



Student Citizenship policy

@ November 2016

RATIONALE

Vermont Secondary College has as its values:

- **Excellence** in the achievement of individual and team goals.
- **Integrity** of individuals in their words, actions and relationships.
- **Responsibility** for our words and action.
- **Respect** for self, others, property.
- **Tolerance** of diversity and individual difference.

Why do we have a Policy on these?

To provide a safe, friendly and accepting college environment for students and staff and to encourage care, courtesy and respect for others. All persons have a legal right to protection from harassment under the *Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act* and the *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act*.

Our school is committed to providing a safe and caring environment and culture which enables positive relationships to be formed amongst all students and staff and which encourages self-esteem, cooperation, personal growth and a positive attitude to learning and teaching.

Our ability to learn, to grow and to achieve is reduced by negative attitudes and behaviour. Bullying and harassment are unacceptable and Vermont Secondary College is committed to creating and maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment.

A number of programs exist within the college setting that are directly aimed at building tolerance, respect and resilience. Some of these include:

- Training for key staff in restorative practices.
- Social, Emotional, Learning (SEL) sessions for all junior classes, at least twice a term.
- VSC is a member of Victorian Safe Schools.
- The library runs classes on citizenship and cyber issues.
- Each House runs a number of activities aimed to boost a sense of community.
- The college has a vibrant student leadership model.
- High Resolves training from years 7-10. Year 8 is based on Global Citizenship.

What Bullying is Not

Many distressing behaviours are not examples of bullying even though they are unpleasant and often require teacher intervention and management. There are three socially unpleasant situations that are often confused with bullying:

Mutual Conflict

In mutual conflict situations, there is an argument or disagreement between students but not an imbalance of power. Both parties are upset and usually both want a resolution to the problem. However, unresolved mutual conflict sometimes develops into a bullying situation with one person becoming targeted repeatedly for 'retaliation' in a one-sided way.

Social Rejection or Dislike

Unless the social rejection is directed towards someone specific and involves deliberate and repeated attempts to cause distress, exclude or create dislike by others, it is not bullying.

Single-episode acts of nastiness or meanness, or random acts of aggression or intimidation

Single episodes of nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If a student is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion they are not being bullied. However, the college will in no way tolerate this kind of behaviour.

Nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different students is not the same as bullying.

What Bullying is

Being bullied or harassed means that someone is subjected to behaviour which is hurtful, threatening or frightening and this behaviour is repeated over time.

Bullying can be physical, verbal and psychological actions by an individual or group which are intended to hurt another person. It deals with the repeated oppression of a person by another person or group.

Cyber-bullying consists of covert, psychological bullying, conveyed through the electronic mediums such as mobile-phones, web-logs and web-sites, on-line chat rooms, 'MUD' rooms (multi-user domains where individuals take on different characters) and Xangas (on-line personal profiles where some adolescents create lists of people they do not like). It is verbal (over the telephone or mobile phone), or written (flaming, threats, racial, sexual or homophobic harassment) using the various mediums available.

Harassment is any verbal, physical or sexual conduct (including gestures) which is uninvited, unwelcome or offensive to a person. Usually falls into two categories; subtle (most common) and explicit.

The above includes unwarranted acts that fall under three broad categories: **Directly physical, directly verbal and indirect bullying and harassment.**

- Repeated name calling, teasing and put downs.
- Damaging, removing or hiding belongings.
- Demands for money or possessions.
- Physical violence or threats.
- Racial discrimination.
- Sexual bullying/harassment.
- Lying and spreading rumours.
- Damaging someone's social reputation and social acceptance aimed to cause distress.
- Playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate.
- Encouraging others to socially exclude someone.
- Inappropriate use of technology such as posting hurtful or malicious content aimed at another person via text messages/images or a social network site.

WHAT THE SCHOOL WILL DO

Vermont Secondary College's approach to dealing with conflict, bullying and other social issues is informed by a broader whole school approach to engagement and wellbeing that promotes healthy and positive behaviours and attitudes. Accordingly, we have adopted a school wide restorative culture that encourages positive relationships between students, their peers, teachers and the broader community by modelling and promoting appropriate behaviour. Further, we have implemented a student code of conduct and utilise restorative practices interventions in the case of social and relational issues. Vermont Secondary College's approach to citizenship includes, but is not limited to:

- Conduct Social Emotional Learning classes (SEL), aimed at encouraging positive behaviours and on premeditating poor relational behaviours.
- Providing safe areas.
- Ensuring complaints are heard in confidence and followed through.
- Including material on behaviour awareness in the curriculum, that promote resilience, life and social skills, assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving.
- Affording the staff opportunities for professional development on restorative practices to best deal with conflict issues.
- Keeping records of incidents of bullying.
- Supporting both parties to resolve the issues.
- Providing all new students and staff with information on our Bullying and Harassment Policy at the commencement of their time at the school.

COMMON REACTIONS TO ACCUSATIONS OF "BULLYING"

"I was just mucking around, can't they take a joke?"

This is the most common response to bullying. It is not a joke to put someone down, ridicule them, make them feel uncomfortable, push them around, or take their things.

“I’ll ignore it and it will go away.”

If anything, ignoring it makes it worse. It gives the impression that bullying is okay with you and that you agree with what the bully is doing.

“I don’t want to cause trouble.”

Students have a right to feel safe at school. You’re not causing trouble, you’re standing up for yourself.

“It’s just a natural part of growing up.”

There is nothing natural about being victimised. Students have a right to feel safe at school, as well as at home.

“No-one can do anything about it.”

Most cases of bullying are sorted out very simply especially if it is reported straight away. The college is committed to solving these problems.

INCIDENTS OF BULLYING WILL BE RESPONDED TO IN THE FOLLOWING SEQUENCE

1. Teachers who observe bullying/harassment incidents or have this reported to them by a student will complete a cyber or bullying incident report form. Copies of this report will be given to the relevant Student Manager who will investigate.
2. Following investigation of the incident it is the school’s preferred option to restoratively mediate between the students (when appropriate) and come to an agreed resolution of the issues. A written agreement will then be signed by the students. Expectations will be explicitly explained.
3. Students who are reported a second time may be asked to sign a contract and further restorative counselling may be required from the House Team, in conjunction with the Student Well-being Coordinator. Together and if appropriate, they may develop a behaviour contract with the student, provide mentoring of different social and emotional learning competencies or conduct a restorative conference with perpetrator and ‘victim’.
4. Students who are reported for bullying a third time or pose ‘at risk’ recidivism may be withdrawn from classes for the remainder of the day. Parents will be contacted via the House Teams or Student Well-being Coordinator and asked to attend an interview. Consequences for further incidents will be explained. These may include external suspension.
5. Students who resist school efforts and represent a significant threat to the safety and wellbeing of staff and other students could be referred to outside agencies for support.

NB: *Incidents of a serious nature may be responded to by immediately applying the Student Code of Conduct.*

All stages of consequences will be supported by the school with counselling by House Teams and the Student Well-being Co-ordinator.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS BEFORE VISITING SCHOOL TO DISCUSS THEIR CHILD BEING BULLIED

1. Before approaching the school, make sure the alleged incidents involving bullying are carefully detailed. As far as possible, set down **a)** what exactly happened, **b)** whether there was any provocation on the part of your child, **c)** whether there were witnesses and if so who.
2. Ensure as far as possible that the student knows what action you are proposing and agrees with it.
3. Make an appointment with the relevant Student Manager or Head of House who may refer to the Assistant Principal, so that time can be made available for you to talk.
4. Don’t attempt to sort out the bullies yourself. This is rarely effective and results in escalation.
5. At the meeting, calmly present the concern as a problem that you are sharing with the school and explain that you are hoping to work out some solution with their help.
6. Be patient. The school will need some time to investigate and check on what has been said.
7. Listen carefully and note what steps the school intends to take and what part they would like you to play.
8. If necessary, arrange for a further meeting/phone contact to assess what has occurred.

WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO TO HELP

- Report any cases of bullying to class teachers or Student Managers/Head of House, or someone you trust.
- Seek help to develop ways of responding to bullying.
- If approached by a bully, stay calm and confidently walk away.
- Leave expensive possessions and money at home.

- Avoid joining in. Being part of a group that is bullying someone else is just as bad as being a bully yourself, as you are providing the bully with an audience.
- Avoid joining in gossip either at school or on-line.

This Policy will be reviewed annually.

References:

Department of Education and Training Victoria

School Policy and Advisory Guide

Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Chicago.

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), ACT

Building Resilience: A Model to Support Children and Young People, DET, Melbourne

Bully Stoppers, DET, Melbourne

Disability Standards for Education, 2005 (last modified June 2016), Australian Government Department of Education and Training

The National Safe Schools Framework, Australian Government Department of Education and Training