

Bullying Policy

The Family Matters School

Revised 12/15/2022

The Family Matters School will not tolerate harassing, intimidating conduct, or bullying whether verbal, physical, or visual, that unreasonably interferes with a child's educational performance, or that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive learning environment. Bullying, intimidation, and harassment diminish a child's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate.

The State of Illinois defines "bullying", including "cyber-bullying", as any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, directed toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

- placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;
- causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;
- substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; or
- substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school (as defined in Public Act 098-0669)

The following behaviors are examples of some, and certainly not all, forms of bullying:

- Telling or forcing another person to do something against his/her will;
- Making another person give up his/her lunch, place in line, or material possessions;
- Threatening some kind of retaliation (physical harm or withdrawal of friendship) if a person doesn't comply with the bully's request;
- Repeated acts of physical aggression upon another person (tripping, hitting, poking, pushing);
- The spread of gossip, rumors and lies to hurt another person;
- Teasing, mocking, and taunting a peer.

School's Responsibility in Bullying

The Family Matters School is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for every child. When bullying is thought to occur, we will take prompt, strong action in dealing with any and all aspects of such situations. Bullying is contrary to State law (Public Acts 98-0669 and 98-0801) and school policy. The Family Matters School will determine whether a reported act of bullying is within the permissible scope of the school's jurisdiction and shall require that the school provides services to those students being bullied.

The Family Matters School believes that education, rather than punishment, is the appropriate way to deal with bullying behaviors. To that end, the staff team will make every effort to work with both the bully and the victim. The team will assist in preventing bullying behaviors and to minimize the risk of being bullied. However, The Family Matters School can and will take whatever steps necessary to protect the rights and the well-being of students and/or staff. Children who engage in acts of bullying may be asked to leave the school if they are unable or unwilling to change their behavior. Teaching children to shun these disruptive behaviors and providing all children equal access to a safe, non-hostile learning environment is our goal at The Family Matters School.

Investigating Bullying:

- Making all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation within 10 school days after the date the report of the incident of bullying was received and taking into consideration additional relevant information received during the course of the investigation about the reported incident of bullying.
- Involving appropriate school support personnel and other staff persons with knowledge, experience, and training on bullying prevention, as deemed appropriate, in the investigation process.
- Notifying the entire staff team and the Executive Director, or her/his/their designee, of the report of the incident of bullying as soon as possible after the report is received.
- Consistent with Federal and State laws and rules governing children's rights, providing parents and guardians of the children who are parties to the investigation information about the investigation and an opportunity to meet with the principal or school administrator or his or her designee to discuss the investigation, the findings of the investigation, and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying.
- If necessary, we will provide information to parties about local services (including social work, psychological services, etc.)

Bullying on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, military status, unfavorable discharge status from the military service, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender-related identity or expression, ancestry, age, religion, physical or mental disability, order of protection status, status of being homeless, or actual or potential marital or parental status, including pregnancy, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic is prohibited in each of the following situations:

1. During any school-sponsored education program or activity.
2. While in school, on school property, on school field trips, or at school-sponsored or school-sanctioned events or activities.
3. Through the transmission of information from a school computer or using the school network.
4. Through the transmission of information from a computer that is accessed at a nonschool-related location, activity, function, or program or from the use of technology or an electronic device that is not owned, leased, or used by a school if the bullying causes a substantial disruption to the educational process or orderly operation of the school. This item (4) applies only in cases in which a teacher or school staff member receives a report that bullying through this means has occurred and it does not require the school to staff or monitor any nonschool-related activity, function, or program.

"Cyber-bullying" means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic system, photoelectronic system, or photo-optical system, including without limitation electronic mail, Internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. "Cyber-bullying" includes the creation of a webpage or weblog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages if the creation or impersonation creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this Section. "Cyber-bullying" also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons if the distribution or posting creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying given here.

Victims of Bullying:

Whenever a child believes that he/she/they is being bullied, he/she/they must go to any teacher or school official to tell of his/her/their experience as soon as possible. Failure to report such

incidents delays the school's efforts to deal with the problem. Any issue involving bullying must be reported as soon as possible, either by the victim of bullying, by the victim's parents, or by another child who has witnessed the event. We encourage any child to come forward and report incidents to his/her teacher or to the administration. At The Family Matters School, anyone who silently witnesses an event and does nothing is also considered part of the problem. Conversely, false reporting of bullying behavior is considered to be another form of bullying. Retaliations or reprisals against those reporting bullying will not be tolerated. As such, these actions may result in the same graduated sanction scale as above.

The Victim's Parents:

If/when a parent believes that some sort of bullying is affecting his/her/their child, the parent must:

- report the incident to the school immediately;
- realize that resolving the problem permanently may take some time;
- ask the school to keep an extra watchful eye on the child.

The Bully's Parents:

When a parent has been notified that his/her/their child has been engaging in behavior that is considered bullying, it is expected that:

- Parents will make it clear to their child that such behavior is unacceptable;
- Parents will work with the school administration and the children involved to help resolve the situation. Parents should be aware that continued bullying behaviors may result in suspension and/or permanent expulsion from The Family Matters School.

Bullying is contrary to State law and the policy of the non-sectarian nonpublic school and is consistent with subsection (a-5) of this Section [free exercise of religion].

Nothing in this policy is intended to infringe upon any right to exercise free expression or the free exercise of religion or religiously based views protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or under Section 3 of Article 1 of the Illinois Constitution.

Peer conflicts are a normal part of growing up, and social conflicts are many times mistaken for acts of bullying. While some reported cases of bullying are unfounded and determined to be a social conflict, The Family Matters School is available to support students through social conflicts as well. Parents, staff and children should consider the following when determining appropriate next steps and whether or not to report a case of bullying.

Social Conflict or Bullying?

Social Conflict	Bullying
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social conflict is a disagreement or argument in which both sides express their views 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying is negative behavior directed by someone exerting power and control over another person.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happens once, or occasionally. May be accidental and not serious in nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pervasive, purposeful and happens repeatedly, or presents a serious threat (physically or emotionally)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal power between those involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person bullying has more power
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual is remorseful, generally stops and changes behavior when they realize it is hurting someone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No remorse, blames victim • Continues behavior when they realize it is hurting someone.

Resource: Pacer's National Bullying Prevention Center

Bullying can happen despite our best efforts to create safe, welcoming environments for children. Research shows that most bullying takes place in school during the school day in places where there is often little or no adult supervision. We teach children to empathize, negotiate and compromise when involved in the everyday conflicts of human life. We have learned, however, that the conflict resolution skills they use to resolve normal problems with their peers won't work in bullying situations. There is an inherent power differential in bullying situations that usually renders negotiation and compromise skills useless. A child who is being bullied generally needs the intervention of an adult who can equalize the uneven power relationship between the one who is bullying and the victim.

Bullying often involves bystanders. We try to educate children about bullying and bystanders, so that they will act to encourage students who bully to stop and to support the victims of bullying behavior. Bullying behavior cannot be tolerated in our school community. We want children to know that adult intervention will be swift and consistent. Consequences will be clearly defined and applied as fairly as possible whenever bullying occurs. We teach children the difference between ordinary, developmentally appropriate conflict and bullying. We encourage them to stop bullying that they are aware of if possible and to report it when they see or experience it. The adults in the community can only give the guidance and support necessary if they know when bullying occurs. Parents, too, are encouraged to report suspected cases of bullying.

Children are encouraged to immediately report bullying. A report may be made to a teacher or The Director of Education. Reporters shall remain anonymous and are protected against retaliation. Anyone, including staff members and parents/guardians, who has information about actual or threatened bullying is encouraged to report it to the school staff.

When addressing allegations of bullying, the school is required to promptly contact all families involved in the bullying, promptly (within 10 days) and thoroughly investigate; give all families involved the opportunity to meet with the school staff; determine appropriate consequences; and protect students from retaliation.

If a teacher identifies a potential bully, they will monitor and document his/her behavior and involve other school staff in monitoring as well. If a negative pattern emerges, intervention will begin. The child and his/her parents will be informed of the bullying behavior.

Depending upon the seriousness of the bullying behavior and the age of the child, consequences will range from apologies and restitution to loss of relevant privileges to suspension. Children will be expected to acknowledge their behavior and to make a contract agreeing that this behavior will end. In some cases, parents may be asked to seek appropriate counseling for their child. The Family Matters School will connect families to resources for counseling if needed. In the case of a child unable to cease bullying behavior, an enrollment contract will not be extended for the coming year, and expulsion will be considered. Any accusations of bullying that are found to be false are considered grounds for further exploration. Those involved will meet with school staff to determine the root cause of these accusations and what actions need to be taken from that point forward.

Act of retaliation against those who report bullying will not be tolerated by the school. Children who retaliate against others will enter into discussions with the staff and their family regarding the behavior and what lies behind it. Retaliation indicates that the situation has not yet been resolved and will be dealt with in the same manner as the original response to the bullying behavior.

Creating a bully-free environment requires the efforts of all stakeholders at The Family Matters School: staff, children and families.

School Contact to report bullying concerns: Devon Lovell 773-465-6011 ext 123,
Devon@familymatterschicago.org

This policy is published in our School Handbook and distributed to all employees and enrolled families at The Family Matters School. The Family Matters School is dedicated to creating a safe space for all and will conduct an annual (or more frequent if indicated) evaluation of the above policy to ensure it is effectively addressing bullying at the school. In evaluating our effectiveness, we will review the number of incidents reported, the frequency of the incidents, the locations of incidents, the type of incidents observed and the by-stander behaviors observed. All stakeholders: staff, children and families will contribute to these reviews of efficacy.

This Bullying Policy is consistent with The Expectations for Youth Behavior as outlined in The Family Matters School Handbook.