

# Parish of St Peter & St James, Belfast



## Anti-bullying Policy for children

*(Note: For cases of bullying between adults the 'Dignity in Church Life Policy' should be adhered to)*

Our parish is committed to providing a caring, supportive and friendly environment where children learn to value and respect each other and are challenged to reach their full potential through active participation. Therefore we will not tolerate bullying by anyone in any of our activities.

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression –whether it is verbal, psychological or physical –that is conducted by an individual or group against others. It is behaviour that is intentionally aggravating and intimidating, and occurs mainly among children in social environments such as schools. It includes behaviours such as physical aggression, cyberbullying, damage to property, intimidation, isolation, exclusion, name calling, malicious gossip and extortion. Bullying can also take the form of identity abuse based on gender and sexual preference, race, ethnicity and religious factors. With developments in modern technology, children can also be the victims of non-contact bullying, via mobile phones, the internet and other devices.

### What can staff/volunteers do if a child tells them they are being bullied?

- Listen calmly and accept what is said.
- Complete an incident form following the conversation and keep on file as this forms the basis of the bullying report. Notes should include nature of incident, date, time, location, names of those involved, witnesses, relevant history and child's response. This report should be given to the Parish Panel.
- Reassure them that help is available, action will be taken, the child was right to tell, it is not their fault and it could happen to anyone.
- Negotiate confidentiality – be clear you'll only tell people who need to know.
- Ensure the child's safety. The staff/volunteers should be aware that the safety of the child is paramount, and this can be maintained through appropriate supervision. Liaise with the parents/guardians in relation to a solution and possible actions.
- Tell the child that you will keep them informed and how you intend to proceed.
- Respond to the incident – all actions should be guided by the needs of the child. Decide what action to take and by whom.

### Responding to incidents of bullying

There are a number of approaches which can be used, and the staff/volunteers should determine which action to take depending on the incident of bullying.

1. The Code of Behaviour sets out the guidelines for children regarding boundaries and appropriate behaviour. Draw everyone's attention back to the Code of Behaviour and the consequences of not abiding by the Code.
2. Focus on the feelings of the target and what the person/group involved in the bullying and the target can do to make this situation better. Allow those involved in the bullying behaviour to think about the action that has taken place and the effect it has had on the target. It promotes the perpetrator and the rest of the group involved in the bullying behaviour with an opportunity to redeem themselves.
3. Time Out – by providing some space and time between the perpetrator and target and allowing both parties involved to think about the incident that has taken place, time apart may aid the process of resolving the bullying e.g. removal of the perpetrator away from the target to another group.
4. Denial of privileges – loss of certain privileges by the perpetrator in the group. It is hoped that by using this response the perpetrator may realise the impact of their actions on the target and the consequences for themselves.
5. Parental/Guardian involvement – make parents/guardians of all children involved aware of the incident of bullying and ask them to intervene in the situation.
6. Suspension or expulsion of the perpetrator may be used as a last resort in bullying where no other interventions have worked.

## **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is defined as “any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others”.

Cyberbullying, similar to more traditional forms of bullying, must meet three main criteria:

- Intention to cause harm to the victim(s)
- Repetition of abusive behaviour(s) over time (however in some instances, one behavioural act can create an on-going sense of intimidation for the victim (e.g. posting a humiliating photo/video which can be viewed by a large audience can have long-term effects)).
- Imbalance of power between victim(s) and bully/bullies (i.e. technological skills, anonymity).

Cyberbullying differs from more traditional forms of bullying in a number of ways:

- The audience is larger;
- There are no time or location barriers;
- It can happen 24/7
- The target’s reaction is not often seen, leading to a reduction in feelings of empathy or guilt for the perpetrator.

Actions staff and volunteers should consider when a child is the target of cyberbullying:

- Confirm that you are dealing with bullying behaviour.
- Listen calmly and uncritically to the report the child is making.
- Remind the child that it is not their fault.
- Tell the child not to respond to the bully as this can exacerbate the issue.
- Ask the child if they have talked to their parents about the cyberbullying. If they have not the staff member/volunteer should offer to help the child to talk to their parents about the problem.
- The following advice should be given by the staff member/volunteer to the parents of the child experiencing the cyberbullying:
  - Keep a copy of all correspondence between the child and the bully.
  - Encourage the child to remove the cyberbully as a ‘friend’ online and block them from his/her phone.
  - Report the issue to the website and/or mobile phone company as appropriate.
  - Serious issues should be reported to PSNI – legal issues include making inappropriate sexual suggestions, racist remarks or persistent bullying that is seriously damaging to the child’s wellbeing. In such situations the staff member/volunteer should report their concerns to the panel who can assist them to inform parents that they should report the cyber bullying or ‘sexting’ to the PSNI by bringing the child’s phone to the local PSNI station and making a report.

Adopted by the Select Vestry on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2024.