

**BULLYING PREVENTION POLICY**

**Purpose**

Forest Hill 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
* make clear that all forms of bullying at Forest Hill College will not be tolerated
* ask that everyone in our school 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 victims, bystanders and perpetrators)
* seek parental and peer group support in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour at Forest Hill College.

When responding to bullying behaviour, Forest Hill College aims to:

* be proportionate, consistent and responsive
* find a constructive and positive solution for everyone
* stop the bullying from happening again
* restore the relationships between the students involved.

Forest Hill College acknowledges that school 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.

## **Scope**

This policy addresses how Forest Hill College aims to prevent and respond to student bullying behaviour. Forest Hill 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 school. These other inappropriate behaviours will be managed in accordance with our Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy. Forest Hill College assures its community of procedural fairness.

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

## **Policy**

### **Definitions**

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 phone, tablets, computers, chat rooms, email, social media, etc. It can be verbal, written or include use of images, video and/or audio.

**Other distressing behaviours**

Many distressing behaviours may not constitute bullying even though they are unpleasant. Students who are involved in or who witness any distressing behaviours should report their concerns to school staff and our school will follow the Student Wellbeing and Engagement policy. *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 harassment, nastiness or physical aggression are not the same as bullying. If someone is verbally abused or pushed on one occasion, they are not being bullied. Harassment, nastiness or physical aggression that is directed towards many different people is not the same as bullying. However, single episodes of harassment, nastiness or physical aggression are not acceptable behaviours at our school.

## **Bullying Prevention**

Forest Hill College is a Positive Education environment and is committed to building 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 Forest Hill College is proactive and is supported by research that indicates that a whole school, multifaceted approach is the most effect way to prevent and address bullying. At our school:

* We are a Positive Education 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 required to utilise Visible Wellbeing prompts in the classroom to promote visible thinking about wellness and discourage harassment or bullying behaviours.
* In the classroom, our social and emotional learning curricula, Positive Education and Visible Wellbeing promotes resilience, assertiveness, conflict resolution and problem solving.
* Our Student Parliament program encourages positive relationships between students in different year levels. We seek to empower students to be confident communicators and to resolve conflict through strength based conversations.
* 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.
* 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/Student Engagement Policy.

## **Incident Response**

### **Reporting concerns to Forest Hill College**

Bullying complaints will be taken seriously and responded to sensitively at our school.

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

In most circumstances, we encourage students to speak to the Year Level Leader and/or Head of Sub-School. However, students are welcome to discuss their concerns with any trusted member of staff including teachers, the wellbeing team, or principal class.

Parents or carers who may develop concerns that their child is involved in, or has witnessed bullying behaviour at Forest Hill College should contact their child’s Year Level leader.

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 Forest hill College are timely and appropriate in the circumstances.

### **Investigations**

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

1. record the details of the allegations in Compass; and
2. inform the relevant Year Level Leader and Head of Sub-school .

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

* speak to the students involved in the allegations, including the victim/s, the alleged perpetrator/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 behaviours 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 leader 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 key stakeholders such as Head of Sub-School, Student Wellbeing Team, teachers, SSS, Assistant Principal, Principal, Department of Education and Training specialist staff etc.

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, Forest Hill 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 victim student
* whether the perpetrator student or students have displayed similar behaviour before
* whether the bullying took place in a group or one-to-one context
* whether the perpetrator demonstrates insight or remorse for their behaviour
* the alleged motive of the behaviour, including any element of provocation.

Year Level Leader may implement all, or some of the following responses to bullying behaviours:

* Offer counselling support to the victim student or students, including referral to the Student Wellbeing Team, SSS and/ or external providers.
* Use of mindfulness techniques to build thoughtful action as opposed to thoughtless action.
* Offer counselling support to the perpetrator student or students, including referral to the Student Wellbeing Team, SSS and/ or external providers.
* Offer counselling support to affected students, including witnesses and/or friends of the victim student, including referral to the Student Wellbeing Team, SSS and/ or external providers.
* Facilitate 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.
* Facilitate 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.
* Facilitate a process using the Support Group Method, involving the victim student(s), the perpetrator students and a group of students who are likely to be supportive of the victim(s).
* Implement a Method of Shared Concern process, non-punitive multi-stage strategy used with groups of students during a series of conversations and interviews with all students involved in the bullying.
* Implement disciplinary consequences for the perpetrator students, 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.
* Facilitate a Student Support Group meeting and/or Behaviour Support Plan for affected students.
* Prepare a Safety Plan and/ or Individual Behaviour plan
* Provide discussion and/or mentoring for different social and emotional learning competencies of the students involved, including Positive Education growth mindset, grit and resilience
* Monitor the behaviour of the students involved for an appropriate time and take follow up action if necessary.
* Implement year group targeted strategies to reinforce positive behaviours,
* The appropriate Year Level leader is responsible for maintaining up to date records of the investigation of and responses to bullying behaviour.

Forest Hill 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:]

* Statement of Values and School Philosophy
* Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy
* Parent Complaints policy
* Duty of Care Policy
* Inclusion and Diversity Policy
* Equal Opportunity Policy

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](https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/PreventingBullying/Planning/Pages/School-policy.aspx)
* [Kids Helpline](https://kidshelpline.com.au/)
* [Lifeline](https://www.lifeline.org.au/)
* [Bullying. No way!](https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/PreventingBullying/Planning/Pages/School-policy.aspx)
* [insert other website or resources that may be useful for your school community]

## **Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed on an 2 year basis, or earlier as required, following analysis of school data on reported incidents of, and responses to bullying to ensure that the policy remains up to date, practical and effective.

Data will be collected through:

* discussion with students through Student Parliament
* regular staff surveys
* assessment of school based data, including the number of reported incidents of bullying in each year group and the effectiveness of the responses implemented.

Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with and Student Parliament, parents groups, school council.

## **Review cycle**

This policy was last updated on October 2018 and is scheduled for review in October 2020.