

School Stories

Protective Physical Environment – Example 2

Brief background to school initiative

Parental expectations spurred the introduction of a new anti-bullying program.

School profile

- Rural government school
- 140 students
- Years: F - 7
- This school is part of a community that is experiencing significant change. A large proportion of the community is no longer involved in farming.

Action

Students who engaged in bullying were put on a reward and contract system. Parents, the principal, and the student signed a contract which identifies the rewards for appropriate behaviour and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. Inappropriate behaviours were outlined. The school believed that this system would help to formalise behaviour management strategies because all participants (teachers, parents and students) were involved in the formulation of the contract.

To ensure the behaviour management plan was followed by the school community, the school ensured that staff, students and parents had a chance to provide input into the plan. Rewards and consequences were clearly identified to the students and it was stressed that the plan had a positive focus, with positive steps taken before punishment. The plan was regularly reviewed.

The school formed a bullying prevention committee consisting of three parents, two Year 7 students and two staff members. The school wanted to encourage peer groups to be vigilant about bullying at the school, hence the involvement of the two Year 7 students on the committee. The committee conducted a bullying survey and from the results they identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school's policy. Both junior and upper



primary students were asked a range of questions related to bullying and the school's approach. These included:

- Where does bullying occur?
- How often does it occur?
- Do you feel safe?
- Do the teachers care about you?

The data were collected, collated and presented to the bullying committee for review. Parents were sent brochures informing them of the survey's results. These data indicated that the students generally felt safe, but were able to identify areas where bullying did occur. The school believed that by raising awareness of bullying behaviour, students were less likely to engage in it and more likely to stand up to bullying behaviour by others.

Strategies suggested by the committee that the school believes worked well included developing the social skills of students, role-playing activities and the development of assertive skills. In upper school, the need to model positive behaviour to other students was emphasised. Students were encouraged to enlist the support of their peers if they were being bullied. To reduce schoolyard bullying, staff reviewed the school plan and made some school areas out-of-bounds if they were difficult to monitor. Staff paid particular attention to areas where bullying occurred more often and ensured there was an even use of facilities so that there was less chance that students may become upset with each other.

The school newsletter was used to keep parents informed of what was going on in the school.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

Staff were worried that the introduction of a specific anti-bullying policy would be viewed as evidence of a bullying problem at the school and become labelled as a "bullying" school. The school had a good name and the staff didn't want to make it appear the school had problems.

Overcoming difficulties

The principal reassured staff that rather than being given a bad name, the school would be seen as being proactive and caring. Staff were provided with information about other schools that were introducing similar programs.

Changes to make

In hindsight, the school would have made the survey instrument a little more specific to their needs as the one they used was too general.