INFORMATION ABOUT BULLYING AND RESILIENCE

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

St Mary’s aims to provide an environment where every student has the opportunity to develop her potential in a caring and safe environment. In accordance with St Mary’s motto “fideliter” (faithfully) the school values fidelity to the principles of truth, honesty and honour in personal conduct. This means showing care, consideration and respect for others. Students are expected to be tolerant of others’ beliefs whilst having the courage to uphold their own. When all students are caring and respectful, bullying will be minimized.

Bullying is a very complex issue and can take many forms. Everyone who is involved - the person being bullied, the person bullying and the bystanders - needs to be guided to deal with the issue and learn ways to ensure it does not happen again.

The information below is a guide to help parents become aware of how they might support their child and the school in dealing with this issue, should it arise.

In the course of each year there will be various awareness-raising activities including discussions in Health Education classes, guest speakers, and the opportunity to work with performers who specialise in raising these issues with children, in a way they can relate to. The type of activity will vary with each Year group. Link groups, which consist of students from Years 8-12, enable opportunities for expressing views, offering information and solving problems.

WHAT DOES THE SCHOOL DO?

Bullying needs to be dealt with according to the individual issues that arise. Incidents of bullying might be brought to our attention by parents, staff, students or bystanders. The Dean of Students is normally the recipient of this information and confers with the Counsellors to work out the best strategy to address that particular incident. The consultation process is usually handled by the Counselling staff and can include

- talking with the student concerned
- talking with parents, staff or friends of the student
- giving the student strategies to effectively manage the bullying
- talking with the individual or group doing the bullying and directing them into a more positive and caring way of behaving
- talking to parents regarding their daughter’s bullying behaviour
- alerting staff to the negative patterns of behaviour for purposes of monitoring, preventing further occurrences and promoting positive patterns amongst the students concerned
- supporting the student over a period of time to ensure that the bullying has stopped

There is a range of sanctions for students who are bullies. The issue is taken seriously in the school and in the community and continuing perpetration could result in a student being expelled.

Incidents of bullying can be reported online:  http://www.stmarys.wa.edu.au/report-bullying

WHAT CAN STAFF DO?

All staff are very watchful for any incidents of bullying. Teachers are encouraged to refer students to the Dean of Students or Counsellors, who can individually follow up, as appropriate.
THE NATURE OF BULLYING

Bullying is any behaviour that hurts, threatens, excludes or frightens another person. It may be verbal, social, physical or psychological. For actions to be called bullying:

- the behaviour is usually repetitive over a period of time
- the situation involves an imbalance of power
- the person being bullied feels powerless to stop the behaviour

Examples of bullying include:

- teasing
- using hurtful names
- spreading rumours
- sending hurtful notes or messages, including via technology
- deliberately ignoring or avoiding
- excluding from group activities
- constant "put downs"
- pushing, bumping, hitting
- taking or damaging property

Signs that bullying is occurring

It can be difficult for children to tell their parents that they are being bullied. One or more of the following signs could indicate that bullying is occurring.

**School**
- being unwilling to go to school
- a significant drop in work standard
- wanting to change the way to travel to and from school

**Emotional**
- personality changes (loss of confidence)
- sudden outbursts of temper
- mood swings

**Physical**
- psychosomatic complaints (e.g. stomach aches for no apparent reason)
- problems with sleep
- loss of appetite
- unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches

**Social**
- not wanting to play with friends
- withdrawal from extra-curricular activities
- beginning to bully other children/siblings

If parents observe any of these changes over an extended period of time it would be advisable to contact one of the Counsellors to talk about ways to support their child.

What can you do if your child says that she is being bullied?

**It is important to:**

- listen sympathetically to what your child has to say and without blame. Tell your child she is understood and believed
- encourage your child to address the situation in a confident and assertive manner
- involve your child in making decisions about what to do

**Act for your child:**

If your child is being bullied please alert the school so we can work together to support her. Contact the Dean of Students or Counsellors.
CYBER BULLYING

Cyber bullying is a relatively new aspect of bullying. It is an area parents need to know about and to monitor carefully. Both mobile phones and computers can be used in cyber bullying. Hurtful material (messages or pictures) can be forwarded to individuals, or sent into the public arena, where they are difficult to erase. The sending and receiving of this material usually happens in homes.

Parent Information evenings addressing this or similar issues are organised for groups of schools, and will be advertised through the normal channels within the school. There are also community avenues through which information about this topic is conveyed. The Commonwealth Government NetAlert Outreach website www.netalert.gov.au is a useful source of information. Students are made aware of the dangers of the Internet and issues like Cyber Bullying through their Information Technology classes in Years 8, 9 and 10.

BUILDING RESILIENT CHILDREN

Resiliency is about being able to deal with, and succeed, in difficult situations. It is a mix of learned skills and characteristics and is one of the keys to positive mental health. Positive parental support is vital, as parents are the most influential model in a child’s life and play an important part in the development of resiliency. Families should try to create opportunities which will enable their children to succeed and gain self-confidence by trying new things in a safe environment. Success is wonderful, failure is only a temporary setback but fear of failure is more damaging than failure itself.

Resilient children are less likely to bully and more likely to be able to deal with bullying.

Teach your children:
- the difference between aggression and assertion by setting an example
- different ways to resolve conflict
- options to respond to bullying
- what to do if they see bullying
- how to acknowledge and accept differences in others

Take an active interest in:
- what’s happening at school
- their friends and their social life
- encouraging your child to bring friends home

Build self-confidence by:
- recognising and affirming their positive qualities
- valuing them for who they are
- encouraging them and acknowledging their efforts, not just achievements
- building a welcoming and inclusive home environment
WHAT CAN BE DONE IF YOUR CHILD IS BULLYING OTHERS?

Children may bully for a variety of reasons including:

- feeling powerful when bullying
- thinking the behaviour increases acceptance by others
- not knowing other ways of expressing anxiety, fear or envy
- feeling uncomfortable relating to others on an equal basis

What can parents do?

- focus on the behaviour
- reinforce that it is the behaviour that is unacceptable and not the person. Labelling a person a bully reinforces the idea that they cannot control their behaviour
- focus on the power of CHOICE in how to respond to others
- explore with your child, situations in which she is most likely to bully, discuss the feelings at these times and brainstorm alternative behaviours
- discuss strategies with a School Counsellor

WHAT CAN YOUR CHILD DO IF SHE SEES SOMEONE ELSE BEING BULLIED?

Bystanders are people who are there when bullying happens or are aware of bullying. Bystanders may not realise that they are supporting bullying behaviour. People who see bullying occurring or know about it happening can make a difference.

Children can help stop bullying by:

- refusing to join in
- not spreading rumours or gossip
- including people who are being left out
- offering support to the person who is bullied by making suggestions about how to handle the bullying or encouraging them to get help from an adult, a friend or their family
- stepping in as the bullying occurs perhaps by telling the bully to "leave them alone"
- finding an older student they know, who may be able to help
- reporting the incident to a staff member

See also:

- A Policy for the Prevention of Bullying and Teasing – A Guide for Students
- A Policy for the Prevention of Cyber Bullying