



District School Board of Niagara

Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan

2023

Table of Contents

What is Bullying?	3
Identity-Based Bullying	4
Behaviours Commonly Mistaken for Bullying	4
Cyber-bullying and other safety risks	5
Sexual Harassment and Sexual Bullying	5
Information for Parents and Families	6
Signs Your Child May Be Experiencing Bullying	6
Signs Your Child May Be Bullying Others	6
How Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can Report Bullying to the School	6
What Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can Expect from the School after Bullying has occurred	7
What Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can Do to Prevent and Intervene in Bullying	7
Preschool Age	7
Elementary School Age	8
High School Age	9
What Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can do to Promote Online Safety and Protect their Children from Cyber-Bullying	10
Prevention and Awareness at School	11
Establishing and Enforcing School Rules	11
CRRP Approach	11
Trauma-Informed Approach	12
School Activities and Curriculum	12
Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs	13
Supports and Interventions at School	13
Supporting Students Who Experience Bullying	14
Supporting Students Who Have Engaged in Bullying	14
Restorative Justice Practices	15
School Procedures and Progressive Student Discipline	15
Professional Development	15
Communications and Outreach Strategies	16
Monitoring and Review	17

Background

The District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) believes that providing students with an opportunity to learn and develop in a safe and respectful society is a shared responsibility in which school boards and schools play an important role. A safe, inclusive, and accepting learning environment that inspires lifelong learning and fosters healthy meaningful relationships is essential for student success and well-being. A whole-school approach to an inclusive school climate based on caring and respectful relationships among and between students, teachers, other school staff and families is a necessary supporting condition to ensure students feel a strong sense of belonging so that they may learn and thrive.

The DSBN recognizes that:

- bullying adversely affects a student’s well-being and ability to learn;
- bullying adversely affects the school climate, including healthy relationships; and
- bullying, including cyber-bullying, is a serious issue and is not acceptable in the school environment (including virtual), in a school-related activity, or in any other circumstances that will have an impact on the school climate.

The Ministry of Education’s [Policy/Program Memorandum \(PPM\) 144: Bullying Intervention and Prevention](#), released in 2007 and re-issued in November 2021, provides guidance to support bullying prevention and intervention in schools. Consistent with this direction, in June 2015, the DSBN Board of Trustees approved [Policy G-29: Safe and Accepting Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention](#).

PPM 144 acknowledges that bullying prevention and intervention occurs within a broader system of actions to strengthen human rights and education within education, and as such, intersects with [PPM 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools](#), [PPM 120: Reporting Violent Incidents to the Ministry of Education](#), [PPM 128: The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct](#), and [PPM 145: Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour](#). Bullying prevention and intervention also intersects with the DSBN’s strategies and policies that promote mental health and well-being, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism, parent engagement, and learning that takes place throughout the curriculum.

What is Bullying?

Bullying is typically aggressive, repeated behaviour that causes another student to be harmed or to feel afraid or distressed. The harm may be physical, psychological, social, or academic, including damaging the other student’s reputation or property. This creates a negative environment at school for the student.

Bullying can be:

- physical, for example, hitting, pushing, tripping, stealing, or damaging property;
- verbal or written, for example, name-calling, threats, humiliating, mocking, or making sexist, racist, or homophobic comments;

- social, for example, excluding a peer from a group, spreading gossip or rumours, making a peer look foolish, or deliberately damaging a peer's relationships; or
- electronic/cyber, for example, sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, private, or malicious content about a peer using text messages, apps, social media, forums, websites, or gaming.

In addition, the student who is being bullied inherently has less power than the bully. A power imbalance can be based on many factors, for example:

- body size, shape, strength, or appearance;
- age;
- intelligence or academic success;
- peer group or social status;
- economic status or family circumstances;
- religion or creed;
- ethnic origin or race;
- sexual orientation;
- gender, gender identity, or gender expression; or
- disability or the receipt of special education.

Bullying can thus occur in situations where there are real or perceived power imbalances between individuals or groups, and it may be a symptom of racism, classism, homophobia, ableism, sexism, religious discrimination, ethnic discrimination or other forms of bias and discrimination. It may also arise from perceptions about differences that are often based on stereotypes perpetuated in society.

Identity-Based Bullying

Identity-based or bias-based bullying describes any form of bullying related to an individual's social identity/ies (actual or perceived) or minority status, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, cultural practices, ability/disability, gender, or sexual orientation. This form of bullying is characterized by the targeting of an individual due to an aspect of their social identity, and/or by content of bullying that focusses on identity characteristics. It is distinct from other types of bullying because it reflects negative attitudes towards an entire group, as opposed to only a single individual. As such, it involves the perpetration of physical, verbal, social, and/or psychological harm that is rooted in discrimination and racism.

It has the effect of further diminishing an individual's social identity and underlining their marginalized position. A child or youth's experience of identity-based bullying, during a critically sensitive period of development such as adolescence, can have negative impacts on their general mental and physical well-being and identity development.

Behaviours Commonly Mistaken for Bullying

Sometimes, students mistakenly report bullying when they are experiencing challenges getting along with one or more peers. The key difference between conflict and bullying is that conflict is a problem or disagreement between equals; there is no power imbalance and bullying is repetitive and not a one-time incident. Conflict can sometimes be confused for bullying, because if it is not managed, it may

escalate to the point of aggressive behaviour. Schools have methods of responding to and managing student conflict.

Another key difference between conflict and bullying is that conflict is a developmentally normative task that children and youth inevitably encounter as they learn how to navigate interactions with others and develop healthy relationships. Bullying, on the other hand, is a concerning and harmful experience that is not recommended as a component of healthy child development. It is not just kids being kids.

Cyber-bullying and other safety risks

Cyber-bullying is the act of engaging in bullying behaviors through electronic means such as social media platforms, email, text or direct messaging, digital gaming and/or communication application. In contrast to other forms of bullying, harassment, humiliation, threatening of others, and intimidation through cyber-bullying can occur at all hours. Cyber-bullying can also reach children and youth at all locales, even in the comfort of their own homes, causing them to feel a sense of loneliness, isolation, fear and despair.

The increasing time that children and youth spend on their cell phones, other technological devices, and digital platforms has enhanced the threat of cyber-bullying, as well as other risks. Bullying, including cyber-bullying, may intersect with other forms of sexual exploitation including, but not limited to, sextortion and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Traffickers and other sexual predators are increasingly using fake accounts to pose as acquaintances or friends of children and youth to lure, groom and recruit them into engaging in sexual acts or services.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Bullying

Sexual harassment is a form of bullying or harassment that involves unwelcome or unwanted sexual attention, both physical and verbal. This unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention can hurt a person's dignity and make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Also described as sexual bullying, sexual harassment refers to bullying or harassment that is sexualized in nature, related to sexuality, and/or related to gender expression or identity.

Sexual harassment or sexual bullying can involve sending unwanted messages asking for sex, or messages that are of a sexual nature; making sexist comments or jokes; spreading sexual rumours; making crude comments about someone's sexual behaviour or sexual orientation; making comments about a person's physical appearance or attractiveness; harassing someone due to their gender identity and gender expression (i.e., an individual from 2SLGBTQ+ community) or an individual who does not conform to hegemonic norms of gendered or sexual identity; and making unnecessary physical contact, including touching.

It is found that bullying behaviours often change as children move into adolescence and acquire an increased awareness of sexuality and sexual awareness. To gain power or status, adolescents who have exhibited bullying often begin to engage in behaviour that targets sexual vulnerabilities, which may be identified as sexual harassment.

Information for Parents and Families

Signs Your Child May Be Experiencing Bullying

Though not exclusive to bullying, children who are being bullied might:

- not want to go to school or may cry or feel sick on school days
- not want to take part in activities or social events with other children
- act differently than they normally do
- unexpectedly lose of money or belongings
- come home with injuries, torn clothes, or broken possessions and offer explanations that don't make sense

Adolescents who are bullied or harassed may start avoiding school or skipping classes, which, if not addressed, can progress to dropping out of school altogether. Adolescents may also attempt to avoid activities that involve other students, both in and out of school.

Signs Your Child May Be Bullying Others

Children who bully others might:

- bully their siblings at home
- be aggressive or disruptive at home, for example, not following household rules
- be aggressive with their friends
- not get along with or play well with other children
- not show empathy or remorse
- come home with injuries or torn clothing
- unexpectedly have more money or new possessions and offer explanations that don't make sense

How Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can Report Bullying to the School

For parents/guardians/caregivers who are concerned about bullying in their child's school, it may be helpful to first consult the [Parents' Guide to the Provincial Code of Conduct](#), which outlines the roles and responsibilities for everyone in the school community, including students, parents/guardians/caregivers, school staff, and community partners.

If a parent/guardian/caregiver believes that their child is involved in bullying, they should contact their child's teacher to determine whether they are aware of the situation. It is a good idea for parents/families/guardians to provide the teacher with as much information as possible about the bullying incident(s) :

- date, time, place
- people involved

- specifics of the incident(s)
- the effect the bullying has had on their child
- what their child has tried so far to interrupt the bullying

It is recommended that parents/families/guardians continue to work with their child's teacher to create a plan to ensure that the bullying is addressed; the plan should include what the student needs to feel safe at school and what the student can do to avoid being bullied or to stand up to or report any future bullying. If working with their child's teacher is not successful in stopping the bullying, the next step is for parents/families/guardians to contact the school's Principal to discuss the situation and what more can be done at school.

If you still have questions, concerns or issues after speaking with your child's teacher and principal, then we encourage you to connect with your Superintendent's office. [You can find your Superintendent and how to contact them by clicking here.](#)

What Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can Expect from the School after Bullying has occurred

When bullying occurs, the school Principal will contact the parents/guardians/caregivers of the students who have been involved, to inform them of:

- what happened, including any harm that came to a student
- what steps are being taken to protect student safety, including any disciplinary measures taken in response to the incident
- what supports will be provided for student in response to the incident

What Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can Do to Prevent and Intervene in Bullying

The home environment is the very first place where children learn how to create and maintain healthy relationships, simply by being a part of their family and its unique dynamics. Parents/families can also be intentional about helping their children develop the essential social skills they need to navigate peer conflicts, both by talking about healthy relationships and teaching skills at home, as well as intervening in the moment when a negative peer interaction is observed. The role of the parent/family changes, depending on the age and developmental stage of their child.

Preschool Age

During the early years, parents/guardians/caregivers typically have more opportunities to see and address bullying behaviour. Keeping in mind that conflict is a developmentally normative task that preschool age children inevitably encounter as they learn how to navigate interactions with others and develop healthy relationships. As soon as a parent/guardian/caregiver notices their child has said or done something hurtful, whether it is during a play date or a conflict between siblings, it is very important to stop everything and address it. If parents/guardians/caregivers don't step in immediately and consistently, children will learn that the behaviours they are experimenting with, like hitting and name calling, are permitted.

Other ways that parents/guardians/caregivers can prevent bullying in preschool aged children:

- Set limits on hurtful behaviour by explicitly telling your child what they can and cannot do
- Establish consequences for hurtful behaviour and be consistent with delivering them every time
- Provide praise for respectful and caring behaviour
- Coach your child through difficult situations, teach them to use language such as, “That hurts my feelings,” “That’s not fair,” and “If you don’t stop, I will tell the teacher.”
- Model considerate and kind behaviour by acting the way you want your child to act and acknowledging and apologizing when you are hurtful or unkind to someone else (including to your child)
- Select the best environment that you can manage for your child. Try to make sure that everyone who cares for your child, whether it be extended family members or daycare providers, also know how to support the development of healthy relationships with peers. Make connections with other parents/families who have similar values and who seem to have kind, friendly children. Arrange play dates and be involved to structure and guide what the children are doing.

Elementary School Age

As children move through elementary school, their peer relationships become more important, and they begin to gain independence, so they are not always under adult supervision. Social bullying becomes a more common method of bullying, which is more difficult for parents/guardians/caregivers to recognize, and more challenging for children to report and talk about.

Ways that parents/guardians/caregivers can prevent or intervene in bullying in elementary school aged children:

- Encourage the development of empathy in your child, for example, by:
 - helping your child identify and label feelings of shame, embarrassment, anger, fear or sadness in themselves and in others
 - having your child draw a picture of what they think it must feel like to be bullied and talking about the feelings that children who are bullied might experience
 - watching a movie with your child that features bullying (e.g., Mean Girls, Wonder, Back to the Future) and while you are watching, pause the movie and highlight the feelings of the person who is being bullied. Help your child to identify the feelings by looking out for facial expressions, body posture, and tone of voice.
 - talking with your child about their strengths, and how they can use their power to help, not hurt, others
- Teach your child to be assertive but not aggressive. Rehearse phrases and words such as “STOP!” until your child is confident. Reassure them that walking away from a bully and telling an adult is the best thing to do, rather than just tolerating it or trying to fight back
- Make sure that you are aware of who your child’s friends are and the dynamics in their peer group(s). Who are the leaders, who are the followers, are there scapegoats or children who are typically picked on or left out? Is the friend group positive and kind to each other, or are there negative patterns brewing?
- Try to expose your child to many kinds of peers and friendships. This may be accomplished by enrolling them in weekend or after school activities, where they can meet children and make friends who do not attend their school, and who may share similar interests

- Make connections with the parents/families/guardians of your child's friends, so that you can ask them what they observe about your child's relationships and interactions when you are not present. Work together to ensure that your children and their friends treat each other with kindness and respect
- If your child has been bullied, help them find activities that they are good at so that they can build their self-confidence. If your child has been bullying others, provide opportunities for them to use their leadership and assertiveness in positive ways, for example, teaching new skills to younger children
- Clearly communicate to your child that you want them to feel comfortable coming to you if they are being bullied. Tell them and show them that you are available and interested. If they do come forward, be sure to give them your full attention and ask for details
- Advocate for your child by reporting bullying to your child's school and continuing to collaborate with the school to support your child
- Set clear and firm guidelines, limits, and consequences for unacceptable aggressive behaviour, whether it happens at home, in an after-school activity, or at school. Consequences should be related to the bullying behaviour, rather than simply punishing them for their actions, for example, by:
 - writing a letter or card of apology to the other child (this is only effective if your child is genuinely sorry and wants to make amends)
 - making a verbal apology to the other child that includes taking responsibility for the behaviour and indicating what they will do to ensure the other child feels better. Check first with the other child's parents/family to ensure that the other child is comfortable with this, and arrange for a private meeting where peers are not present
 - having your child repair, clean, or replace property or personal belongings that were damaged as a result of bullying

High School Age

As children enter adolescence, they develop more sophisticated ways of interacting and communicating with their peers. Aggression becomes more covert, and is often expressed in social, verbal, and electronic forms, in addition to physical bullying. Cyberbullying is a particular concern in this age group, as many adolescents have a constant link to the virtual world through their smartphones. When bullying occurs online, it permeates all aspects of an adolescent's social life and is impossible to escape or avoid.

Ways that parents/guardians/caregivers can prevent or intervene in bullying in high school aged children:

- Dedicate time to regularly be together and talk with your adolescent; this will let them know that you will be receptive if they come to you with a problem. It may be helpful to share bullying experiences you had growing up
- Sit down with your adolescent to watch the movies and TV shows that they like. You can build on the themes to have conversations about stereotypes, sex, peer pressure, appropriate behaviour, and what constitutes healthy relationships
- Encourage your adolescent to enroll in sports, lessons, camps, or other activities outside of school, so they can meet a variety of other adolescents and develop friendships. This can also help build their confidence if they have been

- Try to make your home a welcoming place so your adolescent feels comfortable inviting friends over. This will allow you to meet your adolescent's friends and assess whether the friendships are healthy and positive
- Some adolescents may continue to require their parents'/family's assistance in learning and practicing social skills, such as looking people in the eye, standing up straight, and communicating assertively
- If your adolescent tells you they are being bullied, it is still your job to protect them, even though they are getting older. Treat bullying incidents seriously – get in touch with school staff and other parents/families/guardians; it is important that adults work together to teach youth positive relationship skills

What Parents/Guardians/Caregivers Can do to Promote Online Safety and Protect their Children from Cyber-Bullying

While children's use of digital devices and social media apps allows for new social opportunities and connections, it also exposes them to various online risks and threats, including cyber-bullying. The digital, social or online platform in which they may be experiencing bullying may also be the link to their important social connections and forms of peer support. The answer is not as simple as switching it off. It is helpful for parents/caregivers to be involved with and aware of their child's digital life, and to work with their child in establishing boundaries and acting responsibly online. For parents/families/guardians, key tips for online safety include:

Establishing Clear Rules and Expectations about Online Behaviour

- Have open, regular, and casual conversations with your child about their online interactions
- Set time limits and breaks on online activity (e.g., put devices away during dinner time or a specific time right before bed) and supervise your child's technological use as appropriate to their age (e.g. placing computers in a family space such as a kitchen), while fostering their development into independent and responsible digital citizens
- Reinforce the expectations of "treating online life like regular life", being respectful online, and "not saying anything online that you wouldn't say to someone's face"

Monitoring Online Activity

- Inquire about and show a concern for your child's online life, as much as you do for their offline life (e.g., ask about and be aware of the sites your child is visiting, who they are interacting with online, how people are treating each other in the social media or gaming sites that they are visiting)
- Conduct a search of your child's name online, including search engines, blogs, and social network platforms to find out what appears on the public record

Communicating Online Safety Messages

- Discuss online privacy and online reputation with your child, so that they understand the importance of keeping personal information private (e.g., name, age, social insurance address.),

as well as the possible consequences of uploading personal content to their current or future reputation¹

Helping Your Child Learn How to Recognize and Respond to Cyber-Bullying

- Define and explain what cyber-bullying is
- Talk to your child about what to do if they witness a friend or acquaintance being cyber-bullied (e.g., standing up for their friend or acquaintance, or showing support by sending a private message)²

Prevention and Awareness at School

Schools are ideal settings to provide proactive or preventative interventions aimed at addressing and raising awareness around bullying. In comparison to reactionary interventions that take place after bullying has occurred, prevention efforts require fewer resources and tend to have better success. By focusing on all students in the school, these initiatives can address a wide range of inappropriate behaviours in addition to bullying, through teaching, reinforcing, and recognizing positive behaviours such as empathy, respect, positive regard for others, and responsibility. The DSBN utilizes several evidence-based best practices in bullying awareness and prevention.

The DSBN's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan encourages student voice in the decision-making and implementation process. Students can take on leadership roles in initiatives, clubs, and committees that address bullying and school climate. There are spaces for students' opinions and perspectives to be heard, and they have agency in their school efforts to tackle bullying.

Establishing and Enforcing School Rules

Expectations for appropriate student behaviour are set out in [Policy G-08: DSBN Code of Conduct for Schools](#), which sets clear standards for behaviour as outlined in [PPM 128](#), revised August 29, 2019. DSBN students know that they must demonstrate respect for themselves, for others, and for the responsibilities of citizenship through acceptable behaviour. All DSBN schools have a link to Policy G-08 on their school website and, if applicable, in their student agendas.

CRRP Approach

The DSBN's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan advances a whole-school approach to fostering a safe and inclusive climate, which is guided by a framework of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP).³ A CRRP approach to bullying prevention and intervention encompasses the following areas: classroom instruction and climate; school climate; supportive interventions; student voice; parent/guardian/caregiver relations and outreach; community connections; and professional development.

A culturally responsive approach to establishing a positive school climate ensures that all student

¹ Royal Canadian Mounted Police. (2022). [Internet Safety Tips for Parents](#).

² Common Sense Education. (2018). [Grades K-12 Family Tips: Help Kids Fight Cyberbullying and Other Mean Online Behavior](#).

³ Centre For Urban Schooling (CUS). (n.d). [Framework for a culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy](#).

identities and cultures, along with those of the wider school community, are affirmed and validated. The learning environment reflects the diversity of all learners, and school programs are tailored to accommodate the needs of diverse learners. Through CRRP, educators respect all identities and incorporate anti-racism, anti-classism, anti-ableism, and anti-homophobia into learning.

Trauma-Informed Approach

The DSBN’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan is also guided by a trauma-informed approach to school climate. A trauma-informed approach recognizes the impact of trauma and stress in students’ lives, and that students require safe and understanding learning environments to support their healing. The implementation of the DSBN’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan accompanies board efforts to raise staff awareness about trauma and its impact on student behaviour, build capacity in trauma-informed practices, and minimize the re-traumatization of students in school settings.

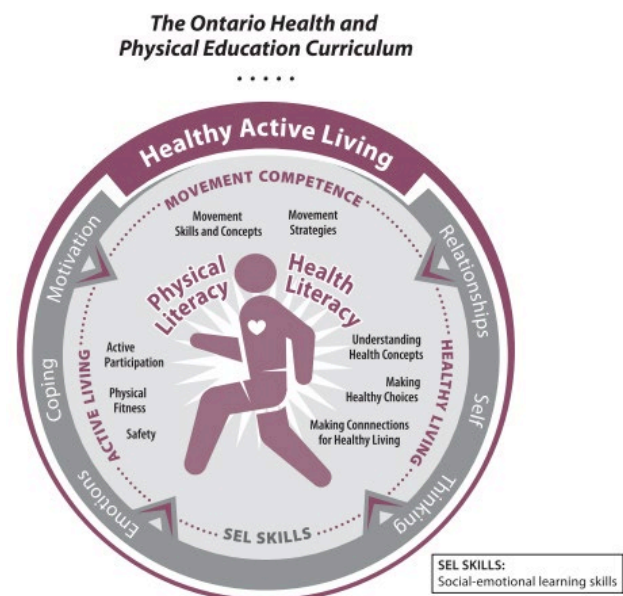
A trauma-informed approach to bullying prevention and intervention involves creating safe and caring school climates that prevent re-traumatization or trauma-related triggers, as well as teaching students the skills to regulate their emotions and behaviour. In addition, appropriate discipline approaches are taken that incorporate restorative practices and do not re-traumatize students. Students are provided with the necessary support that will help them to develop skills to manage stress, form healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions. The trauma-informed supports and interventions are culturally responsive by honouring students’ and families’ cultural and community-specific strategies for coping and maintaining well-being.

School Activities and Curriculum

In [*Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships*](#),

Ontario’s Safe Schools Action Team reports that the most effective way to enable all students to learn about healthy and respectful relationships is through the curriculum. Healthy relationship skills are addressed in Ontario’s updated 2019 elementary health and physical education curriculum, through the development of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills.

Healthy relationship skills include the ability to understand and appreciate another person’s perspective, to empathize with others, to listen, to be assertive, and to apply conflict-resolution skills. At the DSBN, educators help students develop and practice these skills by providing opportunities to apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies and to address issues through group discussions, role play, and case studies. Educators also model the behaviours, values, and skills that are needed to develop and sustain healthy relationships and take advantage of “teachable moments” to address immediate relationship issues that arise among students.



Each school year, the DSBN formally recognizes Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, which begins on the third Sunday in November, and Pink Shirt Day, on the last Wednesday in February. On these occasions, special activities are planned in schools, and resources are provided for students and staff to learn about bullying prevention and intervention. In addition, the [DSBN Equity and Inclusion Department](#) is continuously working with staff and students to promote a culture of inclusion where schools embrace and appreciate the values, identities and lived experiences of all students.

Schools are supported in bullying awareness and prevention by the DSBN's valued community partners. Some of our valued community partners in this domain include:

- Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of North and West Niagara, BBBS of Niagara Falls, and BBBS of South Niagara, whose in-school mentors provide both individual and group programming for elementary students to boost their self-esteem and build confidence
- Niagara Region Public Health, whose school nurses are available to meet with students and assist educators in promoting healthy relationships, including their [teaching tools](#) on healthy relationships, for the secondary health and physical education curriculum
- The Niagara Sexual Assault Centre (CARSA), whose public education promoters provide a variety of [presentations to students](#), with a focus on responsible decision-making and safety around forms of bullying, abuse, and harassment

Co-curricular activities such as clubs, the arts, and intramural sports provide additional settings for students to build healthy relationships. Opportunities are made available for students and staff to participate in equity and inclusive education, bullying prevention, and leadership initiatives within their schools. For example, many DSBN schools have Healthy Schools Committees, Culture Clubs, Equity Committees and Equity Champions, Mental Health & Well-Being Teams, or Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

SEL is the process through which students acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

SEL focuses on the systematic development of a core set of social and emotional skills. In addition to the inclusion of SEL in the updated elementary health and physical education and mathematics curricula, social-emotional skills are promoted through the delivery of evidence-based programs, grounded in research and principles of child and adolescent development. All SEL programs used in DSBN classrooms have been scientifically evaluated and shown to produce short- and long-term positive outcomes in students, such as better academic achievement, improved learning attitudes and behaviours, decreased aggression and disruptive behaviours, and lower levels of emotional distress. To reliably produce these outcomes, SEL classroom programs at the DSBN are delivered by specially trained youth counsellors, assisted by the classroom teacher, in a sequenced, active, focused, and explicit manner. Several of our programs have a specific focus on bullying awareness and prevention, some of these include:

Supports and Interventions at School

A variety of supports are made available to students who have been bullied, witnessed incidents of bullying, or engaged in bullying. These supports are provided utilizing a tiered approach that is dependent on the severity of the incident, from early prevention to more intensive interventions. Supports may be provided to students and staff by school social workers, school youth counsellors, central consultants, central coaches, and community-based service providers who work in schools.

For students with special education needs, all interventions, supports, and consequences will be consistent with the student's strengths, needs, program goals, and learning expectations that are outlined in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Supporting Students Who Experience Bullying

Bullying is an adverse childhood experience (ACE), or potentially traumatic experience that can negatively affect a child or youth's development. As a form of violence, children and youth who are bullied and those who witness bullying may experience it as an ACE.⁴

A student victimized by bullying or immobilized by witnessing bullying will have access to appropriate emotional and social support in the immediate aftermath of the bullying incident(s). In addition, school staff should be proactive in connecting with the student, in the weeks and months after the bullying incident(s), to determine whether they require continued support. Students, who have experienced bullying, should be provided with relevant and ongoing intervention and support to prevent the potential long-term effects of bullying.

Supporting Students Who Have Engaged in Bullying

In situations where students have engaged in bullying, student discipline is enacted in a trauma-informed approach that balances accountability with an understanding of traumatic behaviour. While recognizing that being bullied can be a source of trauma, it is understood that children who engage in bullying behaviour are more likely to have been exposed to trauma and report Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Students who exhibit bullying behaviour are often indirectly signalling that they themselves need significant support. The causes, or reasons for bullying can be wide-ranging, as are the prevention methods put in place. As outlined in [PPM 145](#), when inappropriate behaviour occurs, disciplinary measures should be applied within a framework that shifts the focus from one that is solely punitive to one that is both corrective and supportive. Schools should use a range of interventions, supports, and consequences that are developmentally and socio-emotionally appropriate and include learning opportunities for reinforcing positive behaviour while helping students to make better choices.

A key component of discipline involves supporting the learning and emotional needs and behavioural development of students exhibiting bullying behaviour. Where appropriate, these students are provided with additional professional support and/or a Positive Behaviour Support Plan. By working closely with students, parents/families/guardians, and community partners, DSBN schools will take preventative and

⁴ Stopbullying.gov. (2017). [Bullying as an adverse childhood experience \(ACE\): Factsheet](#).

intervention measures to address bullying, as well as provide the necessary supports to all students to ensure a safe, healthy, and caring school climate.

Restorative Justice Practices

Restorative justice is an approach used to resolve disputes and conflicts in the school setting. This approach communicates the message that all students are accepted and belong at school. Typically, the student who has engaged in the bullying and the student who has been the target of the bullying are assisted in repairing or restoring the relationship that has been damaged.

When a school uses restorative justice practices, work is done to recognize the purpose or function of the bullying behaviour. There is a focus on repairing the harm done, while giving voice to the student who has been harmed. Collaborative problem-solving methods are utilized, while emphasizing that the student who has engaged in bullying takes responsibility for their behaviour. Staff act as mediators to encourage conflict resolution among students; all students are given the opportunity to describe what has happened, how they feel about it, how it has affected them, and potential solutions. Restorative justice practices may also be used to facilitate the reintegration of suspended students back into school.

School Procedures and Progressive Student Discipline

Serious student incidents are reported by staff to the school principal(s) to ensure that appropriate actions to address the incident and protect students may be taken. Requirements for reporting and responding to serious incidents are outlined in [PPM 144](#). All school staff must report serious student incidents to the school Principal as soon as reasonably possible, and no later than the end of the school day.

At the DSBN, Principals' responses to bullying incidents are consistent with a progressive discipline approach and promotion of positive student behaviour, as outlined in [Policy G-28: Student Discipline](#). Progressive discipline is a school-wide practice that utilizes a continuum of prevention programs, interventions, supports, and consequences to address inappropriate student behaviour, with a focus on promoting and fostering positive behaviours. The progressive discipline approach is intended to be bias-free, in that practices are applied in a fair and timely manner for all students, while considering students' individual circumstances and differences, including mitigating factors for the inappropriate behaviour. Where a student engages in bullying, the school administrator may suspend the student or refer the student for expulsion, after an investigation, in accordance with the Education Act.

Professional Development

The DSBN provides professional development programs to educate administrators, teachers, and other school staff about bullying prevention and strategies for promoting a positive school climate. The DSBN will offer programs that provide staff with the tools and capacity needed to implement the Bullying

Prevention and Intervention Plan. Ongoing professional learning and training topics for DSBN staff may include the following:

- An overview of the DSBN's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
- Cyber-bullying and safety
- Identity-based bullying
- Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP)
- Indigenous education and education for reconciliation
- Inclusive Language
- Trauma Sensitivity and Trauma-Informed Practices
- Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Restorative Justice and Practices

Each school has a Safe and Accepting Schools Team that promotes a safe, inclusive, and accepting school climate. The team is often part of existing school teams, such as Special Education's In School Team, Healthy Schools Committee, Safe Spaces Team to name a few. The Team's work encompasses a broad range of areas, including bullying prevention and awareness, mental health and well-being, cyber-safety, equity, and anti-racism and elicits parent awareness, voice and involvement. The Safe and Accepting Schools Team often collaborates and maintains communication with existing school groups, such as School Council, and encourages student voice and leadership throughout its work.

Communications and Outreach Strategies

Policies, procedures, and plans on bullying prevention and intervention are actively communicated to school administrators, students, parents/families/guardians, teachers, and other school staff. This information is also provided to the board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Indigenous Education Advisory Council (IEAC), School Councils, Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Community Advisory Committee (EIARCAC), Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) and other appropriate community partners. This plan and related policies, along with additional resources will be made available to parents/families/guardians on the board's website, under the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Page. The DSBN will also foster parent/guardian/caregiver engagement and build capacity in bullying awareness and prevention through school council and PIC presentations. Outreach to Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomer, and 2SLGBTQ+ groups ensures that all parents/families/guardians are engaged in matters relating to bullying prevention and intervention. Every effort will be made to reduce cultural, linguistic, and other barriers when reaching out to parents/families/guardians.

The DSBN works to establish and sustain connections with community partners/agencies as part of its bullying prevention and intervention plan where appropriate. The DSBN recognizes that bullying is not only a school problem, but also a wider community problem that requires community support, collaboration, and solutions. Appropriate community partners may include public health, child

welfare/social service/mental health organizations, youth-service organizations, public service organizations, and cultural and/or religious organizations.

Monitoring and Review

The DSBN monitors, reviews, and evaluates board policies and guidelines regularly. The DSBN School Culture Student Survey is an anonymous online survey that provides families and students with an opportunity to provide input on the school culture. It fulfills the Ministry of Education requirement that all schools in Ontario implement a school climate survey for students every two years.

Building a positive school culture requires a collective commitment where the voices of students, families and school staff are essential. Data collected:

- Guide decision-making for school planning
- Specify areas of growth and strength at your school
- Set collective goals to support an inclusive school culture and enhance student success

Further Resources

- Ontario Ministry of Education – [Safe and Accepting Schools](#)
- [The Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network \(PREVNet\)](#)
- [The Canadian Safe School Network](#)
- [Bullying Prevention and Intervention in the School Environment: Factsheets and Tools](#)
- The Ontario Institute for Education Leadership – [Leading Safe and Accepting Schools](#)
- Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and the Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA) – [Safe@School](#)
- Kids Help Phone – [Bullying resources](#)
- Media Smarts - [Cyberbullying](#)
- Common Sense Education – [Grades K-12 Family Tips: Help Kids Fight Cyberbullying and Other Mean Online Behavior](#)