

School Stories

Supportive School Culture – Example 3

Brief background to school initiative

Data collected by the school indicated that a social skills initiative was necessary. The teachers felt their students needed to understand that consequences for inappropriate behaviour were directed at their ‘behaviour’ and not at the child. Also the school experienced an influx of new teachers with skills in peer support. There was a realisation that the number of 15 to 25 year olds in the area was rapidly increasing, and thus the number of students would likely increase too. All these factors were taken into consideration when planning and implementing the bullying prevention strategies.

School profile

- Metropolitan government school
- 780 students
- Years: F - 7

Action

Input for the bullying prevention plan was received from both the staff and a student cohort. When revising the plan, the school organised ‘parent coffee chats’ to discuss the proposed changes. If parents were unable to attend these chats they were sent an A4 size flyer outlining the changes.

The school organised a collaborative problem-solving team. The problem-solving team consisted of one administration representative, three teachers (one male, two female) from pre-primary, Year 4 and Year 7. Teachers who experienced difficulties in the classroom approached the problem solving team to discuss the issue. The group discussed the problem and suggested potential strategies and methods for its resolution. The teachers and the problem solving team also approached parents to discuss such situations and how they could assist in the reduction of the problem.



The school introduced a Climate Committee which involved the students and teachers. The committee ran regular features in the school newsletter, organised activities for 'Kindness Week', and organised a time capsule (that is to be opened in 25 years). The committee was set up with the help of the Lions Quest International. They aided in the production of some books and provided staff training. This involved a two-day professional development program, Skills for Working with Adolescents, which was paid for by the Life Skills Committee of the local council. In the first year the training was only available to staff and in the second year parents were also able to attend. Additional staff training was provided by the Centre for Adolescent Mental Health and the school psychologist. The presentations discussed issues for adolescents (peer pressure, bullying) and their effects on students.

Classroom strategies included discussions, role-play and creative writing. For lower primary students the period after lunch was used to sit in a circle and discuss what had happened in the playground, how it made others feel and how things could be improved. Upper primary students also conducted discussion groups, where they used examples from the media to discuss issues related to bullying and harassment. Teachers used drama, health and language to act out and discuss issues of bullying without directly focusing on issues within the classroom.

The school established a student council and a peer support program. Year 7 students chosen as peer supporters were given a whole day of training. It was held outside the school and students learnt skills such as negotiation, assertiveness and team building through a variety of games and activities. At every lunch and recess break two peer supporters patrolled the playground and resolved problems that were brought to them by other students.

The school has conducted several evaluation surveys. Both the peer supports and parents were surveyed in relation to all of the actions that the school has implemented throughout the school year. Staff meetings were held once a term to discuss issues relating to any of the programs and activities that had run. If any changes were implemented they were advertised in the school newsletter.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

One of the main difficulties the school experienced was the mismatched expectations of parents compared to overall school expectations.

Overcoming difficulties

Lots of talking and meetings were held with parents. One strategy used to help parents realise the true actions of their children in school, was to talk to parents on the phone before students had a chance to get home and lie to parents to avoid punishment. Parents are reluctant to believe the school's side of events if it means believing their child has lied.

If we could do it over

The school realised the need to focus on consequences for behaviour, not punishment of the child. It is important to understand that you're not going to get rid of all bullying; support is the most important thing. Documentation is also helpful to remind parents of past discussions and actions taken.

Recommendations for other schools

Everyone must be involved and consistent if the program is to work. The school believes that bullying should be looked at under the umbrella of pastoral care, as opposed to behaviour management.

Next steps

The school plans for their newly set up Behaviour Management Committee to review their hierarchy of consequences. The Climate Committee will also include students next year.