

Introduction

Bullying is a significant issue in education today as news cycles are filled with accounts of increased aggressiveness and hurtful behavior among students across the country. At Smithtown Christian School, we take bullying very seriously and engage relational conflicts to promote resolution and Christlike honor for all students. While “turning the other cheek” (Matt 5:39) is an appropriate Biblical response students should practice whenever faced with unkind words or actions, no student at SCS is expected to simply sit by and absorb persistent unkind words or actions. Whether on the receiving end of such behavior, or merely observing it, all students are encouraged to report bullying behavior to school authorities (1 Peter 2:13-14).

Definition

Bullying is **persistent, unwanted, aggressive, and intentionally hurtful** behavior directed towards a single individual.

A one-time, isolated instance of unkind behavior, no matter how unkind it is, does not constitute bullying. Key to understanding bullying behaviors is that they are marked by the four qualifiers listed above: it is unkind behavior that is *persistent, unwanted, aggressive, and intentionally hurtful*. Bullying may include actions such as calling someone names, starting rumors, attacking someone verbally or physically, or groups of students purposely excluding someone from a peer group in school. Additionally, cyber-bullying involves perpetrating the aforementioned actions through online or social media platforms. The bully seeks to control or dominate the other person or the environment through their bullying. Bullying behavior is at odds with the Biblical command to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31) and will not be tolerated at SCS.

Isolated instances of unkind or hurtful behavior will be addressed according to the policies outlined in the elementary and secondary student handbooks. Bullying, however-- as defined above-- is a unique challenge, and merits a specific and unique discipline response from SCS.

Bullying vs. Teasing

It can be difficult to distinguish between bullying and typical childhood teasing. Teasing generally is a “give and take” situation where two students exchange verbal or physical interactions in an effort to be funny or show attention/affection to one another. Teasing can happen between the best of friends or first acquaintances. However, Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Unchecked teasing can grow into a toxic

relational dynamic where the two individuals have no constructive, positive interactions and when a member of the SCS team becomes aware of such a dynamic, they will intervene as appropriate.

Teasing is differentiated from bullying by both the intent of the aggressor and the perception of the receiver. However, continued unwanted teasing that has been addressed by the student and/or an adult is considered bullying.

Proactive Means to Prevent Bullying

Research about bullying suggests that there are three interrelated reasons why students bully.

1. Students who bully have strong needs for power and dominance.
2. Students who bully find satisfaction in causing injury and suffering to other students.
3. Students who bully are often rewarded in some way for their behavior with material or psychological rewards.

Understanding these reasons helps the school to take appropriate proactive measures to help students avoid developing bullying behavior patterns, such as: teaching about finding one’s identity in Christ, providing opportunities to serve one another in love, and establishing positive guidelines and boundaries for Christ-honoring relationships. We believe that a school culture shaped by these factors will be less prone to encouraging or rewarding bullying behaviors.

More specifically, educating students on the definition of bullying and what to do about bullying is a continuous process and is accomplished through classroom instruction, chapel lessons, and focused teachings from the Dean of Student Life, Elementary Principal, and/or School Social Worker. In addition, students who do not

understand bullying may be addressed one-on-one, or in small groups. Finally, and most importantly, SCS is working to establish more focused prayer expressions among parents, families, and the SCS team, to address the underlying issues and possible spiritual strongholds that can lead to bullying behavior. SCS believes that bullying behaviors arise out of complex individual needs and can be a reflection of challenges that a student is facing at home. Truly, only God knows all the dynamics that lead to bullying behavior, and He longs to bring health and healing to individuals who participate in destructive behaviors. Prayer is the most important way for families and the SCS staff to proactively engage the issue of bullying.

Responding to Bullying

Since bullying often occurs when no adults are present, students are the first line of defense against bullying. At SCS, students are encouraged and trained how to tell others to stop unwanted behavior and also to tell an adult about any bullying behavior they have either experienced or observed. Philippians 2:4 says "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." When our students stand together, they form a culture of support and mutual love which discourages bullying behavior.

All SCS team members are expected to take purposeful disciplinary action against bullying using Biblical principles that engage the bully's heart, while also stopping the hurtful behavior. The staff's goal is to resolve the bullying situation in a manner that helps the bully change his/her ways by addressing the root of the problem: the student's heart. This cannot be done quickly, but takes patience and understanding of the situation and the student involved to effectively resolve the situation, along with follow-up accountability to make sure the conflict does not continue.

The following outlines the steps that will be taken when a bullying pattern is identified. However, it is to be understood that every incident of bullying will be prayerfully handled with utmost consideration for the unique dynamics of each situation, including the developmental stage of each student, etc.

1. Whenever an SCS team member suspects (via student report or direct observation) that a pattern of bullying is occurring they will speak with all students involved and gather information to determine if it is truly a bullying situation. If not, he or she will resolve the student conflict appropriately, with normal discipline procedures, as outlined in the appropriate student handbook.

2. If a bullying pattern is discovered, the intervening staff person will stop any immediate bullying behavior and then report the bullying pattern with specific incident information to the appropriate administrator (K-5: Elementary Principal; 6-12: Dean of Student Life).
3. The administrator will give immediate disciplinary consequences to the student involved in bullying. Those consequences should match the level of intensity of the bullying incident, using the discipline policy of the appropriate student handbook as a guide.
4. The administrator will contact the parents/guardians of both parties to inform them of the incident/bullying pattern.
5. The administrator will initiate a meeting with parent/guardian of the offending party to put a behavior contract in place. All confirmed incidents of bullying will result in a written behavior contract, which outlines behavioral expectations and potential consequences for repeated bullying. The administrator will inform SCS staff members who interact with the offending student, as appropriate, about the behavioral contract, so that accountability for behavioral improvement will be as comprehensive and seamless as possible.
6. In addition to the normal disciplinary consequences for a particular infraction, a period of forced separation between students will be enacted, as much as practical.
7. As practical and appropriate, administrators may check in with teachers, students, and parents to ascertain the long-term success of the discipline.

When Bullying Continues

Whenever bullying behavior has been identified, the parents notified, and a student has received appropriate initial and long-term consequences (including a written behavior contract), the expectation is that the student will be sufficiently encouraged and supported in the change process, resulting in an end to the bullying behavior. However, if the student continues the pattern of bullying behavior, the parent/guardian will be required to immediately pick up the student from school and the student will serve an out of school suspension for two days. The student will also receive reflective and redemptive writing exercises and/or be required to attend counseling as appropriate.

If after the suspension, the bully commits one additional inappropriate action as outlined by their behavior contract and does not respect the firm yet grace-filled discipline process outlined above, the student may be dismissed from SCS (Proverbs 22:10).

Note on Parent Reports of Bullying

At times, the person reporting suspected bullying will be a parent/guardian. SCS respects and welcomes parent reporting of bullying, and assumes that such reports are valid and worthy of investigation. All such reports will require additional verification from eye-witnesses or via other means, prior to going through the steps outlined above. When a parent informs a teacher or administrator of a suspected bullying incident, the matter will be referred to the appropriate administrator, who will then keep the reporting parent/guardian informed as to the progress and conclusions of the investigation.

Once a situation has been brought to the attention of the administration, and the appropriate administrator is handling the issue, parent/guardians are asked to honor the role of the administrator by allowing him or her to be the hub for all communication relating to the situation.

At times, the administrator may conclude that some kind of contact between the parents/guardian and a student or a student's parents/guardians may be appropriate and helpful to a successful resolution to the bullying issue. In such cases, the administrator will take the lead in making such contact happen, including such options as a letter of apology, a meeting between parents/guardians of involved students, etc. In all cases, SCS will work to maintain the highest level of confidentiality and accountability.