



ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE

333 Highway 18, Old Bridge, NJ 08857 732-251-4812



St. Thomas the Apostle School Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Policy (H.I.B.)

CONFLICT VS. BULLYING

Conflict is different than bullying. Not all disagreements are bullying. Conflict is a normal part of human interaction and arises frequently in our day to day lives. Part of learning to be independent and grown up is learning how to deal with and respond appropriately to conflict at home, at school, and in your community. Recognizing the difference between conflict and bullying will help students, parents, and teachers know how to respond.

Conflict is:

- A disagreement; an argument
- All parties have equal power to solve the problem
- All parties have an equal interest in the outcome and are equally involved
- All parties are of relatively equal size, age, or status
- A conflict can be resolved by talking or working things out together or with help from an adult.

Bullying is:

- Not a disagreement, the behavior is one-sided
- A repeated form of mistreatment where the victim cannot defend him/herself
- An imbalance of power – usually one person is either bigger or older than the other or has a higher social standing (is more popular) and uses this against the other person
- Usually involves repeated acts of harassment, harm, or humiliation
- Causes a change in the school climate for the student who is the victim

Harassment, intimidation, or bullying means that any gesture, written, verbal, or physical act, or any electronic communication that:

- Can be reasonably perceived as being motivated by either any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or mental, physical, or sensory disability; or
- Takes place on school property, at any school sponsored function, social media or on a school bus that substantially disrupts or interferes with the orderly operation of the school or rights of other students; and
- A reasonable person should know under the circumstances, that the act(s) will have the effect of physically or emotionally harming a student or damaging a student's property, or placing a student in reasonable fear of physical or emotional harm to his/her person or damage to his/her property; or
- Has the effect of insulting or demeaning a student or a group of students; or

- Creates a hostile educational environment for the student by interfering with the students' education or by severely or pervasively causing physical or emotional harm to the student.

REPORTING

All acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying shall be reported verbally or in writing first to the classroom teacher as soon as possible. The teacher will then report the incident to the Principal or designee as soon as is practicable from when the school employee, student, or volunteer witnessed or received reliable information regarding any such incident. Students may also use Stop!t, a mobile application provided by the Diocese to anonymously report such acts. The school principal or designee shall immediately initiate an investigation. If the reporting took place verbally or in writing the school Principal or designee will create a Stop!t incident.

A school employee who promptly reports an incident of harassment, intimidation, or bullying to the appropriate school official designated by the school's policy is immune from a cause of action for damages arising from the reporting of the incident or any failure to remedy the reported incident.

The school's employees, students, or volunteers are prohibited from engaging in reprisal, retaliation, or false accusation against a victim, witness, and one with reliable information or any other person who has reliable information about an act of harassment, intimidation, or bullying or who reports an act of harassment, intimidation, or bullying. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who engages in reprisal, retaliation, or false accusation shall be determined by the principal after consideration of the nature, severity, and circumstances of the act.

INVESTIGATION

The principal and/or vice principal will interview the students who made the accusation and the student who is accused of committing the act(s) as soon as the report is received. Additionally, the principal or vice principal will interview any adult who was or may have been present when the act(s) took place. The principal or vice principal, as part of the interviews, will inquire as to the names of any witnesses to act(s) and interview them. If there is any documentary evidence (i.e. text messages, social media, photos), copies will be requested. The principal or vice principal will keep written notes of the interviews.

Confidentiality for all students involved will be maintained to the extent possible. The students involved or staff involved will be instructed not to discuss the incident in order to preserve the integrity of the investigation. The parents, police, and any other appropriate agency shall be informed by the Administration if the accusation meets the criteria for reporting to law enforcement and deemed exclusive of pastoral discretion.

Parents shall be notified verbally or in writing within 48 hours of the start of an investigation. The investigation shall be completed as soon as possible, not no later than 10 school days from the date of the report of the incident of harassment, intimidation, or bullying. Upon completion of the investigation, the Principal and/or vice principal will determine consequences of the incident report. All statements and evidence of the investigation will be updated and/or attached to the Stop!t incident report.

The parents will be advised verbally or in writing of the completion of the investigation and the conclusion reached. No parent will be advised as to the discipline of any child other than their own. The principal's decision is binding.

STUDENT SUPPORT

The administration and faculty will provide ongoing support for students who are subject to harassment, intimidation, and bullying, including some or all of the following:

1. The student(s) will meet with the principal and/or vice principal to discuss the incident and explore any feelings or concerns;
2. The principal and/or vice principal will assist the student in returning to the classroom;
3. Grade and homeroom teacher will be asked to closely monitor the student and provide support as needed;
4. The school environment will be altered as needed, such as changing seats or assigning cafeteria seats;
5. The principal and/or vice principal will provide social skills, including empowerment skills and responding in the moment;
6. The student will be provided with assistance in reading or interpreting social signals, building self-esteem or identifying friends and classmates who can offer support;
7. The administration may increase positive contact with adults in the school who can provide future support;
8. The administration may encourage positive peer relationships and support; and
9. The principal and/or vice principal will be available to speak with and provide support to the students, parents, and family. If necessary, encouraging professional help from community mental health providers will be recommended.
10. Parental involvement
11. Counseling/conflict resolution.

NOTIFICATIONS

If the principal and/or vice principal determines that harassment, intimidation, bullying, or retaliation has occurred, he/she shall:

- Notify the local law enforcement agency if called for by the Memorandum of Agreement with Law Enforcement;
- Notify the parents or guardians of the Aggressor; and
- Notify the parents or guardians of the Target.

The specific disciplinary consequences imposed on the Aggressor will not be disclosed to the parents or guardians of the Target.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Once the investigation is complete, the principal and/or vice principal shall determine the consequences for the Aggressor(s) on a case-by-case, age appropriate basis. Harassment, intimidation, or bullying can take many forms and can vary dramatically in how serious it is and what impact it has on the Target and other students. While conduct that rises to the level of a violation of this policy will generally warrant disciplinary action against the students responsible whether to impose disciplinary sanctions and what sanctions to impose in a particular case are matters within the professional discretion of the principal or vice principal. It is the goal of the school to have students achieve redemption, learn, and stop the conduct. If the principal and/or vice principal deems that expulsion is the appropriate consequence, the principal must first contact the Office of Schools.

Disciplinary action in preschool and kindergarten, first and second grade, will generally be handled by the child's teacher working with the student, the student's family, and the principal and/or vice principal (as needed). These children are very young and are learning social skills. Only in exceptionally severe circumstances will conduct of a young student be referred to law enforcement.

CONSEQUENCES

The following list of consequences and remedial actions is provided as a guide and by no means limits the school from implementing other additional consequences and remedial actions consistent with the requirements of this Policy.

Student consequences may be one of more of the following:

- Loss of a privilege;
- Completion of letter of acknowledgement of action, with apology to the Target (after reviewed by the Principal and not in a case of sexual harassment or intimidation);
- Detention;
- Reparation to Target in the form of payment for, or repair of damage to possessions;
- Reassignment of seats in class, cafeteria, or bus, or removal from the bus or extended care;
- In-school suspension;
- Out-of-school suspension;
- Extended suspension;
- Expulsion.

Remedial action:

- Parent/Student conference;
- Counseling with a licensed counselor or psychologist at the parents' expense;
- Education about the effects of Harassment, Intimidation, or Bullying;
- Behavioral agreement;
- Cooperation with a behavioral management program developed in consultation with a mental health professional and the Principal.