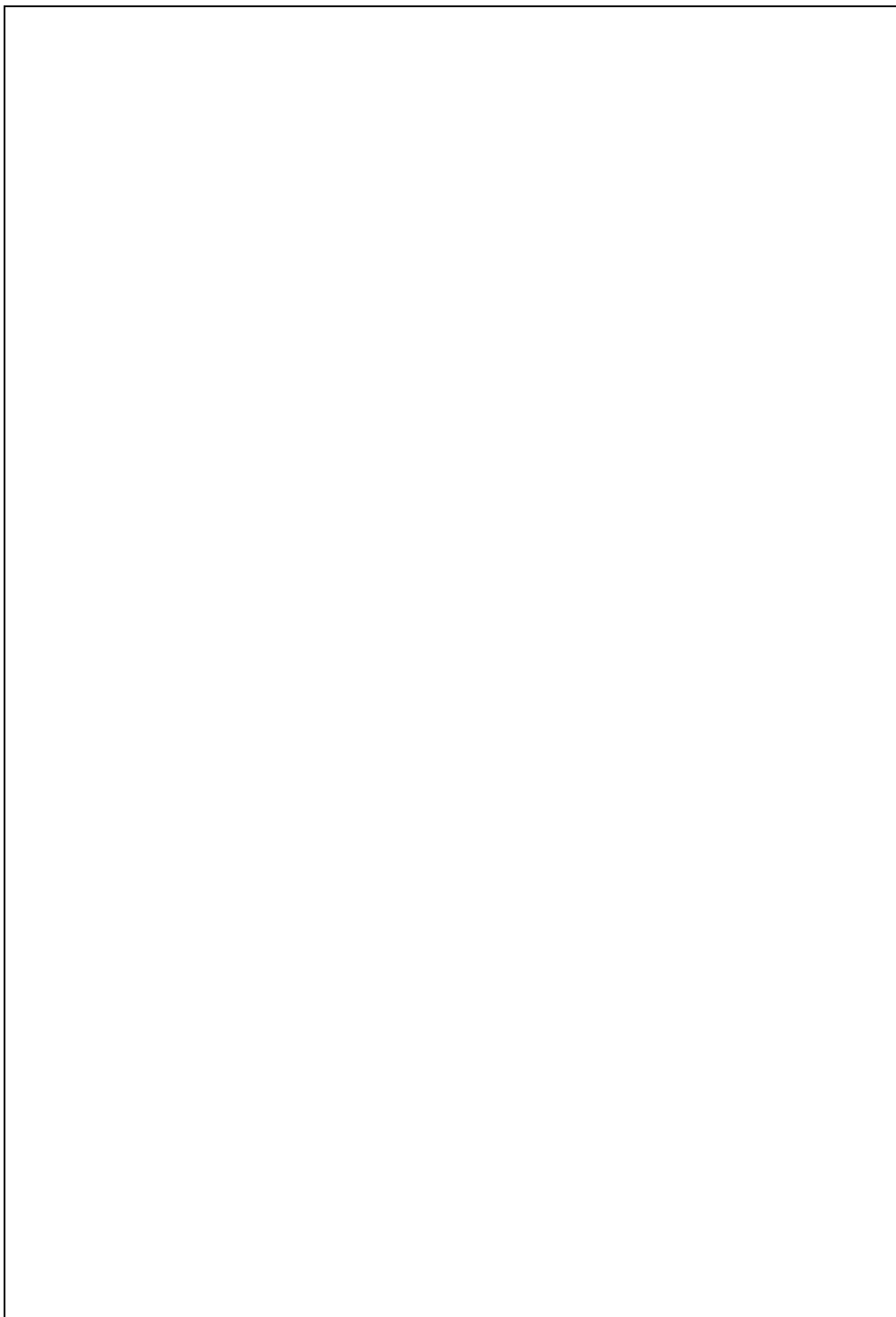


Bullying

**What it is and what we can
do about it.**

A Parents' Guide

**Te Hihi School
2015**



Te Hihi School

The school has worked with Michael Williams, HOD Guidance and Counselling at Edgewater College, to develop this guide for Te Hihi School students and parents. Some of the content is targeted towards teenagers and this has been kept in as it will apply to students as they progress through our school and onto other schools.

At Te Hihi, every child has three core rights:

- The right to respect and fair treatment
- The right to learn without being hassled by others, and
- The right to feel safe and be safe.

This guide reflects those rights and goes further to give you some information about bullying in schools. We hope that you will discuss these issues with your family and friends so that we can all find a way to help those affected by bullying.

Kevin Bush
Principal

As a caregiver, you may have heard about bullying from your child or you may have heard about it through the news media. Your child may have been hurt in some way or that their property has been taken or damaged. You may even learn that abusive text messages or images or postings on social networking sites such as Facebook have been sent to your child. You are likely to feel angry and upset and worried if your child or someone you know is unhappy or fearful.

What is bullying?

When a person is deliberately made to feel small, worthless, ashamed or unhappy or is left put of groups or had rumours spread about them and it happens repeatedly over a period of time, we call that bullying. Another term for it is relational aggression and this kind of bullying is as common amongst boys as girls. There does not need to be any kind of physical violence for there to be bullying. In fact if there is violence, it is usually as a result of earlier psychological or verbal or online bullying. Bullying is about the abuse of power and can be covert as well as overt i.e. it may be obvious to others or it may be “under the radar”. Bullying survives best in a climate of fear and retribution. When people who are aware of bullying do nothing to expose it, bullying can take root in a school and can control the relationships of young people.

How does it affect people?

Bullying is very dangerous but unfortunately it is part of life. This does not make it acceptable but it does help for us to understand that many relationships that children are exposed to are not healthy.

Sometimes children that are perceived by others as being a bit different in some way are more vulnerable to bullying, but it can happen to anyone.

When young people have been bullied, they can become anxious, drop out of school, develop psychological problems, feel isolated and alone, and in extreme cases, can take their own lives.

Cyber bullying

In recent years we have seen an alarming increase in the use of internet technology for bullying. Mobile phones and key boards can be potent weapons in the hands of young people. Posting comments, using aliases or false identities are ways to bully behind a smokescreen of anonymity.

The best way to deal with cyberbullying is to prevent it happening in the first place. Your child may be just as likely to cyber bully as to be the target of cyber bullying and sometimes children get caught up in cyber bullying simply by not thinking about the consequences. Passing abusive texts or embarrassing videos can seem like fun but can also be humiliating.

Teach your children the seven key anti cyber bullying messages.

Anti Bullying code.

1. Always respect others. Be careful what you say online or what images you send. Remember you cannot see the impact that they might have on the other person. Never forward a rude or nasty picture to someone because you could be breaking the law.
2. Think before you send. What you send can be made public very quickly and could stay online forever. Think whether you want a future employer or teacher to see that photo.
3. Treat your password like your toothbrush. Never share it. Change it on a regular basis. Choose hard to guess passwords and only ever give your mobile to trusted friends. Never agree to be a friend with someone you don't know.
4. Block those bullying. Use Netsafe or contact your ISP. Maintain strict privacy settings on your Facebook and other social media accounts.
5. Never retaliate or reply.
6. Keep the evidence. Learn how to keep records of offensive messages or pictures or online conversations. These may be used as evidence in future court action. Be smarter than the bullies.
7. Make sure you tell someone:
 - Tell a trustworthy adult
 - Tell your school staff
 - Tell your Internet Service Provider (ISP) or Netsafe.
www.netsafe.org.nz
 - Visit www.mylgp.org.nz
 - Call Youthline 0800 37 66 33

If you find that your child is being bullied, it doesn't mean that there is something wrong with them. They should be reassured and told that

"It's not your fault. There is a problem and we must do something about it"

Giving advice or telling a child to "harden up" does not help. Most likely they have tried this approach and it has only made things worse.

"Stand up for yourself, hit back, laugh it off, ignore it"

These pieces of advice are usually not helpful. If your child has been bullied and they have suffered in silence it is common for them to feel ashamed and weak and they will not want to worry you. They may not even want you to help. Any suggestions that you make for them to do things they can't do will only increase their sense of failure and shame.

Reassure your child that together with the school, you will do whatever you can to make things better and that is a parent/caregiver's responsibility.

One thing that is hard to accept is that punishing those who bully rarely makes things better. Punishing those who bully, increases the likelihood of revenge attacks and retribution. It also makes it harder for those targets of bullying to tell an adult about it.

The hardest thing for you may be to listen. If your child has been cyber bullied it is unlikely that they will tell you because the most

natural response of a parent is to restrict access to mobile phones or the internet. Studies show that almost all students access cyberspace every day. It will not help to take your child's phone off them because that may be the only way that they are supported.

Why do children bully?

Parents and teachers are often surprised at the way that children treat each other. When children are in a group they often act in ways that seem to be out of character. Children who bully others rarely do it alone. Even when someone is being cyber bullied there are often a group of students behind it or are complicit in it. Bullying at school can be continued around the clock using the internet and mobile phones so there is no rest from it. Even when children post comments on another's Facebook or social networking page they are aware that others will read it. Bullying others can make a person feel powerful and special. Sometimes they think that what they are doing is a joke. Sometimes too there is a leader who sets the example for others to follow and many young people get caught up in bullying because they are too afraid to stop it or they don't know how.

What can be done about bullying?

As with cyberbullying, the best way to deal with it is to prevent it happening in the first place. To do this, the school must deliberately create a climate of peaceful and purposeful learning relationships. Schools need to use a range of positive approaches when dealing with

this problem. They must commit themselves firmly to eliminating violence of any kind. They must build effective systems for managing conflict, which if allowed to escalate, could develop into violence. “Zero tolerance” policies rarely work and the whole school community needs to be involved in designing policies that support a safe and peaceful physical and emotional school. There must be clear and transparent systems for students to repair harm done to others when they make mistakes, including teachers.

The *Undercover Team Approach* is an approach we use selectively where bullying is occurring in a “core” class. It grew out of a concern for a practical way to repair bullying relations in a class room and to provide an opportunity for the whole class to learn about the effects of bullying without any opportunity for retaliation or retribution by the perpetrators of the bullying.

An Undercover Team is a group of 6 to 8 students selected by the target of the bullying and endorsed by their teachers. These students must be ones who have prestige in the class and included in this unique group are to be the two “worst” bullies. The focus of the team is to eliminate bullying and the team members work with the Deputy Principal/Associate Principal (DP/AP) to establish a range of strategies and interventions that oppose the assumptions that bullying is acceptable.

The team’s identity and purpose is only known to the team, the target of the bullying, their teachers and DP/AP. This anonymity enables the team to go about their bullying elimination activities without losing face and the “bullies” are never named or shamed. No one is punished and no one is interrogated because it is usually the request

of the “victim” that there should be no opportunities for retribution. With the bullies and the key players in the class all working together to eliminate bullying, the chances of success are much greater. It gives the perpetrators of bullying a chance to develop a different reputation with their teachers and their peers.

This approach enables and helps the members of the team to understand the real effects of bullying and empowers them to do something about it. They change the way they treat each other and the target of the bullying and in turn they influence the way the whole class operates.

When the target of the bullying says that the bullying seems to have gone for good, the team members are rewarded with a lunch date with the Principal, Deputy Principal or Associate Principal.

What about incidents that aren't classed as bullying?

Some children have a highly developed level of social graces and at times their behaviour impacts on other children's rights. However, most children are developing these social graces as they go through school and don't always consider how their actions affect others. These are dealt with in school using the Restorative Conflict Resolution Model.

Restorative Conflict Resolution

In turn, children are asked these questions:

What did YOU do? Children only state their involvement and not tell tales or speculate on how others were involved.

How did this make you feel? This opens up the restorative nature of the process, and reveals the damage and hurt that may have been caused.

What do you need in order to go home happy, with this problem sorted? This will often generate replies such as “nothing”, “a sorry”...

Are you able to offer them what they have asked for? Most children are happy to apologise and they may need to be coached on how this should look e.g. strong eye contact, firm handshakes, sincerity etc.

Why should schools bother about bullying?

Schools are required by Government to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students. Human rights legislation provides a raft of statutes to protect children from violence, abuse and bullying. There are many studies that show that bullying of any kind is immensely damaging. Children who are exposed to high levels of bullying don't feel safe at school. This is likely to affect their ability to learn and can have serious effects on their ability to cope with normal relationships. There is strong evidence to link relational aggression and bullying with anxiety, depression, loneliness, relationship difficulties, substance abuse and self-injury and suicide.

FAQ's

“If you are not seen to be taking strong action, what will the school community think?”

A school which has established clear written policies that deal with bullying and violence is likely to be accepted by the community. Parents and teachers can be reassured that every complaint is taken seriously and that they will not be dismissed and the victim of bullying will not be blamed.

Parents never want their child to be further victimised by a schools actions and would generally prefer that the relationships that supported the bullying will be replaced by positive ones. Most parents would prefer that the bullying is stopped and there were no threats of intimidation. They would expect that the school puts things in place to prevent it happening again.

“What do you do if there are serious incidents of violence?”

Thankfully this is rare at Te Hihi and most bullying doesn't involve serious violence. Bullying can lead to violence but it should be stopped before it reaches this stage. Serious assaults may become a police matter and the usual sanctions that a school applies will apply in this case. Even in cases of serious violence, those responsible for it must still be accountable to those they have harmed and the school has measures to enable this to occur. Unless the relational world of the students concerned is restored, students may still feel unsafe. The focus should then be on making things right.

“Don't you need to get to the truth and give out suitable punishments?”

The “truth” is virtually impossible to discover and it could be a counter productive and a waste of time to try to trace a rumour back to a single source. Where messages are kept on digital devices it may be easier but generally it is more profitable to focus on changing the relationships that support the bullying than finding and punishing those who are bullying. Bullying relationships are complex and often those on the receiving end of bullying are not passive recipients of the aggression.

“What if more than one bully is involved?”

Bullying is rarely a solitary activity. Those who bully usually require an audience and there is always some cooperation with others even if it is just watching the bullying. When bullying is done online or by phone, the person bullying will not be acting alone but will be playing up to an audience. This makes it harder to uncover the source of the bullying.

“What if a teacher is bullying my child?”

If a child makes an accusation of bullying by a teacher, this is a matter for the Principal to investigate because it could be a matter of a breach of teacher’s professional standard’s and is therefore an employment issue.

“What if the perpetrator of the bullying is seriously disturbed?”

Undercover Teams and restorative approaches are not designed as treatment for someone who has serious emotional and behavioural problems. Specialist help should be sought in this event.

“What about people who seem to invite bullying? Are the victims always passive and do nothing to provoke bullying?”

Some people have been most of their lives. They seem to develop a reputation of always being offended. Nobody is born a victim or a bully. They learn these behaviours from a complex interplay between family and social expectations and the way that they have learnt to approach life. These reputations or identities are not fixed and they do not describe all that a person is.

We know that many people “give as good as they get” and children are rarely passive objects of bullying. They fight back in their own way and do as much as they can. Often this makes things worse as they become playthings of those who acting in a cruel way with their target.

What is most important is getting rid of the bullying in spite of the personalities of all the students who are affected by this. Attributing blame never works and drives the bullying further out of sight where it is ultimately more damaging. We encourage children to step outside any positions they may have held and take a stand of support for the victim because that is the right thing to do.

“What can I do?”

If you suspect your child or someone you know is being bullied, do not blame them but go to the school and seek help. Try to be calm and put the responsibility clearly on the school. Try to work with your school until the child says that they feel safe. Ask to see the school’s policy on bullying and offer to help where you can.

