

Bully and Harassment

HARASSMENT – AN INFORMATION GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

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Introduction

The spirit and intent of this protocol have been established to uphold the inherent right of all individuals to be treated with dignity and respect. For the Catholic School System, the basis of this belief is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Book of Genesis where it is written “*God created man in the image of himself...male and female he created them.*” In the Gospel According to Luke, Jesus talks about “*...loving the Lord God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength and all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.*” God, as our loving parent, has made us all brothers and sisters through his love.

It is the policy of the Board that every individual has the right to freedom from harassment in the school system, because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or handicap.

All members of the inclusive school community have a responsibility to play a part in ensuring that the learning environment is free from harassment. This responsibility is to be exercised by not engaging in conduct which may constitute harassment. Any student who believes that a fellow student has experienced or is experiencing harassment, or retaliation for having brought forward a complaint of harassment, is encouraged to follow the procedures outlined herein.

The Board takes seriously its responsibility to ensure a learning environment of mutual trust and respect and wishes to make clear that harassment of any individual will not be tolerated and that there will be consequences to those who conduct themselves in a contrary manner.

What is Harassment?

Harassment is defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code as “engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome”.
(Subsection _____)

Harassment can be, but is not limited to, misuse of power, it is unacceptable and unsolicited conduct, action, beliefs and attitudes which, intentionally or unintentionally, demean the victim and/or assert control and/or influence over the victim. It is behaviour that is not welcomed and may make you feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, offended or scared.

Harassment is expressed in different ways, including, but not limited to:

- something done to you and/or something done to someone else including unnecessary and unwelcome physical contact such as touching, petting or pinching, leering, suggestive staring and/or other gestures, unwanted

- sexual attention, remarks, behaviours, sexually degrading words and/or solicitation made by a person who knows or ought reasonably to know that such attention is unwanted (in some situations the behaviours as indicated may actually be assaultive in nature and could be reported to the Police).
- comments which hurt someone's feelings including insults, jokes, name-calling, slurs and teasing.
- fighting and/or bullying.
- graffiti, insulting words, messages, slogans, pictures and offensive posters, video or any other form of electronic transmission.
- lack of sensitivity to a person's gender, sexual orientation, race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, age, record of offenses, marital status, family status, employment status and/or disability.
- making and/or distributing material which contains biased or hateful ideas.
- implied and/or expressed verbal threats.
- one happening and/or a series of repeated happenings, (it only has to happen once, to affect you).
- Non-intentional occurrences may also constitute harassment.

Effects of Harassment

Harassment may cause:

- a loss of self-esteem and/or self-confidence
- humiliation, intimidation, tension, anger and/or frustration
- poor health
- poor school performance and/or attendance
- a negative school climate

What To Do If Harassed

1. Pay attention to your feelings!

Sometimes people being harassed are told they lack a sense of humour or have a chip on their shoulder. Harassment is not funny. It is harmful. It is not allowed. It is the person doing the harassing who is wrong.

2. **Take action!**

If you feel you are being harassed, speak up! Clearly indicate to the individual that the action is unwanted. If you don't say something, people may think that you accept the harassment and it may continue. Should you feel you require support in approaching the offending person, you are encouraged to seek out the assistance of a staff person.

3. **Continue to take action!**

If you feel that the situation is continuing and/or unsatisfactorily resolved, express your concerns to a staff person immediately and follow the Resolution Process.

What is the Role of the Staff Person?

The staff person is a member of the school staff chosen by the person feeling harassed. This individual will not take sides but will work together with the people involved to help them work out their differences.

At all times a student is encouraged to inform his/her parent/guardian of concerns related to actual and/or perceived harassment and of the Resolution Process.

The Resolution Process outlined below addresses the following forms of harassment:

- Student to Student
- Student to Staff
- Staff to Student

RESOLUTION PROCESS

STEP ONE

An informal approach to resolution is always recommended as a first step. Often this approach will be sufficient in ending the unwanted behaviour. Should an individual feel intimidated or uncomfortable about utilizing this approach, he/she may proceed directly to Step Two or Step Three.

PROCEDURE

- The complainant should express directly to the offending party his/her displeasure at the unwanted behaviour and respectfully request that it end.

STEP TWO

Should the unwanted behaviour continue following resolution attempts as outlined in Step One, the complainant should proceed as follows:

PROCEDURE

- The complainant should keep a personal record of the details which should include dates, times, places, nature of behaviour, witnesses (if any) and other relevant information.
- The complainant should seek the assistance of a staff person of his/her choice.

The staff person has a responsibility of determining the appropriateness of proceeding directly to Step Three. Such a decision shall be based primarily upon the nature, frequency and severity of the incident(s).

The complainant at any time may choose to proceed directly to Step Three.

- The staff person shall contact the parents/guardians of the students involved.
- The complainant requests that the staff person confidentially arrange a meeting between the two parties and the staff person, for the purposes of discussion, mutual understanding and agreement
- At the meeting the complainant shall:
 - make objection, disapproval and/or unease known to the offending person in a clear manner;
 - describe the behaviour verbally and/or refer to notes;
 - firmly request that the offending behaviour stop.
- The staff person will then assist the involved parties in attempting to achieve a mutually agreed upon resolution.
- At any meeting, any party may be accompanied by another person of his/her choice with mutual agreement of the other parties.

RESOLUTION

- If the parties agree, the matter is resolved and it goes no further. If resolution is not achieved, the process may then proceed to Step Three. Documentation should be maintained in a secure fashion (preferably with the Principal) for a period of three years or until the student leaves the school (whichever comes first). Should similar behaviours occur within the three-year period the time starts anew.

STEP THREE

- This is the final stage in attempting to resolve an issue of Harassment. Should unwanted behaviours continue to be evident and/or should previous attempts to resolve the issue have proven unsatisfactory, the complainant, on his/her own or with the assistance of the staff person, should proceed as follows:

PROCEDURE

- The staff person and/or the concerned party(s) may refer the matter to the school Principal/designate for disposition according to the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline and/or the Safe Schools Policy of the Board.

An individual always has the right to pursue a solution through the legal system in the event the harassment continues or has not been resolved satisfactorily within the school system.

Staff Person's Role

- Be a role model.
- Be proactive.
- Assist in any of the procedural steps as outlined.
- Take responsibility.
- Provide support and direction.
- Confront behaviour.
- Help resolve problems.
- Seek advice and support when appropriate.
- Ensure no retaliation occurs.
- Be aware of the impact of your comments and behaviour.
- Understand the differences associated with harassment, abuse and neglect.
- Be aware of legal and/or procedural issues (e.g., a teacher, upon making an adverse report on a colleague, shall furnish the colleague with a written statement as per the *Teaching Profession Act*).
- Consult with Principal/designate in the event of any uncertainty/doubt.
- Report complaints of a serious nature to the Principal/designate.
- Ensure proper documentation and file security.