the Board's policies and procedures regarding Bullying Prevention and Intervention.
- 11.2 When revising its plan, the Board will review school climate surveys to identify concerns, identify best practices of evidence-informed programs currently used at the Board, consider other evidence-based practices and identify key collaborators in respect of its bullying initiatives.

12.0 Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week

- 12.1 The week beginning on the third Sunday of November in each year is provincially proclaimed as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week. Schools are encouraged to support this and participate in any other bullying prevention awareness activities throughout the year.

13.0 Communication of the Policy

- 13.1 Administrators will inform all staff, students, Safe, Caring and Inclusive School Team members, School Council and other members of the school community of this policy. Student/school handbooks and planners, School Day communication tool and School Websites should include a statement regarding the unacceptability of bullying, the procedures for reporting bullying and the consequences for bullying.

14.0 Access to Resources

- 14.1 The WRDSB is committed to making reasonable and targeted efforts to provide access to appropriate board resources/publications for families/caregivers and in doing so, taking into account linguistic and accessibility considerations.