

## Preventing & Responding to Bullying Policy

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## 1 Introduction

Our Vision is to create an accepting society where autistic people are understood, able to access opportunities and fulfil their potential.

Our mission is to work together to put the needs of autistic people at the centre of everything we do.

Our learners at Doucecroft can experience difficulties with communication, social interaction and executive function, the skills used to plan and be able to problem solve that effect emotional regulation.

These differences can make it very difficult for our learner to reflect upon or self-manage their actions. Behaviours that may be perceived as 'bullying' may therefore occur.

Our learners at Doucecroft are generally very supportive of each other and this policy intends to reinforce our efforts to encourage positive relationships between learners and guidance to when such incidents do occur.

## 2 What is Bullying?

The Anti-Bullying Alliance defines bullying as: The repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power. Bullying can be physical, verbal or psychological. It can happen face to face or online.

Bullying takes many forms and can include:

**Physical** – the use of violent, aggressive and/or threatening behaviour including hitting, kicking, pushing, taking or breaking others belongings, use of violence.

**Emotional** – Being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting, making others do something they do not want to do, intimidation or threatening, belittling and harassment. This can include reduction of a person's self esteem or confidence through threatening behaviour, taunting or teasing or by social exclusion.

**Indirect** – Name calling, spreading rumours, graffiti, sarcasm, teasing, getting someone else to hurt someone.

**Online/Cyber Bullying** – Use of information and communications technology to deliberately upset others with threats, intimidation, cyber stalking, sexting, impersonation.

## 3 Policy Aims

This policy aims to:

- Promote a safe, positive environment free from bullying and harassment.
- Encourage respectful behaviour and the positive, safe use of technology.
- Ensure learners feel confident to share concerns and report bullying.
- Provide a consistent approach to preventing, reporting and responding to bullying.
- Support learners affected by bullying and those involved in bullying behaviours.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of staff, learners, and families in addressing bullying.

To achieve these aims, the school:

- Promotes respect among learners, staff and visitors and encourages the reporting of concerns.
- Supports learners through specialist input from Speech and Language Therapists and Occupational Therapists.
- Treats all forms of bullying as unacceptable and responds in line with this policy.
- Addresses bullying through the curriculum including PSHE.

- Considers online bullying within the Online Safety Policy.
- Applies the Equality Policy with regard to the Equality Act 2010, when managing and reviewing incidents.
- We follow DfE guidance on preventing and tackling bullying.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying>

**We recognise that:** Bullying can cause real distress and may affect a person’s health and development and in some instances, bullying can cause significant harm. All children, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, have the right to equal protection from all types of harm or abuse. At Doucecroft we promote inclusion.

## 4 Considerations

Due to the difficulties associated with autism such as understanding their own and others’ emotions, obsessional behaviour, theory of mind and difficulty understanding the impact that their behaviour has on others and how it makes them feel, it is often difficult to assess that a behaviour was “deliberately hurtful” and therefore bullying. e.g., some people with autism may have a limited understanding of social etiquette and this may be misconstrued as bullying by others. Young people with autism can make direct remarks but have no intention of causing harm. Such comments cannot be considered as bullying, but they need to be addressed so the learning about the impact of remarks and how to interact more appropriately. This anti-bullying guidance and strategies, along with all other related policies and procedures must take into consideration individual learners’ understanding of bullying and whether their behaviour is within their control.

Equally, our learners are vulnerable to being the target of bullying or abuse due to their difficulties in social interaction, social communication and social relationships. A vulnerable learner may not recognise that they are being bullied and believe themselves to be part of the group because they are receiving attention or being asked to do things for others. This may mean incidents do not get reported.

It is also important to consider the motivations behind bullying behaviour and whether it reveals any concerns for the safety of the learner carrying out the bullying. Where this is the case, the learner engaging in bullying is likely to need support themselves.

## 5 Interventions For The Prevention & Management of Bullying

- Learners are encouraged and supported to report concerns at an appropriate level to their ability. Where this is not possible, staff follow the school’s reporting procedures.
- Staff receive training on the different forms and indicators of bullying including homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, religious discrimination, Islamophobia, disability discrimination and racism.
- High levels of vigilant staffing ensure effective supervision and early intervention. Breaks and mealtimes are structured, well supervised, offer a range of activities and are staggered where necessary to reduce risk.
- A whole school approach to proactive teaching promotes positive behaviour, with clear expectations visible across the school and reinforced through teaching, social stories, comic strip conversations, circle time and class meeting.
- Staff model appropriate behaviour and support learning through play.
- Emotional understanding and self-regulation are supported through emotion boards, zones of regulation and an interoception curriculum.
- Staff recognise that some learners may be more vulnerable to bullying and plan targeted preventative interventions.
- The PSHE curriculum, following the SEND PSHE association framework, promotes respect, diversity and understanding of similarities and differences. SMSC and RE further explore different cultures.

- Post-16 provision supports understanding of the wider world and develops social, emotional and collaborative skills.
- Learners are taught about different forms of bullying and the impact bullying can have.
- The school participates in national Anti-bullying week.
- Awareness is reinforced through everyday teaching, social stories, comic strip conversations, circle time and class meetings.
- In line with the Behaviour Management & Relationships Policy, the school promotes kindness, respect and positive relationships.
- Student Voice is actively promoted, with staff trained to listen effectively and value the open relationships we form with learners.
- Childline and NSPCC posters are displayed throughout the school.
- Learners can report concerns using a thought box system and an electric worry button.
- Learners are encouraged to recognise and celebrate the achievements of others through end of terms awards.

## **6 What Can Parents/Carers Do?**

Parents/carers play an important role in preventing and responding to bullying. We ask parents/carers to look out for unusual behaviours in their child, for example not wanting to attend school or becoming withdrawn.

Should a parent/carer have a concern relating to bullying, they are encouraged to inform the school. This information will be taken seriously, and appropriate action will follow.

We would ask that if a parent/carer suspects their child has been bullied, they do not approach that child or their family. Instead, please inform us immediately.

- It is really helpful for parents/carers to support their child to ask for help.
- It is important to reinforce that it is not their fault if they are affected by bullying.
- Follow reporting section for the process.

## **7 How Is Bullying Reported ?**

Incidents of bullying are recorded via our incident reporting system on School Pod by school staff.

Learners can independently report on an electronic system called a 'Worry Button'. These concerns are reported to the Safeguarding team. These accounts are often supported by Doucecroft staff. A learner may also prefer to complete information that they can put in the thought boxes that are placed around the school.

Parents are encouraged to email concerns to the class teacher in the first instance who will action and record. If concerns continue, parents can contact the Wellbeing Team: [dc-wellbeing@autism-anglia.org.uk](mailto:dc-wellbeing@autism-anglia.org.uk)

Concerns related to bullying will be reviewed on a case by case basis. It may be that we invite parents of the learner who has been involved in bullying and those who have been affected by bullying to the school to discuss the matter.

## **8 What Is The Procedure When Responding To Bullying Incidents ?**

The following robust but flexible procedures are followed:

- A favoured member of staff to talk to each learner involved as appropriate about the incident. Communication systems used by the learner will support this and it may be necessary for staff to explore the learner's understanding of the incident.

The problem will be identified and possible solutions suggested, which may include:

- A restorative meeting may be suggested. This is a non-blaming forum where the learners each take a turn to talk, including about how it made them feel, either as a group or individually, as appropriate. Support prior to the meeting so learners can understand the intention and prepare for what they want to share. Learners may be guided to limit their points to the most important 3 things to make the meeting accessible and manageable.
- Additional or focused learning for the learner. This may be in the form of social stories or 1:1 sessions with a suitable focus.
- Discussions with key staff, use of comic strip conversations to reflect on the impact of their behaviour on others; debriefs.
- Mediation meetings if appropriate.
- Opportunity to access in house therapy and Wellbeing Team to support understanding. The work with the person involved in bullying will be to understand and change their behaviour, and to support making good the relationship, or to end the negative behaviour.
- Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings for both the person involved in bullying and the learner who has been affected by the bullying.

In the event that bullying continues, or in more serious cases of bullying:

- Parents/carers will be invited into the school for a meeting to discuss the problem.
- In the unlikely event of continued bullying behaviours, sanctions including exclusion, as per our Behaviour Policy may be enforced.
- Where appropriate, access to external services such as Child & Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS) where applicable.

Bullying incidents are logged by category in the bullying log and reviewed by the Senior Management team. Actions to support may also include staff training, timetable changes and specific support to reduce and prevent further cases of bullying.

## **9 Allegations From Learners Against Other Learners**

Doucecroft will manage any incidents of peer on peer conflict using the guidance within this policy and or the Behaviour Management & Relationships Policy. Some allegations may be of a more serious nature and raise safeguarding concerns.

Allegations made against another learner may include physical abuse (violence), emotional abuse (threats) or sexual abuse (touching, up-skirting, sexting).

In this case, the allegation must be logged using our online safeguarding system 'My Concern' and this will be dealt with as a safeguarding concern by our Designated Safeguarding team. Further guidance can be found in our Safeguarding Policy.

Advice and support will be sought from external agencies as appropriate.

## **10 Prevention of Cyber Bullying**

Learners may be drawn into cyber bullying by passing on messages or images or taking part in online activities without realising they are involved in cyber bullying. Doucecroft recognise the need to

develop strategies to limit cyber bullying and to help learners protect themselves whilst using information and communications technology.

Strategies to prevent cyber bullying include:

- Educating learners about staying safe in the cyber world.
- Learners have structured lessons on online safety as part of the curriculum.
- Encouraging staff to keep up to date with new technology.
- Members of staff are required to attend training on e-safety.
- Using resources aimed at developing online safety, e.g., those produced by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) to help learners develop safety awareness online including the importance of reporting anything which causes them concern.
- Close liaison between senior staff and parents/carers to support/manage incidents of cyber bullying.

Doucecroft School has strategies in place in addition to those for other types of bullying to protect learners from cyber bullying whilst in school. These include:

- High levels of filtering on all computers accessible to learners.
- Clear rules about internet use.
- Learners hand in electronic devices on arrival at school for lower school learners – Older learners sign a use agreement.
- Access to mobile phones limited and on agreed terms.
- Staff supervision whilst using ICT.
- Clear procedures in place to report any issues.

Sometimes cyber bullying is clear and deliberate. At other times, the perpetrator may not be aware of the consequences of what they have done. There is a distance between the perpetrator and victim, and this can make it more difficult for learners on the autism spectrum to realise the impact of what they have done.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are now widespread and easy to access. Staff, learners and parents/carers may be familiar with generative chatbots such as ChatGPT and Google Board.

Doucecroft School recognises that AI has many uses to help learners learn but may also have the potential to be used to bully others. For example, in the form of 'deepfakes' where AI is used to create images, audio or video hoaxes that look real.

Doucecroft School will treat any use of AI to bully learners in line with our Behaviour Management & Relationships Policy.

## **11 Related Policies**

Behaviour Management Policy.  
Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.  
Curriculum Policy.  
Complaints Policy.  
Online Safety Policy.  
Relationships and Sex education Policy.  
SMSC and British Values.

## 12 Responsibilities, Monitoring & Review

The Headteacher communicates this policy to all school stakeholders to ensure that disciplinary measures are applied fairly, consistently and reasonably, and that a member of the Senior Management team has been identified to take overall responsibility. At Doucecroft this is our Wellbeing Lead.

The Trustees will take a lead role in monitoring and reviewing this policy.

All staff, including Trustees, Senior Management Team, teaching and non-teaching staff will support, uphold and implement this policy accordingly.

Parents/carers will support their children and work in partnership with the school/college.

The school will ensure that learners, where appropriate understand this policy and why it is important.

Data on Bullying is collated and used to support learners. The policy will be updated as needed or at least yearly.

## 13 Useful Links & Supporting Organisations

Anti-Bullying Alliance: [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

Childline: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Family Lives: [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)

Kidscape: [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

MindEd: [www.minded.org.uk](http://www.minded.org.uk)

NSPCC: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

The BIG Award: [www.bullyinginterventiongroup.co.uk/index.php](http://www.bullyinginterventiongroup.co.uk/index.php)

PSHE Association: [www.pshe-association.org.uk](http://www.pshe-association.org.uk)

Restorative Justice Council: [www.restorativejustice.org.uk](http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk)

The Diana Award: [www.diana-award.org.uk](http://www.diana-award.org.uk)

Victim Support: [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

Young Minds: [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Young Carers: <https://carers.org/about-us/about-young-carers>

The Restorative Justice Council: <https://restorativejustice.org.uk/restorative-practice-schools>

### **SEND**

Changing Faces: [www.changingfaces.org.uk](http://www.changingfaces.org.uk)

Mencap: [www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

DfE SEND code of practice: [SEND Code of Practice January 2015.pdf](#)

### **Cyberbullying:**

Childnet: [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com)

Internet Watch Foundation: [www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)

Think U Know: [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)

UK Safer Internet Centre: [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)

The UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) [www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis](http://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis)

DfE 'Cyberbullying: advice for headteacher/principals and school/college staff':  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying)

DfE 'Advice for parents and carers on cyberbullying':  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-and-tackling-bullying)

### **Race, religion and nationality**

Anne Frank Trust: [www.annefrank.org.uk](http://www.annefrank.org.uk)

Kick it Out: <https://www.kickitout.org/take-action/resources>

Report it: [www.report-it.org.uk](http://www.report-it.org.uk)