

# Bullying & Harassment Policy

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**Purpose:**

To provide staff, students, parents and carers with definitions and examples of bullying (including cyber-bullying) and harassment. To outline the school's response if bullying or harassment occurs.

To reinforce within the school community that no form of bullying or harassment is acceptable. To comply with the Child Safe Standards in Ministerial Order 1359

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**Scope:**

All students, staff, parents and carers

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**Implemented by:**

Principal, Mentors employed in their capacity as VIT Registered Teachers

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**Approved by:**

VHS Board

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**Reviewed:**

Every three years or as regulatory changes arise or improvements are identified

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**Communicated via:**

VHS Website, Policy and Procedure Manual, Staff Handbook

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Village High School is committed to providing a safe and caring environment and culture which enables positive relationships to be formed amongst all students and staff to encourage self-esteem, cooperation, personal growth and a positive attitude to learning. Our Bullying and Harassment Policy exists alongside the School's Behaviour Management Policy and Codes of Conduct. When necessary, this policy is discussed with students as are the rights and responsibilities of each child, the meaning of bullying (including cyber-bullying) and harassment and what to do if they or someone they know experiences them.

## What are bullying, cyber-bullying and harassment?

Bullying can be done in various ways including physically, verbally, socially and psychologically and can be in person or via online platforms. It is often behavior directed towards a less powerful person or group (or that is perceived as vulnerable) or behaviour by a person or group with perceived power or status that is intended to cause harm, distress or fear. See Schedule A for a list of Definitions.



The list below includes, but is not limited to, examples of bullying behaviour. A student is experiencing bullying when they are subjected to such behaviours in an ongoing way.

- ✿ Hitting, pushing, kicking, punching etc.
- ✿ Humiliation, put-downs, name calling, mocking, shaming, ignoring, exclusion, racism and racial slurs, homophobic or transphobic comments or refusal to acknowledge and use a person's chosen name and pronouns
- ✿ Initiating or spreading rumors or sharing private and sensitive information
- ✿ Staring, dirty looks, sharing inappropriate notes or drawings
- ✿ Exposing others to inappropriate online content
- ✿ Encouraging or requesting others to act in a certain way or undertake activities that would be harmful to themselves or another person

Cyber-bullying consists of psychological bullying, conveyed through an electronic medium such as mobile phone, online platform or social media. It can be verbal (over the phone), or written and can include threats of any nature, sharing of a person's private or personal information, harassment about a person's characteristics include race, sexual or gender identity, cultural background, mental health or other vulnerable characteristics, or sending inappropriate or prohibited content.

Harassment is any verbal, physical or sexual conduct (including gestures) which is uninvited, unwelcome or offensive to a person.

When people are bullied or harassed some effects might be anger, embarrassment, fear and humiliation, loss of self-confidence and reduced function and potential.

### How does cyber-bullying differ to traditional bullying?

1. **Availability** – It can occur anywhere and at any time. Misperception that there are no real-world consequences for online actions.
2. **Anonymity** – The impression of anonymity in the 'online world' leads young people to feel less accountable for their actions and provides a false bravado to would-be bullies.
3. **Geography** – Rather than being limited to the schoolyard, cyberbullying can operate wherever a young person uses the internet or a mobile phone, which occurs in most areas of a young person's life.
4. **Impact** – The internet provides the means for 'bullying' comments to be available to a wider audience. Through social networking sites, these comments can be viewed by a potentially unlimited number of people. The impact of and embarrassment caused by these statements is increased many times over.
5. **Intent** – A private message or joke that is forwarded on may become offensive or harassing even though that was not the intention of the original sender.
6. **Permanence** – Verbal comments are fleeting. Online content is tracked and stored and can potentially resurface at any time.
7. **Democracy** – Anyone can be a victim – students, teachers, parents.

## What is not bullying






There are also some behaviours, which, although they might be unpleasant, inappropriate, or distressing, are not bullying:

- **mutual conflict**- which involves a disagreement, but one without an imbalance of power. Unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly in retaliation
- **single-episode acts** of inappropriate behaviour directed towards an individual or many different people, is not bullying
- **social rejection or dislike** is not bullying unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude, or create dislike by others.

However, these items may still be a breach of the Student Code of Conduct and may also be dealt with under the Behaviour Management Policy.




## Addressing the risk of harassment, bullying and cyber-bullying at VHS

VHS will address the risk of bullying and cyber-bully in the school community by;

-  Promoting and supporting the development of respectful and meaningful relationships between students, staff, families and members of the community.
-  Training staff to recognise harassment, bullying and cyber-bullying, respond confidently and appropriately, and to understand that bullying behaviour and harassment should not be ignored.
-  Encourage staff to share their concerns with other school personnel to raise awareness of suspected instances of bullying to ensure that further incidents are quickly recognised and can be dealt with promptly.
-  Ensure that all members of the school community understand their obligation to report accounts of suspected harassment, bullying or cyber-bullying to Mentors or the Principal, in accordance with VHS policies for reporting concerns and complaints.
-  Bullying and Harassment is included in our Social and Emotional curriculum including what to look for and actions for students to take if they are experiencing or witnessing bullying or harassment.

## What should you do if you experience bullying or you see it happening to someone else?

If any of the above behaviours are happening to you or someone you know, you / they should:

-  Tell the person to STOP, and if possible, walk away;
-  Tell a Mentor, the Principal, your parents or another person you trust about it as soon as possible;
-  If you cannot talk to anyone you know about it, phone the Kids Help Line on: 1800 55 1800

## Procedure Following a Report of Bullying





1. The Principal or a member of the Wellbeing Team will ask the student to describe what happened.
2. The other student(s) will be asked to describe what happened.
3. The Principal will determine if what has occurred is bullying (including cyber-bullying), harassment or another type of behavior.
4. If it is not bullying, the behavior will be identified as Level 1, 2 or 3 in the Behaviour Management Policy and the equivalent level response will be put into place. Alternatively, it may be a breach of the Student Code of Conduct and a Breach Notice will be issued.
5. If the behavior falls within the definition of bullying or harassment the offending student(s) will be instructed to stop the behavior and his/her parents will be notified.
6. The Principal may decide that a Restorative Practices meeting should occur between the students involved.
7. The parents of the students involved will be informed of this process and the outcomes.
8. If the bullying continues, a meeting will be held with the offending student, his/her parents and the Principal. A Personal Management Plan will be developed at this meeting.
9. The behavior of all students involved will be monitored by all school staff.
10. If the Personal Management Plan is not followed, the question of the offending student's enrolment will be referred to the school Board for consideration as per the Behaviour Management Policy and Enrolment Agreement.
11. The VHS Board will either cancel the student's enrolment or place other conditions on his / her enrolment which will be closely monitored.
12. Ongoing support will be offered to the student who has experienced the bullying and group dynamics will be closely monitored by all staff throughout the day.
13. Student programs will be organized to raise student's awareness about bullying (including cyber-bullying) and harassment, to provide a forum for discussion of matters and to aid development of attitudes and school culture. Some matters will be dealt with formally in the curriculum and in peer support programs, leadership programs, extra-curricular programs and occasional activities run by outside experts and workers.

## Documentation


VHS understands that documentation of known or suspected bullying incidents is a critical component of an effective bullying prevention effort.

Records relating to suspected or confirmed instances of bullying will be determined by the nature of the offence or as requested by the Principal but may be in the form of an incident report, documented concern or complaint, behavioural management record, staff meeting records or individual student file.

## Related Documentation

-  Personal Management Pathway
-  Personal Management Plan
-  Parent / Carer / Guardian Code of Conduct
-  Student Code of Conduct

## Related Policies

-  Behaviour Management Policy
-  Concerns & Complaints Policy
-  Child Safety & Wellbeing Policy
-  Duty of Care Policy

## Schedule A – Definitions

The below are nationally agreed definitions endorsed by the Victorian Department of Education.

### Bullying

Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.

Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records).

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders. Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

### Covert bullying

Covert bullying can be very difficult for someone outside of the interaction to identify. It can include hand gestures and threatening looks, whispering, excluding or turning your back on a person, restricting where a person can sit and who they can talk with. Social bullying (spreading rumours, manipulation of relationships, excluding, isolating) is often covert bullying.

### Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying includes any form of bullying behaviour that occurs online or via a mobile device. It can be verbal or written, and can include threats of violence as well as images, videos and/or audio.

### Physical bullying

Physical bullying includes hitting, pushing, shoving or intimidating or otherwise physically hurting another person, damaging or stealing their belongings. It includes threats of violence.

### Social bullying

This is sometimes called relational or emotional bullying, and includes deliberately excluding someone, spreading rumours, sharing information that will have a harmful effect on the other person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.

### Verbal and written bullying

Verbal and written bullying includes name-calling or insulting someone about an attribute, quality or personal characteristic.