

# Investigating and Resolving Bullying in School

FURTHER STEPS FOR TEACHERS



## The Cool School Programme



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

# CONTENTS

The Cool School Programme	2
Nature and extent of the problem	2
Effects of Bullying	4
Rationale for a comprehensive Anti-Bullying Programme	4
A Conceptual Model for Managing Bullying	6
Strategies for Investigating and Resolving Bullying	8
Confidential Questionnaires	8
Bullying Sociogram	9
Class Observation	14
Interviewing Techniques	16
Reconciliation and Mediation	22
Sample Forms	26
References and Resources	28

## The Cool School Programme

The Cool School Programme was developed within the North Eastern Health Board's Child Psychiatry Service. It is an anti-bullying programme and support service targeted at second level schools, and specifically tailored to the Irish context. The aims of the programme are:

- To research the nature and extent of bullying in individual schools in the NEHB area, and provide feedback on the findings to each school.
- To facilitate the development and implementation of a whole-school Anti-Bullying policy in each school through inservice training for teachers, and on-going support for anti-bullying teams.
- To provide teaching materials, including lesson plans, video materials and a series of advice booklets.
- To provide support for individual teachers where appropriate.
- To provide group therapy for students who have been repeatedly victimised by bullying.
- To enable teachers to help students who have been engaged in bullying to change their behaviour.

These guidelines discuss preventative and re-active approaches to bullying between students in school. The measures discussed rely on a whole school approach which tackles the problem comprehensively. These are consistent with the Department of Education Guidelines on Countering Bullying in Primary and Post primary Schools (1993).

### Nature and extent of the problem

- Research carried out in the NEHB area, found that 15% of students had been bullied in the term in which the study was conducted (*James et al*). The types of bullying experienced by students included: name-calling, physical hurt, threats, being excluded from the peer group, having rumours spread about them, having their belongings taken and experiencing unwanted sexual advances. Bullying occurred throughout the school environment including the classroom, corridors, playgrounds, toilets and gyms (*Cool School Programme, 2000*).
- Many of the negative behaviours which are treated as discipline problems in schools, have their root cause in bullying. This applies not only to student to student behaviours, but also to student to teacher interactions.
- Bullying is often a covert activity, it is deliberately hidden from teachers, and can be difficult to detect. Most social interaction between students occurs when teachers are not present and the most serious and persistent forms of bullying may remain hidden.

- Teachers work with a large number of pupils from different classes and year groups. Contact time is very short and mostly devoted to subject teaching. Even in schools where pastoral care is strong, the network of social relationships between pupils and the pressures which bear on them, may be difficult to uncover.
- Teachers move from class to class, and there are many opportunities for bullying particularly between class periods when supervision is reduced. Even if the changeover between classes is very brief, the opportunity for serious bullying is present. An even more insidious opportunity exists when pupils themselves are on the move in corridors.
- Telling is difficult for students. Victims of bullying fear that telling will worsen the problem, and that there may be retaliation if it is known that they told. They also feel shame at being victimised and being unable to stop it recurring. Research in the NEHB area indicates that on average 44% of victims had told a parent, and 33% had told a teacher (*Cool School Programme, 2000*). If bullying is not raised as an issue in the classroom students may be unaware that help is available.
- Teachers have few opportunities for sharing experiences with colleagues due to the fact that they teach mostly in isolation. Lack of communication between teachers prevents the development of a collective plan to deal with bullying.
- At present there is no universally accepted technique for dealing with bullying. As complex clusters of behaviours are involved, responding often requires sensitive decision-making to suit specific cases. Current practice varies from school to school, and can be dependent on the personal skills and interests of individual teachers.
- Many schools rely on management to solve bullying. Usually this means that the Principal or Vice-Principal deals with individual situations as they arise. While much valuable work can be achieved on this basis, there are a number of drawbacks to this approach. Incidents tend to be dealt with on a crisis management basis. In many cases the situation has deteriorated to such an extent that the opportunity for effective intervention has passed and serious long-term damage has already been done.
- Without a whole school anti-bullying policy, an anti-bullying ethos, and consistently implemented procedures and responses, it is likely that only the most obvious cases will be addressed.

# Effects of Bullying

The consequences of being bullied are wide-ranging and severe, affecting many areas of a person's life. Below is a list of some of the common reactions to being bullied.

## Physical Effects

Frequent minor illnesses  
Aggression  
Violence

Fights  
Physical damage  
Loss of or damage to property

## Academic/School Effects

Punctuality problems  
Deteriorating academic performance  
Poor attendance  
Truancy  
School dropout  
School refusal/phobia

## Emotional/Psychological Effects

Anxiety  
Anger  
Loss of confidence

Loneliness  
Fear  
Social isolation  
Depression  
Suicidal thoughts/ behaviour

## Effects on school staff

Class disruption  
Unpleasant and stressful working conditions  
Low morale  
Poor academic achievement  
Absenteeism  
Stress related illnesses

## Rationale for a comprehensive Anti-Bullying Programme

A whole-school policy requires the cooperation and commitment of staff, students and parents in the development of a school system, which would prevent and respond to bullying behaviour. Smith and Sharp (1993) found that schools which concentrated on a whole-school anti-bullying policy, and which introduced a variety of interventions, were more successful in reducing levels of bullying. A piecemeal approach was considerably less effective.

Research in Scandinavia has shown that where a whole school intervention programme has been used:

- The effects of the programme were more marked after two years than after one.
- There were significant reductions in bully/victim problems in school and there was no displacement of the problems to the journey to and from school. There was a reduction in general anti-social behaviour including vandalism, fighting, theft, and truancy.

- There was a marked improvement in the social climate of classes: improved order and discipline, better social relationships and an improved attitude to schoolwork and to school.
- The intervention programme affected not only existing bullying problems but also reduced the number of new victims.
- There was an increase in student satisfaction with school life (*Olweus,1993*).

In Ireland, The Department of Education issued Guidelines on Countering Bullying in Primary & Post-Primary Schools (1993) which included recommendations for a comprehensive Anti-Bullying Programme. Drawing from international research and The Department Guidelines, the Cool School Programme recommends the following elements for a comprehensive anti-bullying programme.

- Creation of a positive anti-bullying ethos and the raising of awareness about bullying.
- Whole-school preventative measures.
- Procedures for supervision and monitoring.
- Procedures for noting and reporting incidents.
- Strategies for investigating and resolving bullying problems.
- Parent Education.
- Specific curricular work with students.
- Strategies for supporting victims and bullies.
- Evaluation of the policy.



## A Conceptual Model for Managing Bullying

A useful framework for dealing with bullying behaviour is offered by the concept of Restorative, as opposed to Retributive Justice. This contrasts the traditional model of apportioning blame and applying punishment with a more holistic view, which seeks to restore the balance of relationships between pupils in school. The process of dealing with bullying incidents in school does not have to be draconian. In addition to supporting victims a restorative model also takes into account the needs of the person who is bullying.

### *Retributive Justice*

Misdemeanor defined as violation of school rules.

Focus on establishing blame, on guilt, on the past. (*Did you do it?*)

Adversarial relationship and process.

Punishment to deter/prevent.

Accountability defined as taking punishment. action, deciding to put things

Conflict seen as individual v. school.

Adapted by Hopkins (2002).

### *Restorative Justice*

Misdemeanor defined as violation of one person's rights by another.

Focus on problem-solving by expressing feelings and needs first, and then how to meet those needs.

Dialogue and negotiation. Everyone involved listening to each other.

Restitution. Reconciliation and restoration as goal.

Accountability defined as understanding the impact of the right and making reparation.

Misdemeanors recognised as interpersonal conflicts. Value of conflict as potential opportunity for learning recognised.

The Department of Education (*and Science*) circular "Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post Primary Schools" (1993) has several recommendations about investigation of bullying incidents.

### The Department Recommends

*Each school should have definite procedures for investigating and dealing with bullying behaviour.*

*Take a calm, unemotional problem-solving approach.*

*Investigate outside the classroom. Avoid public humiliation of students*

*Listen to all sides of the story. Speak separately to the pupils involved.*

*Be aware of the rights of all individuals.*

*Keep a written record of bullying incidents.*

### Cool School Advice

Teachers should implement procedures according to their own school's policy.

The privacy of an office or an empty classroom will help. Be clear about your own school's guidelines regarding the necessity to have a witness, parent or colleague present

It may be particularly helpful to enlist the help of a colleague, if there is a group involved.

Avoid jumping to conclusions.

This should be brief and factual. Avoid emotional or judgmental language.



*Retributive*



*Restorative*

# Strategies for Investigating and Resolving Bullying

It is important that the prevention, investigation, and management of bullying be an ongoing process in schools. There are many opportunities for school staff and management to address bullying, both formally and informally, for example by communicating with feeder schools, by asking for information on enrollment forms, by conversing with parents at induction and at parent teacher meetings. Informal networking between teachers on a day to day basis provides opportunities for pre-empting and monitoring. Where a specific technique is being used to respond to a particular situation in a class, it is important that all teachers involved with the class be informed of the approach being taken, and be given appropriate feedback. In any approach to resolving bullying, care should be taken to ensure that information supplied to or by a teacher is not used to further torment a victim.

Central to the programme is an ethos of respect in the school. The following strategies can be used as preventative measures as well as tools for investigating and resolving bullying. In schools where a pastoral system is in place, year heads or tutors may implement them during tutorial time. Alternatively, schools may choose to use them at SPHE, CSPE or Religion time.

## 1. Confidential Questionnaires.

This is the simplest and most obvious way of discovering who needs help in dealing with bullying in school. Here are some examples.

- One question which can be answered discreetly during class time. For example:

Name:	Class:			
Would you like to talk to someone about bullying?		Yes	No	

- A more confidential method would be to allow the same question to be answered at home, signed by parents and returned in a sealed envelope. Some schools do this on a regular basis.
- Questionnaires can also be used to monitor the effectiveness of a school's implementation of anti-bullying measures.

## 2. Bullying Sociogram

A sociogram is a useful strategy for understanding relationships in a class or group. The method employed is to ask each individual a series of questions designed to uncover the social dynamic in a class, thus identifying positive and negative influences in the group.

### Aims

#### Preventative

- To prevent bullying by adopting a proactive pastoral approach. The direct intervention of an individual teacher will build trust and confidence in the school's anti-bullying policy, and inspire better relationships amongst the pupils themselves. Awareness of the unacceptability of bullying will be raised even if there are no problems in the group.
- To provide a safe structure which encourages disclosure of bullying situations, thereby uncovering emerging or previously undetected cases.
- To establish a clear picture of the social dynamic operating within a class by identifying :
  - The power structure among students.
  - Levels of bullying and victimisation.
  - Students involved.
  - Students at risk.

This will give the teacher first hand information and a better understanding of the hidden sub-culture of the group.

- To identify strengths within the group, and by empowering bystanders, to encourage mutual support between students.

#### Reactive

- To investigate reported instances of bullying. This includes one-to-one bullying or incidents involving a group.
- To stop bullying by providing an immediate response, and to reduce the possibility of retaliation.

#### Procedural

- To embed anti-bullying measures into teachers' classroom practice. Information may also be used as an early warning system to form the basis of a team response by other subject teachers.
- To fit in with the school's discipline structure by allowing teachers to establish standards of acceptable behaviour.
- To facilitate the noting, recording and investigating of bullying as described in the Guidelines.

## When to use the Sociogram?

As a powerful preventative measure: the sociogram may be used very early in first year before serious patterns of negative behaviour take hold, and when students are beginning to form relationships with peers. Students will be reassured by the experience of a teacher who is supportive and is encouraging a safe and friendly atmosphere, and who is prepared to act with authority when necessary.

As a monitoring mechanism: it can be used at regular intervals as part of tutorial provision in the school.

As a non-confrontational intervention: it can be used in cases where bullying has already occurred.



## Steps for Implementation

1. Decide who should administer the sociogram and consult with school management, the in-school Anti-bullying support team, or pastoral team.
2. Seek the co-operation of the subject teacher and arrange for a double class period if possible.
3. At the appointed time, explain the purpose of the sociogram to students. Inform the whole class that you are going to talk to everyone about their experience of the class atmosphere, and whether it needs to be improved. Explain that this exercise is part of the school's anti-bullying measures. Tell the class that you will give them feedback.
4. Subject teacher continues work with the class, thus ensuring minimum disruption. Individual students are interviewed privately (*See sample form for key questions*). Inform each student of the confidential nature of the interview, reassuring them that they will not be identified as having provided information. Be clear that all students will be asked the same questions. This protects victims from retaliation, on the basis that the picture you have formed comes from the whole class contribution. Have the class list to hand to record information. You may find it helpful to make a visual representation of the information on a chart, especially where there is a recurring problem. Record the details.
5. A clear picture of the class dynamic will emerge. Discuss general findings with the whole class. Identify ways in which the class is working well in terms of co-operation and friendships. If this is overwhelmingly positive, the preventative aspect of the strategy will still have come into play. Praise the class for their co-operative spirit, and reward them if possible.
6. If problems have been identified, deal with problem behaviour immediately after having interviewed all students. Discuss evidence privately with individual students who were identified as behaving in a bullying manner.
7. Be specific about the problem behaviour, explain why it is wrong, and challenge the inappropriateness of it. Be clear that it is totally unacceptable in the school. Seek agreement on:
  - Facts.
  - Future behaviour.
  - Follow up meeting.

It may be useful to have a tutor or year head witness the agreement. Inform the offending young person that this will be monitored, and that other teachers will also be made aware of the situation. Arrange a time to review progress. Mention the rights of others. Explain to the student, that being popular in class is more likely to arise from being admired by others, rather than being feared. Emphasise that you have formed an opinion about their specific behaviour by talking to every student in the class. No particular person should be singled out for revenge or retaliation. This also applies to friends of the offending pupil. **Make it clear that you will be checking up on this.** Make a record.

8. Negotiate or renegotiate a class agreement regarding future acceptable behaviour.
9. Feed back results of the sociogram to class teachers, and decide on a strategy for supervision and monitoring.
10. Arrange to review progress with the class and with class teachers.

## SAMPLE BULLYING SOCIOGRAM FORM

Name of student

- Are you happy with the atmosphere in your class?
- Who are your friends?
- Are you being bullied in any way? *(If the answer is yes, gather details and reassure the pupil that the problem will be addressed.)*
- Is there anyone in the class being picked on or having a hard time?
- Is anyone being left out, or ignored?
- Is there anyone spreading rumours or gossip, or using notes, phone calls or text messages to make others feel bad about themselves?
- Is anyone being unfair to others?
- Is there a group of pupils making life difficult for others?
- Are pupils from other classes giving anyone in this class a hard time?
- Can you give examples?
- Who do you think is causing the problem?
- What can you do to help students who are having a hard time?
- Have you been bullying anyone?

Who is bullying? e.g.	What is the behaviour?	Who is it directed towards?
John	Pushing, name calling	Tom
	Three pupils mentioned this	
Niamh Orla	Used to be friends with Mary, now excluding her from the group. Reported by Mary and Liz	Mary

Conclude by reminding all pupils about the school's anti-bullying policy. Thank them for their co-operation, and mention that you will be acting on the information you have received.

### 3. Class Observation

Class observation involves all subject teachers recording peer behaviour over an agreed period, pooling the information, and deciding on an agreed course of action. This observation is carried out unobtrusively. Class observation is a useful tool for discovering the dynamic at work in a group and provides a more comprehensive method of dealing with negative behaviour and maximising constructive behaviour. It can also be used to monitor events following the use of the Bullying Sociogram. Teachers may find class observation useful where bullying is suspected but more evidence is required to identify its source. In cases where bullying has been reported and there is a risk of retaliation, this strategy protects confidentiality and enables evidence to be gathered through direct teacher observation. It may also be used to gather information where teachers are being bullied, especially by a group of students.

#### Aims:

- To improve class atmosphere, thereby protecting the rights of pupils and teachers.
- To co-ordinate teachers' response to bullying behaviour.
- To identify and encourage constructive influences in the class.
- To record problematic behaviour accurately.
- To identify pupils who need support including those engaged in questionable behaviour.
- To provide management and parents with accurate information about bullying.
- To enable teachers to establish standards of what is acceptable and unacceptable and to implement these.

*Class observation is best carried out discreetly and confidentially with the support of a principal, who will facilitate teachers' meetings to pool information and ensure follow up.*

#### Steps for implementation

1. Convene an initial meeting of subject teachers.
2. Indicate the nature of the problem.
3. Explain the procedure.
4. Emphasise confidentiality.
5. Fix a date for returning completed forms. Two weeks should suffice, but urgent issues arising should be dealt with immediately under school procedures.
6. Gather evidence and record on Observation Forms.
7. Convene follow up meeting of subject teachers and pool information.
8. Decide on appropriate response.
9. Interview students concerned. *(See following section on interview techniques)*
10. Review progress with class teachers.

## SAMPLE CLASS OBSERVATION FORM

TEACHER.....CLASS.....DATE / /

Time	Name of Pupil	Behaviour	Directed Towards
e.g.			
3.15	John	Sniggered when pupil asked a question	Mary
	Philip	Joined in with sarcastic guffaw	Mary
	Ann	Joined in by staring contemptuously	Mary
2.30	Sarah	Defended Mary who was being teased	John

Although much of the bullying in school takes place in the classroom, behaviour in corridors, playgrounds, toilet areas, changing rooms etc should also be included. Very often ancillary staff in schools are very knowledgeable about what is really going on, and their observations and comments should be encouraged.



## 4. Interviewing Techniques.

This section deals primarily with an interview with someone accused of bullying others. However the general approach and structure may also be used with victims and bystanders, adjusting the content as necessary. Teachers may find it useful to consult the first booklet in this series, “Responding to Bullying, First Steps for Teachers”

### Interviewing an alleged bully. Background considerations

- Young people who are bullying others may respond in different ways when confronted. It is important to be aware of how an involved person might feel and the attitudes that may be displayed. The fear of being caught, labelled a bully, punished or expelled may inspire defiance, or a visible display of power. Students who feel cornered may decide never to admit wrongdoing.
- Some young people may feel ashamed of their involvement in bullying behaviour, and may feel guilty. Because of a desire to save face, they may deny all knowledge of involvement. Other pupils when challenged may respond by saying nothing, or by agreeing with everything that is said. The likelihood here is that the student will offer temporary compliance, without fundamentally reconsidering a change of behaviour.
- Occasionally, bullies have no feelings of shame, guilt, or empathy with their victim’s suffering. Expecting a response on the basis of remorse may not be productive. In such cases the consequences of bullying behaviour must be made very explicit.
- Even when there is an anti-bullying policy in place, some young people may be unaware that their bullying behaviour is wrong. This will have to be explained clearly, especially to those who tend to respond aggressively to problematic situations.
- In school environments where bullying has not been effectively addressed, many of the bullying behaviours which students inflict on each other may be socially acceptable. Pupils may be modelling the behaviour of others, or may be behaving in accordance with accepted hidden traditions. This occurs, for example where there is covert acceptance by students and staff of bullying of 1st. year students, new students, or of vulnerable students.
- The challenge to a teacher is to disarm these attitudes, fears and beliefs and the non-confrontational approach suggested here may help to diffuse tension.

## Key elements of an interview

Before proceeding with an interview with a young person in relation to a particular incident, it will be very useful to have used the sociogram as described above.

### Privacy

Pupils usually disclose more in private because they feel safer. Dealing with incidents in public can cause unnecessary embarrassment for the victim, increasing vulnerability, and may encourage confrontation and denial on the offender's side. Privacy is also important for witnesses and other members of the class. They may be experiencing subtle pressure to support one side or the other, or worse still, threats may have been made.

In a case where group bullying is suspected, teachers will find it helpful to enlist the help of a colleague to interview members of the group individually.

### Non-confrontational approach

After welcoming the pupil and thanking them for their co-operation let him/her

know that you see yourself as facilitating problem-solving, rather than as a person who dishes out punishment. Take a non-confrontational approach and use "I" statements (*see examples below*). This will reduce tension and build trust. Avoid labelling of the young person as a "Bully". Refer to the behaviour rather than the person. Be calm, constructive, and adopt a problem-solving approach, and allow enough time for the interview. Most young people respond to patience, and the opportunity to talk, rather than to pressure, anger, or impatience.

## Examples of opening statements

These are designed to inspire confidence in the young person that he/she will be treated fairly. You may wish to use some or all of them, depending on your own style.

- There seems to be some difficulty between yourself and Mary. I am here to help resolve the situation. I need your co-operation to get it sorted out, because I feel your contribution to the solution is going to be extremely important. Your help is going to make all the difference. Allow time to respond.
- If you have made a mistake in your behaviour, even if it is a serious one, I want to help you work things out. The most important thing from everyone's point of view is that it never happens again. I think it is very important that it is settled here and now. Allow time to respond
- This talk is between the two of us for the moment, and I don't want to involve the school principal, or parents at this point. (*NB. Serious cases may need to be referred on straight away*).

- We have dealt with a lot of different kinds of situations and we usually manage to sort things out, even serious problems. Allow time to respond.

At this point it should be clear to the teacher whether the young person is responding to the approach being taken. Every opportunity to co-operate is being extended to them in as friendly, non-threatening, and constructive a manner as possible. Check that the young person understands what you are saying, and what your approach is. Ask whether they would like anything clarified or repeated. Give them time to think over what you have said.

### Seeking further information

The following questions will provide the teacher with contextual information.

- How do you get on with the other student/s?
- Did you know one another before this incident took place?
- How long do you know one-another?
- Is there a history to what happened, or did it come out of the blue?
- Do you think it will be easy to get back on good terms with the other person?

Offer a choice between writing down what happened, and talking about it. Writing is less confrontational, especially for young people who might regard any one-to-one interaction with a teacher as adversarial.

- Let's have a look at the incident now. I need to understand your involvement. Can you help me fill in the details from your point of view?  
This is what I need to be clear about.
  - What happened?
  - When and where did it take place?
  - Who was involved?
  - What part did you play?
  - Was there more than one person involved on either side?
  - Were there any witnesses?
  - Did this take place more than once?
  - Have you been involved in anything like this before?

- Encourage the young person to focus on taking responsibility for their own actions, rather than attributing blame to others or the group. Don't accept standard techniques for saving face such as "I was only messing", or "We were all doing it". Bypass these comments and ask the young person to talk about *their* specific role at the time. For example ask:

What did **you** actually say or do?  
How would someone else who witnessed the incident describe your actions?  
Would you do the same thing again, or act differently?  
What did you do wrong?  
Do you understand what was wrong about it?  
What is the problem about what you did?

- How do you feel about the situation?
- Are you worried about what is going to happen?
- What do you think is fair in the situation?
- This is what I think is fair: *(Outline a fair outcome such as, apologising, agreeing to mediation, signing an agreement with a parent present, agreement to speak with a counsellor, paying for damage, returning money or the equivalent value of property, detention, suspension.)*

Invite a comment from the young person at this stage. A co-operative attitude should be praised on the spot. If the solution to the problem is agreed by all concerned, the matter may be concluded.

### **What if there is complete denial?**

Cases will arise from time to time where there is complete denial of involvement. Repeat the evidence as you see it, and try again. It may be necessary to protect the confidentiality of the source of your information. Stay focussed on what you believe actually took place. Do not accuse the young person of lying.

- This is the situation as I see it. *(Give details).*
- Anybody who examined it would think the same about your responsibility.
- I do not accept that I am hearing the full story from what has been said so far.

Explain your role again as above, and let the young person know that this is a very positive opportunity for them to be forthright and honest. If there is still denial, explain that you are not going to let the matter rest until it has been resolved, and outline what the next steps are according to school policy.

For example:

Reporting the matter to the Principal.  
Initiating a wider investigation.  
Contacting parents.  
Contacting outside agencies such as the Juvenile Liaison Officer, or the Gardai. National Educational Psychological Services may have a role if it appears that there are psychological difficulties.

Whether or not there is an admission of involvement, it is critically important to be unequivocal about the immediate and future behaviour of the young person.

It should be made clear that

- The specific behaviour you have discussed should cease immediately
- That the young person is made aware that disciplinary implications already apply in the situation.
- Agreement should be sought about not taking revenge against the victim or others whom the bully suspects may have provided information to teachers.
- If agreement is not forthcoming, a warning should be given which also extends to friends of the bully.
- Measures need to be taken by the school to ensure the safety of the victim, and to supervise the behaviour of any others involved. A case discussion involving school management and other relevant personnel will decide on possible sanctions.
- If bullying continues, management have to choose between suspension/expulsion or referral of the offender for clinical psychological assessment. An assessment will point to whether the young person has psychological/psychiatric difficulties contributing to the behaviour or not, and whether anger management training might be a useful next step.
- Discuss with the parents the possibility of counselling their son/daughter.
- Keep a record of the interview.

# SAMPLE BULLYING RECORD FORM

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_

Names of students involved \_\_\_\_\_

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Details of Incident \_\_\_\_\_

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Action Taken (*Warning, Sanctions, Referral, Agreement, Mediation, Other*)

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Signed Student \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Parent \_\_\_\_\_

Suggestions for follow up \_\_\_\_\_

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## 5. Reconciliation and Mediation

There are circumstances where reconciliation between the parties is possible. However in practice it may be more effective to tell the young people involved to leave each other alone. The same instruction should apply to friends on both sides, whether they are in the school or not.

### When is Mediation appropriate?

Where you believe reconciliation may be achieved with further support, mediation through the skilled facilitation of a teacher may be a useful next step. The advantage of arranging and facilitating mediation for young people is that it involves them in problem-solving at their own level. It gives them a sense of ownership of the solution, rather than imposing it from outside. The process itself can be as valuable as the end result, because it allows divergent points of view and attitudes to emerge and be resolved in a structured and safe way. The presence of an adult helps provide focus, fairness, and safety to the interaction. A crucial consideration to be borne in mind is the openness of the participants to the process. **A young person who has been victimised will need to feel confident enough to face a direct meeting with someone who has caused them suffering, and the teacher should be aware that this may take time. Some young people may never feel confident enough to engage in the mediation process.**

### When is mediation not appropriate?

A young person who insists on minimising the effects of their bullying behaviour is not ready for mediation. They need to show that they understand what is wrong about their behaviour, and be prepared to change. In rare situations there are young people with poor conscience development who will not be suitable for mediation. In assessing the situation, the guiding principle should be that mediation should not make matters worse, and that the bullying should stop.



### Preparation for mediation

In order to assess the suitability of the candidates for mediation, it is necessary to hold an individual preparatory interview with both parties. There should be a clear assurance of safety and an atmosphere of welcome and affirmation. Explain the process and clarify that the objective of mediation is to resolve the conflict. Allow each person to tell the story from their point of view. This will show where points of difference and similarity lie and help the facilitator to establish what would be a fair solution to the problem.

Set the ground rules for mediation. There should be an attitude of respect on all sides and each person must listen to the other's story without interruption. Each party's contribution should be treated with respect and must not be spoken about in a way that would be considered abusive by either party. Encourage both to come to mediation prepared to reach agreement and with suggestions for solving the problem.

Mediation process	Values to foster
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mediation should take place in a calm atmosphere, so it should be arranged for a time when both parties have had an opportunity to de-stress, and not in the immediate aftermath of an incident.</li><li>• Welcome both young people and reiterate the objective of mediation.</li><li>• Facilitator starts by stating briefly his/her understanding of the situation. Give each party a chance to respond or clarify.</li><li>• Focus particularly on expression of feelings, encouraging a response from the other, e.g. "Were you aware that Jane felt as badly as this about what happened? Now that you are aware of how she feels, what difference do you think it will make to how you relate in the future?"</li><li>• Using a flip chart or blackboard list the issues, highlighting the areas of agreement and concern.</li><li>• Check each party for new information and new understandings.</li></ul>	<p>Respect Teamwork Collaboration Trust-building</p> <p>Communication Empathy Recognition &amp; Acceptance of differences. Validation</p> <p>Honesty Integrity.</p>



We advocate the use of The Cool School Programme in second level schools, i.e. Confidential Questionnaires, Bullying Sociogram, Class Observation, Interview Techniques and Mediation for the following reasons:

1. The Cool School Approach is flexible and has the advantage of being preventative as well as reactive.
2. It offers methods of investigation which aim for restorative rather than retributive justice.
3. It addresses the problem of one-to-one bullying, group bullying and whole class involvement.
4. It provides an effective monitoring tool for teachers to tackle group bullying by using Class Observation.
5. It facilitates an anti-bullying ethos in the school and raises standards of discipline, by becoming part of the discipline structure of the school.
6. Accuracy of information can be checked out by using the Sociogram.
7. The Cool School approach provides knowledge of the group dynamics at work in a class or school. Information from the wider group is taken into account when solving problems.
8. Use of the Sociogram and the Confidential Questionnaire provides a safe method for disclosure.
9. It aims to reduce the defensive stance of a bully by using a pastoral approach.
10. It engages bystanders in the resolution of problems.
11. It provides for follow-up with all parties.
12. It offers an effective method of record keeping.
13. It results in the negotiation or renegotiation of a class agreement.





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This publication is the second in a series of three produced by the 'Cool School' Anti-bullying team. Other titles in the series are:

*Responding to Bullying-First Steps for Teachers*  
*Bullying in Schools-Advice for Parents (in preparation)*

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