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Protective Physical Environment

An assessment of the school’s physical environment is conducted annually.

During a school day, students spend approximately 80 minutes involved in free play during recess and lunch breaks. During this time students need a variety of play areas that are well supervised and areas they can go to if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. The identification by students of areas where they feel less safe and clear guidelines or policies regarding the use of these areas will help schools to reduce the potential for bullying behaviour.

An assessment of the school’s physical environment can involve mapping and reviewing aspects of the environment which may enable or prevent bullying. For example, mapping these areas will allow the school to see overlapping supervision areas or areas that lack adequate supervision or safety. It is also important to consider access to facilities and equipment for all age groups.

The following are suggestions for reviewing the school’s physical environment as well as procedures for reporting and recording school bullying incidents, followed by questions that will help to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods.

Step 1: Mapping your school’s physical environment

Use a map of the school to identify:

* outdoor and recreation areas (by year level if applicable)
* outdoor equipment
* out-of-bounds areas
* safest areas
* supervision areas, including the number of staff assigned to each area and time-out areas

An example of a student-friendly school map can be found by in *Protective physical environment toolkit 5.A* or use existing maps of the school.

Step 2: Mapping locations of bullying incidents

Using the map of the school’s physical environment delineating the safest areas, supervision areas, boundaries and so on, highlight the hotspots where bullying

incidents are typically occurring using the school’s records of bullying incidents. Consider supplying rough maps of the school (inside and out) or take photographs around the school and ask students to highlight the places they believe bullying (including cyberbullying) takes place or where they feel unsafe. In a secondary setting, students can also be challenged by seeking submissions from students detailing their safer schoolyard designs, rationale and recommendations. Compare these hot spots with the supervision boundaries, access to activities or equipment and out-of-bounds areas.

Step 3: Review of the physical environment map

Discuss the results of schoolyard mapping with all staff. Using the *Protective physical environment toolkit 5.A* planning sheet, consider the potential problem areas and plan strategies for action. Consider the following questions while completing this review:

* + - * **Are adequate areas provided for all students to play or spend time together?**

Are there grassed, shaded, covered and paved areas, sports and other equipment, and open spaces for students of all ages?

* + - * **Are areas identified where students should not be spending time?**

Are there areas that are unsafe, where supervision is limited or where students are blocked from the view of duty teachers?

* + - * **Are there some areas that are currently considered out-of-bounds which could become safer areas for students to spend time?**

For example, the library provides a non-threatening environment that is often seen by students as an area that has more teacher supervision and can, therefore, be safer from bullying than the schoolyard.

* + - * **Are areas available during break times with higher levels of teacher supervision for students who may feel unsafe?**

Areas supervised by empathetic staff members should be provided within all school environ ments to enable students to seek refuge if they are bullied during break times.

* + - * **Are time-out areas provided for students who display antisocial or bullying behaviours?** Asking students who are engaging in bullying or other antisocial behaviour to take some time out from the situation, provides an opportunity for them to "cool down" and reflect on their actions.
      * **Are all outside areas supervised by teachers?**

Recording the location and the types of activities students are engaging in allows the school to provide adequate levels of supervision.

* + - * **Do all staff perceive it is their role to intervene in bullying incidents in the schoolyard?** Some staff can be reluctant to intervene in a bullying incident. Ensure staff are able to identify a bullying incident and respond in accordance with school procedures set out in school behav iour policies.

Top tips for school improvement

* Improve the coverage of teacher supervision of outdoor areas and bullying hot spots.
* Create safer areas for students to spend time during class breaks to avoid being bullied.
* Establish a time-out area for students who have behaved inappropriately to spend time during class breaks.
* Provide staff with skills and confidence to identify and respond effectively in bullying incidents.
* Create out-of-bounds areas where teacher supervision is limited and/or bullying is prevalent.

An attractive, friendly school environment is maintained.

Well-maintained attractive school environments can impact positively on student attitude, behaviour, motivation and connectedness. Some ways to make schools more attractive include:

* Removing graffiti as quickly as possible
* Providing forms for reporting school maintenance and improvements that are needed around the school and acting on them
* Regularly check cleanliness and temperatures of all learning areas
* Creating garden beds using a variety of different plants
* Displaying student artwork and photographs around the school
* Acknowledging at assemblies and in news or e-letters the commitment of the school community to maintaining school buildings and grounds

Developmentally appropriate, competitive and non-competitive games and activities are provided during break times to assist students’ skill development and understanding of social rules.

Break times can provide students with opportunities to socialise and engage in activities with their peers in a safe, supported environment. When school members consistently model, encourage and recognise appropriate social behaviours, they increase the likelihood of promoting positive behaviours and preventing bullying behaviours.

Schools can allow students to develop pro-social skills, extend key understandings about social rules and practise behaving appropriately in both structured and semi-structured environments when they provide:

* + a range of semi-structured indoor and outdoor activities
  + supervised activities for rainy days
  + recreational and hobby clubs
  + blogs managed by school staff

Ways schools can create more pro-social schoolyards include:

* + providing equipment which allows for different levels of challenging play
  + using attractive, age appropriate outdoor equipment
  + facilitating greater use by students of available equipment

Step 1: Activity review

Using Protective physical environment toolkit 5.C, list all the equipment, such as playground and sporting equipment and activities, e.g. lunchtime concerts, teacher-led activities and library access, that are available to students. Compile this list over several days involving as many staff as possible to ensure all activities and equipment available to students is captured.

For all equipment and activities, complete the “Who accesses?”, “How could access be improved?” and “Comments” columns. Consider the following:

* + What equipment and activities cater for developmental needs of students of all ages?
  + How can this access be improved?
  + Is there equity in the access to equipment and activities for all ages? If not, how can this be improved?
  + Do students know in which areas they can spend their break times?
  + Are students using these areas?
  + Which groups of students would like to spend time in areas they are currently not allowed?
  + Can provision be made to accommodate these groups?

Step 2: Planning

Distribute the completed Protective physical environment toolkit 5.C to staff, students and parents to seek their input into the activities and equipment which are made available to students during break times to validate the initial list.

Using this information, work through Protective physical environment toolkit 5.D to prioritise areas for improvement, for example, provision of new line markings on court areas and improved access to existing equipment and activities. This toolkit will assist staff to identify the areas of concern, suggest strategies to overcome these problem areas and assign staff and a timeline for completing the changes.

Outdoor areas, out-of-bounds areas and “safer” areas are clearly identiﬁed to students and students are encouraged to spend time in areas where adequate supervision is provided.

Students and their families need to be informed of the reasons behind some of the decisions regarding where students can and cannot spend break times. When there are consistent messages and clear understandings around the use of the schoolyard, students are more likely to understand and respect the boundaries.

Using Protective physical environment toolkit 5.A, as described earlier in this chapter, provides a clear representation of which areas are available to students.

Competent supervision is provided by school staff.

Encouraging students to spend time in areas where the level of adult supervision is high will reduce the invisibility of bullying behaviour. School-wide data collection on the prevalence of bullying, including where and when bullying occurs, can be used to inform the provision of well-organised supervision from trained staff to ensure:

* + signs and symptoms of bullying are identified
  + situations are responded to in a timely manner
  + students feel safe
  + all areas of the school grounds that students may access are visible to duty staff
  + hot spots are identified
  + out-of-bounds areas are defined
  + improved use of the schoolyard by all students

Questions to review staff supervision during break times

* + - **Is there a formal reporting process or system for bullying incidents in the schoolyard?** Establish if one exists and define the benefits for your school of having a formal reporting system. See *Component 3, Proactive policies and practices* for further information relating to the development of a reporting system.
    - **To what extent are all staff, students and parents aware of this reporting procedure?** Whole-school community awareness of the process of reporting incidents ensures effective and supported implementation across the school.
    - **Is there a central register of all reported incidents in the schoolyard?**

A central record system enables the effective recording, monitoring and follow-up of bullying incidents.

* + - **Who maintains the record system and what do they do with the information?**

Assign the management of the central record system to a few key staff. The same key staff would ideally be trained in using the Shared Concern method and other restorative techniques to effectively respond to bullying incidents (see *Proactive policies and practices toolkits 3.C, 3.D* and *3.E*).

* **Is there a system to monitor reported incidents for emerging bullying behaviour trends and repeat offenders?**

Maintaining a central record system makes it easier for key staff to identify students who are repeatedly bullying others and those being bullied frequently as well as the locations where bullying is occurring. Monitoring reported incidents will also allow the school to identify bul lying “hot spots” and modify schoolyard supervision accordingly.

* Competent supervision across the school grounds is one of the most effective strategies to reduce bullying behaviour. The following questions may assist the school to assess and refine its supervision strategies to help reduce and effectively manage bullying that occurs outside of the classroom.
* **Is there a coordinated and regularly updated supervision roster?**

It is important that the staff on duty or supervision roster is considered to be as important as staffing classrooms with appropriately trained staff. Supervision during break times must

be consistent, supported by staff who are trained and know how to respond according to the school’s behaviour policies.

* **Are all staff trained to identify and respond effectively to bullying behaviour?**

Training staff in the school’s preferred methods for reducing bullying incidents (from the be- haviour policies) is important before they conduct supervision duties at break times.

* **Are all staff trained in the school’s system of recording incidents of bullying?**

The whole-school community needs to be aware of the process of reporting incidents to en sure effective and supported implementation across the school.

* **Does the school use bright duty teacher vests to help students quickly and easily identify support staff?**

Schools have found that having duty teachers clearly visible to other staff and students makes students feel safer. Students report it is also easier to identify a teacher when they need one.