



## BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY

### PURPOSE

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

The purpose of this policy is to:

- explain the definition of bullying so that there is shared understanding amongst all members of the Wonthaggi Secondary College community
- make clear that no form of bullying at Wonthaggi Secondary College be tolerated
- build a positive school culture that promotes inclusion and respect for all students
- ask that everyone in our college community be alert to signs and evidence of bullying behaviour, and accept responsibility to report bullying behaviour to school staff
- ensure that all reported incidents of bullying are appropriately investigated and addressed
- ensure that support is provided to students who may be affected by bullying behaviour (including targets, bystanders and students engaging in bullying behaviour)
- seek parental and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour at Wonthaggi Secondary College

When responding to reports of bullying behaviour, Wonthaggi Secondary 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.

Wonthaggi Secondary College acknowledges that college staff owe a duty of care to students to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm, which can include harm that may be caused by bullying behaviour.

Wonthaggi Secondary College will work with students involved and their parents/carers and ask for support in regard to process, sanctions and consequences related to reports of bullying behaviour.

### SCOPE

This policy addresses how Wonthaggi Secondary College aims to prevent, address and respond to student bullying behaviour. Wonthaggi Secondary College recognises that there are many other types of inappropriate student behaviours that do not meet the definition of bullying which are also unacceptable at our college. These other inappropriate behaviours will be managed in accordance with our *Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy* and *Inclusion and Diversity policy*.

This policy applies to all school activities, including camps and excursions.

## POLICY

### Definitions

#### **Bullying**

In 2018 the Education Council of the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the following definition of bullying for use by all Australian schools:

*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.*

Bullying has three main features:

- It involves a misuse of power in a relationship
- It is ongoing and repeated, and
- It involves behaviours that can cause harm.

Bullying can be:

1. *direct* physical bullying – e.g. hitting, tripping, and pushing or damaging property.
2. *direct* verbal bullying – e.g. name calling, insults, homophobic or racist remarks, verbal abuse.
3. *indirect* bullying – e.g. spreading rumours, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking, encouraging others to socially exclude a person and/or damaging a person's social reputation or social acceptance.

*Cyberbullying* is direct or indirect bullying behaviours using digital technology. For example via a mobile device, computers, chat rooms, email, social media, etc. It can be verbal, written and include images, video and/or audio.

#### **Other distressing and inappropriate behaviours**

Many distressing and inappropriate behaviours may not constitute bullying even though they are unpleasant. Students who are involved in or who witness any distressing and inappropriate behaviours should report their concerns to a staff member and our college will follow the Wellbeing and Engagement Policy/Student Engagement Policy/Core Values.

*Mutual conflict* involves an argument or disagreement between people with no imbalance of power. In incidents of mutual conflict, generally, both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the issue. Unresolved mutual conflict can develop into bullying if one of the parties targets the other repeatedly in retaliation.

*Social rejection or dislike* is not bullying unless it involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others.

*Single-episode acts* of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. However, single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not acceptable behaviours at our college and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. Wonthaggi Secondary College will use its Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy to guide a response to single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression.

*Harassment* is language or actions that are demeaning, offensive or intimidating to a person. It can take many forms, including sexual harassment and disability harassment. Further information about these two forms of harassment, including definitions, is set out in our Inclusion and Diversity Policy.

Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated at Wonthaggi Secondary College and may have serious consequences for students engaging in this behaviour. Wonthaggi Secondary College will use its Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy to guide a response to students demonstrating harassing behaviour, unless the behaviour also constitutes bullying, in which case the behaviour will be managed in accordance with this Bullying Prevention Policy.

## **BULLYING PREVENTION**

Wonthaggi Secondary College has a number of programs and strategies in place to build a positive and inclusive school culture. We strive to foster a school culture that prevents bullying behaviour by modelling and encouraging behaviour that demonstrates acceptance, kindness and respect.

Bullying prevention at Wonthaggi Secondary College is proactive and is supported by research that indicates that a whole school, multifaceted approach is the most effective way to prevent and address bullying. At our college:

- We strive to have a positive school environment that provides safety, security and support for students and promotes positive relationships and wellbeing.
- We strive to build strong partnerships between the school, families and the broader community that means all members work together to ensure the safety of students.
- Teachers are encouraged to incorporate classroom management strategies that discourage bullying and promote positive behaviour.
- A range of year level incursions and programs are planned for each year to raise awareness about bullying and its impacts.
- We seek to empower students to be confident communicators and to resolve conflict in a non-aggressive and constructive way, with preference to utilising the restorative practices process.
- Students are encouraged to look out for each other and to talk to teachers and older peers about any bullying they have experienced or witnessed. The Peer Support program assists junior school students to develop a relationship with Peer Support Leaders.
- We participate in the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence.

For further information about our engagement and wellbeing initiatives, please see our Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy.

## **INCIDENT RESPONSE**

### **Reporting concerns to Wonthaggi Secondary College**

Bullying complaints are taken seriously and responded to sensitively at our college.

Students who may be experiencing bullying behaviour, or students who have witnessed bullying behaviour, are encouraged to report their concerns to a member of staff as soon as possible.

Our ability to effectively reduce and eliminate bullying behaviour is greatly affected by students and/or parents and carers reporting concerning behaviour as soon as possible, so that the responses implemented by Wonthaggi Secondary College are timely and appropriate in the circumstances.

We encourage students to speak to their Year Level Coordinator, Sub-School Leaders or a member of the Principal team. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff who will pass on the information on behalf of the student.

Parents or carers who develop concerns that their child is involved in, or has witnessed bullying behaviour at Wonthaggi Secondary College should contact their relevant Year Level Coordinator or a member of the Principal team on McKenzie Campus (03) 5611 4000 / Dudley Campus (03) 5672 0900 / FLOW 0491 362 779.

## **Investigations**

When notified of alleged bullying behaviour, college staff are required to:

1. record the details of the allegations on Compass and;
2. inform the relevant Year Level Coordinator. The details will then be discussed with the relevant supports, members of the Student Wellbeing Team, Assistant Principal and/or Principal.

The Year Level Coordinator is responsible for investigating allegations of bullying in a timely and sensitive manner. To appropriately investigate an allegation of bullying, the Year Level Coordinator may:

- speak to those involved in the allegations, including the target/s, the students allegedly engaging in bullying behaviour/s and any witnesses to the incidents
- speak to the parents of the students involved
- speak to the teachers of the students involved
- take detailed notes of all discussions for future reference
- obtain written statements from all or any of the above.

All communications in the course of investigating an allegation of bullying will be managed sensitively. Investigations will be completed as quickly as possible to allow for the behaviour to be addressed in a timely manner.

The objective of completing a thorough investigation into the circumstances of alleged bullying behaviour is to determine the nature of the conduct and the students involved. A thorough understanding of the alleged bullying will inform staff about how to most effectively implement an appropriate response to that behaviour.

Serious bullying, including serious cyberbullying, is a criminal offence and may be referred to Victoria Police. For more information, see: [Brodie's Law](#).

## **Responses to bullying behaviours**

When the Year Level Coordinator has sufficient information to understand the circumstances of the alleged bullying and the students involved, a number of strategies may be implemented to address the behaviour and support affected students in consultation with (but not limited to) members of the Student Wellbeing Team, teachers, DET Student Support Service team, Assistant Principal, Principal, and/or Department of Education and Training specialist staff.

There are a number of factors that will be considered when determining the most appropriate response to the behaviour. When making a decision about how to respond to bullying behaviour, Wonthaggi Secondary College will consider:

- the age and maturity of the students involved
- the severity and frequency of the bullying and the impact it has had on the target student
- whether the student/s engaging in bullying behaviour have displayed similar behaviour before
- whether the bullying took place in a group or one-to-one context
- whether the students engaging in bullying behaviour demonstrates insight or remorse for their behaviour
- the alleged motive of the behaviour, including any element of provocation

- the personal circumstances of the student involved.

Wonthaggi Secondary College staff may implement all, or some of the following responses to bullying behaviours:

- Offer counselling support to the target student or students, including referral to the School Nurse and/or the Department of Education-appointed School Counsellor
- Offer counselling support to the students engaging in bullying behaviour, including referral to the Department of Education-appointed School Counsellor, or an appropriate external provider
- Offer counselling support to affected students, including witnesses and/or friends of the target student, including referral to the Department of Education-appointed School Counsellor or an appropriate external provider, DET Student Support Service team or a member of the Student Wellbeing Team

As outlined in Bully Stoppers, the following methods of intervention may be considered and utilised:

- a restorative practice meeting with all or some of the students involved. The objective of restorative practice is to repair relationships that have been damaged by bringing about a sense of remorse and restorative action on the part of the person who has bullied someone and forgiveness by the person who has been bullied.
- a mediation between some or all of the students involved to help to encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour and explore underlying reasons for conflict or grievance. Mediation is only suitable if all students are involved voluntarily and demonstrate a willingness to engage in the mediation process.
- the Support Group Method, involving the target student(s), the students engaging in bullying behaviour and a group of students who are likely to be supportive of the target(s).
- the Method of Shared Concern process with all students involved in the bullying.
- The traditional approach, using sanctions and consequences involving punishment of the student responsible for the bullying behaviour
- The strategy of strengthening the target, helping the intended target to improve their capacity to cope more effectively.
- Facilitate a Student Support Group meeting and/or Behaviour Support Plan for affected students.
- Prepare an Individual Management Plan restricting contact between target and students engaging in bullying behaviour, including yard restrictions, locker placement and limited access to school internet
- Monitor the behaviour of the students involved for an appropriate time and take follow up action if necessary.
- Implement year level targeted strategies to reinforce positive behaviours if deemed relevant and appropriate
- Implement disciplinary consequences for the students engaging in bullying behaviour, which may include removal of privileges, detention, suspension and/or expulsion consistent with our Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy, the Ministerial Order on Suspensions and Expulsions and any other relevant Department policy.

Wonthaggi Secondary College understands the importance of monitoring and following up on the progress of students who have been involved in or affected by bullying behaviour. Where appropriate, school staff will also endeavour to provide parents and carers with updates on the management of bullying incidents.

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

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

- Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy
- Core Values

The following websites and resources provide useful information on prevention and responding to bullying, as well as supporting students who have been the target of bullying behaviours:

- [Bully Stoppers](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#)
- [Lifeline](#)
- [Bullying. No way!](#)
- [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#)

## EVALUATION

This policy will be reviewed on a 2 year basis, or earlier as required.

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed and reviewed by the school council.

## REVIEW CYCLE

This policy was last updated in February 2021 and is scheduled for review in February 2022.