SOUTHSIDE
Montessori School

Anti Bullying Policy and Procedures

Scope

This policy applies to all students, staff, and parents/guardians at Southside Montessori. It is designed to guide the creation of a safe and supportive environment that promotes respect, inclusion, and the prevention of bullying. This policy extends to all school related activities, both on and off-campus, including extracurricular events, online interactions, and school trips.

Purpose

The purpose of this Anti-Bullying Policy is to:

- Establish a clear and consistent approach to preventing and addressing bullying.
- Foster a safe and inclusive learning environment where all students can feel valued and supported.
- Comply with relevant legislation and regulations to protect students from harm.
- Integrate the Montessori philosophy of respect, individuality, and peaceful conflict resolution in the context of anti-bullying practices.

This policy exists to provide a clear framework to guide all members of the school community in understanding, preventing, and addressing bullying. It helps create an environment where all individuals feel safe, valued, and respected, in line with our commitment to supporting the holistic development of every student.

Legislation and Standards

This policy is developed in accordance with the following laws and regulations in New South Wales (NSW), Australia:

1. **The Education Act 1990 (NSW)**
    a. Section 21 outlines the duties of the principal and the school community to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of students.
    b. School policies must be aligned with the need for a safe and supportive learning environment.
2. **The Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)**
    a. Prohibits discrimination and harassment based on race, sex, disability, and other characteristics.
    b. Schools must take proactive steps to prevent bullying and discrimination.
3. **The Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)**
    a. Ensures that staff and students are provided with a safe working environment.
    b. This includes a responsibility to ensure that bullying does not occur within the school.
4. **The Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW)**
    a. Requires schools to ensure that staff working with children do so in a manner that protects their safety and wellbeing.
    b. Schools must investigate any reports of bullying that could lead to emotional or physical harm.
5. **The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)**
    a. Ensures that students with disabilities are protected from bullying, and schools must make reasonable adjustments to prevent exclusion or harassment.
6. **The Montessori Approach (as an educational philosophy)**
    a. Promotes respect, empathy, and responsibility as core values in conflict resolution.
    b. Encourages self-regulation, peaceful problem-solving, and mutual respect among children.

Types of Bullying and Definitions

Understanding the different types of bullying is crucial for effective prevention and intervention. Bullying may take various forms:

1. **Physical Bullying**: Involves harm or threats of harm, including hitting, slapping, tripping, or damaging personal property.
2. **Verbal Bullying**: Involves hurtful words or actions such as name-calling, teasing, or threatening someone.

3. **Social (Relational) Bullying**: Involves damaging relationships or reputations, including exclusion from groups, spreading rumors, or public humiliation.
4. **Cyberbullying**: Occurs via digital platforms, such as social media or texting, including harassment, impersonation, exclusion, or sharing embarrassing content.
5. **Psychological (Emotional) Bullying**: Involves using manipulation, intimidation, or degradation to harm someone's mental or emotional well-being.
6. **Racial or Ethnic Bullying**: Targets individuals based on their race or ethnicity, such as using racial slurs or discriminatory exclusion.
7. **Sexual Bullying**: Includes inappropriate sexual comments, unwelcome physical contact, or harassment.
8. **Disability Bullying**: Targets individuals due to their physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities.

What Constitutes Bullying and What Does Not

To create clarity and ensure that all members of the school community understand what bullying is and is not, the following distinctions are made:

What constitutes bullying:

- **Intentional harm**: Bullying is deliberate behaviour meant to harm or distress the target.
- **Repeated behaviour**: Bullying is often ongoing, but even a single serious incident can be considered bullying, depending on its impact.
- **Imbalance of power**: Bullying often involves a power differential, where the perpetrator has power or control over the victim, whether through physical strength, social status, or digital means.

Examples of Bullying:

- A student repeatedly calling another student derogatory names or making threats.
- A group excluding a student from social activities or spreading hurtful rumors about them.
- A student intentionally hitting or physically intimidating another student.
- A student spreading malicious rumors about another student online or through social media.

What does not constitute bullying:

- **Conflict or disagreements**: Differences of opinion or occasional disagreements between students are not bullying. These are normal parts of human interaction and should be resolved through communication and conflict resolution.
- **Playful behaviour**: If two students are engaging in harmless play, such as a friendly game, and no harm is intended or caused, it is not bullying.
- **Accidental harm**: A situation where a student accidentally causes harm to another, without the intention of bullying or ongoing harm, is not considered bullying.
- **One-off arguments or disagreements**: A single argument or dispute that does not involve ongoing harassment or intimidation is not bullying.

Why This Policy Exists

This policy exists to:

- **Promote a Safe Environment**: To ensure that all students can attend school in a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment, free from bullying or harassment.
- **Encourage Respect**: To foster respect, empathy, and a sense of belonging among all members of the school community.
- **Ensure Legal Compliance**: To adhere to state and federal legislation that requires schools to protect students from harm and discrimination.
- **Support the Whole Child**: To reflect the school's Montessori philosophy of supporting the emotional, social, and academic growth of every student, emphasizing peaceful conflict resolution and respect for others.

Responsibilities

Students

Students have the responsibility to:

- Treat others with kindness, respect, and empathy.
- Refrain from engaging in any form of bullying, whether physical, verbal, social, or cyber.
- Stand up for others who may be targeted by bullying, either by offering support to the victim or reporting bullying to an appropriate adult.
- Follow the school's rules and contribute to creating a positive, safe, and inclusive school culture.

Staff

Staff have the responsibility to:

- Model respectful behaviour and create a safe, inclusive environment for all students.
- Be vigilant and proactive in identifying bullying behaviours and intervening early to stop bullying.
- Encourage positive relationships and teach students conflict-resolution skills that align with the Montessori approach.
- Take immediate and appropriate action when bullying is reported, including investigation, support, and disciplinary measures where necessary.
- Provide ongoing support to victims of bullying and work with the perpetrator to understand and address the behaviour.
- Report all concerns regarding student safety, welfare or wellbeing to the Principal in accordance with the Child Protection Policy.

Parents and Guardians

Parents and guardians have the responsibility to:

- Support and reinforce the values of respect, empathy, and inclusion at home and in the community.
- Monitor their child's behaviour, including online activity, to ensure they are not engaging in bullying.
- Encourage open communication with the school and inform staff if they suspect their child is being bullied or bullying others.
- Work collaboratively with the school to resolve bullying incidents and support restorative practices.

School Community

The broader school community—including local organizations—has the responsibility to:

- Support and uphold the school's anti-bullying policy by fostering open communication between home and school.
- Work together with staff and students to promote the values of respect, empathy, and inclusion.
- Educate and raise awareness about bullying and its impact on young people's mental health and wellbeing.

- Collaborate with the school in identifying solutions and supporting victims of bullying.

Ways to Identify Bullying

Identifying bullying early is crucial in preventing it from escalating and ensuring that victims receive support. Bullying may not always be overt, so it's important for both students and adults to be aware of potential signs. Below are several ways to identify bullying:

1. Physical Signs

- **Unexplained injuries**: Bruises, cuts, or scratches that the student cannot explain, or inconsistent explanations for how they were sustained.
- **Damaged or missing belongings**: Personal items such as clothing, books, or school supplies being destroyed, lost, or frequently misplaced.
- **Frequent sickness or complaints**: Regular complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or feeling unwell without a clear medical cause, particularly on school days.

2. Behavioural Changes

- **Avoidance of school or social situations**: The student may begin refusing to go to school, taking longer routes to school, or attempting to stay home regularly, particularly on days when bullying is likely to occur.
- **Sudden withdrawal from friends or activities**: A previously social or outgoing student may suddenly avoid friends, stop participating in extracurricular activities, or become isolated from peers.
- **Changes in mood**: Unexplained anxiety, depression, anger, or sadness may indicate that the student is experiencing bullying. You may notice mood swings or a drop in the student's overall emotional state.

- **Reluctance to talk about school**: If a student avoids talking about school, frequently seems upset when discussing school events, or expresses a desire to change schools, it could signal an underlying bullying issue.

3. Academic Decline

- **Drop in academic performance**: Bullying can impact a student's focus, confidence, and ability to complete assignments or participate in class. A sudden lack of engagement in schoolwork can be a sign.
- **Tiredness and lack of concentration**: Victims of bullying may have trouble concentrating, show signs of exhaustion, or become disengaged from their studies due to the emotional toll bullying takes on them.

4. Social Behaviour Indicators

- **Exclusion from peer groups**: If a student is repeatedly excluded from group activities, games, or social events, it may be a sign of relational or social bullying.
- **Frequent rumors or gossip**: If students spread negative or hurtful rumors about another student, it may indicate the presence of bullying behaviour.
- **Hostile or inappropriate interactions**: Observing or hearing about negative interactions such as teasing, name-calling, mocking, or other forms of verbal abuse among peers is a clear sign of bullying.

5. Digital Behaviour (Cyberbullying)

- **Increased secrecy about online activity**: If a student becomes secretive about their use of digital devices or social media, or avoids sharing their online experiences, it may indicate they are being bullied online.
- **Sudden changes in online behaviour**: The student may delete accounts, block friends, or engage in digital interactions that seem to be driven by fear or anxiety.
- **Receiving threatening or harmful messages**: Evidence of hurtful, threatening, or humiliating messages sent via social media, text, or email, whether directed at the student or involving the student in some way.

6. Peer or Teacher Observations

- **Other students' complaints or observations**: Sometimes, peers will notice bullying before the victim feels comfortable speaking out. If a student consistently witnesses or reports incidents of bullying toward another, this should be taken seriously.

- **Changes in teacher or staff observations**: Teachers or staff may notice a student becoming withdrawn, anxious, or upset in class, showing a decline in engagement, or avoiding certain groups of students. These changes might indicate bullying.

7. Verbal Cues

- **Statements like "Nobody likes me" or "I don't have any friends"**: These kinds of statements, especially if heard regularly, may signal that the student is experiencing social isolation, exclusion, or bullying.
- **Fear of specific students or groups**: The student may express fear or anxiety about interacting with certain peers, highlighting possible targets for bullying.

8. Unexplained Emotional Reactions

- **Sudden anger or outbursts**: A student may suddenly lash out at others or become angry without a clear cause, possibly due to the emotional frustration and distress caused by bullying.
- **Low self-esteem or self-harming behaviours**: The student may express feelings of worthlessness, self-harm, or engage in behaviours indicating emotional distress, which could be linked to bullying.

9. Physical Health Complaints

- **Frequent absences**: Students who are bullied may start to avoid school due to fear or anxiety, leading to increased absenteeism.
- **Eating and sleeping problems**: A student may develop disordered eating habits (e.g., loss of appetite, overeating) or experience sleep disturbances as a result of the stress associated with bullying.

10. Reports from Other Sources

- **Concerns raised by parents or caregivers**: Parents or guardians may notice behavioural or emotional changes and may express concern that their child is being bullied.
- **Concerns from external professionals**: Counsellors, social workers, or other external professionals may raise concerns about a student's mental and emotional well-being, which could be related to bullying.

Procedures for Managing and Investigating Bullying

This process operates in conjunction with the School's Behaviour Management Policy and Child Protection Policy, which take precedence where applicable.

1. Immediate Response and Safety

When bullying is suspected or reported, staff must take immediate steps to ensure student safety and prevent further harm.

This may include separating students, increasing supervision, or removing a student from the situation.

Where there are concerns regarding student safety, welfare or wellbeing, staff must respond in accordance with the Child Protection Policy.

2. Reporting and Escalation

All bullying concerns must be reported to the class educator in the first instance and documented.

The educator must escalate the matter to the Principal where:

- the behaviour is repeated
- the behaviour is serious
- there are concerns regarding student safety or wellbeing

In line with the Child Protection Policy, all staff are required to report any concerns regarding the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a student to the Principal.

3. Child Protection Thresholds

Where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm, the matter must be managed in accordance with the Child Protection Policy, including mandatory reporting obligations.

Staff must not conduct their own investigation of matters that may meet child protection thresholds and must refer the matter to the Principal.

4. Documentation and Record Keeping

All incidents of bullying behaviour must be recorded by educators, including:

- the nature of the behaviour
- actions taken
- communication with parents
- follow-up actions

5. Investigation and Procedural Fairness

Where appropriate, the school will gather information about the incident in a manner consistent with procedural fairness, including:

- informing students of concerns
- allowing students an opportunity to respond
- ensuring decisions are made impartially

6. Risk Assessment and Safeguarding

The Principal (or delegate) will assess risk to determine:

- the safety of students involved
- whether the behaviour is ongoing
- what immediate and ongoing support is required

Risk will be monitored and managed in accordance with child protection procedures.

7. Response and Behaviour Management

Responses to bullying will be consistent with the School's Behaviour Management Policy and may include:

- redirection and guidance (for initial behaviours)
- reflection and restorative processes
- parent communication and collaboration
- behaviour support planning
- withdrawal from class or supervised reflection
- more formal disciplinary responses where behaviour is serious or ongoing

8. Parent Communication

Parents will be informed at appropriate stages, including where:

- behaviour is repeated
- behaviour is serious
- a formal response is implemented

Parent engagement will reflect the collaborative approach outlined in the Behaviour Management Policy.

9. Confidentiality

All matters relating to bullying must be managed confidentially, in accordance with the Child Protection Policy.

Information will only be shared with relevant staff and families as appropriate.

10. Follow-Up and Monitoring

The school will monitor students involved to ensure:

- the behaviour has ceased
- the student feels safe
- agreed strategies are effective

Follow-up processes will align with Behaviour Management monitoring practices.

11. Escalation to Formal Processes

Where bullying behaviour is persistent or serious, the matter may be escalated to formal disciplinary procedures, including:

- behaviour review
- leadership involvement
- suspension or expulsion processes in accordance with the Discipline Policy

Strategies to Deal with Bullying

To effectively address bullying, a comprehensive set of strategies will be implemented:

1. Education and Awareness

a. Anti-bullying education will be incorporated into the curriculum, focusing on the effects of bullying, empathy, and conflict resolution.
b. Regular workshops for students, staff, and parents to raise awareness about bullying, its signs, and how to prevent it.
c. Use of real-life scenarios and role-playing exercises to teach students how to handle bullying situations effectively.

2. Reporting Mechanisms

a. Clear, accessible reporting systems will be established, including online reporting forms and a designated school contact person for confidentiality.
b. A student-friendly system will encourage bystanders to report bullying they witness without fear of retaliation.

3. Regular Monitoring and Surveys

a. Regular surveys will be conducted to assess the school climate and identify bullying hotspots.
b. Staff will be trained to recognize signs of bullying and proactively intervene in potential incidents.

4. Peer Support Programs

a. Implement peer mentoring or buddy systems, where older students support younger ones in fostering inclusion and respect.
b. Peer mediators will be trained to assist in resolving conflicts between students, utilizing restorative approaches.

5. **Restorative Practices**
    a. Restorative circles and mediation sessions will be used to address bullying incidents, providing victims and perpetrators an opportunity to express their feelings and work toward understanding and resolution.
    b. Emphasis on repairing relationships and reintegrating the perpetrator with the victim in a healthy way.
6. **Individualized Support**
    a. Provide counseling and emotional support to victims of bullying, helping them cope with the effects and build resilience.
    b. Work with perpetrators to understand the impact of their actions and support behavioural changes through counseling or behaviour management programs.
7. **Collaborative Partnerships**
    a. Partner with local community organizations, mental health services, and law enforcement to provide additional support and resources when necessary.
    b. Encourage family involvement in supporting the student's emotional and social development.

Follow-up and Monitoring

1. **Monitoring Progress**
    a. Regular follow-up meetings will be held with the victim, perpetrator, and their families to ensure the issue is resolved and that no further bullying occurs.
    b. Teachers will monitor the affected students closely to ensure a safe and supportive environment is maintained.
2. **Annual Review**
    a. The policy and its implementation will be reviewed annually, with input from students, parents, and staff to assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

Conclusion

Southside Montessori is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and nurturing environment for all students. Through proactive anti-bullying strategies, restorative practices, and a commitment to the values of the Montessori approach, we aim to create a school culture where every student can thrive free from bullying and harassment.

V.1	**Policy created:** 2010	**Reviewed:** 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022
V.2	**Policy created:** 2025	Ratified by SSM Board Reviewed and Updated by the Leadership Team Annual Review due- 2026
V2.1	**June 2026** Addition of Procedures for Managing and Investigating Bullying	Approved by Principal