

# **2023-2024 Country Meadows Montessori School Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment Policy**

## **Identifying the Problem**

Bullying is one of those words that tends to walk a fine line and requires some unpacking. While bullying and the effects of bullying behavior are real and sometimes what adults see as bullying is disrespect manifesting early and often. Bullying itself means a repeated attack on the same person or many people, using the same bullying behaviors and intimidation tactics. It's about seeking power and control over a situation in order to stand-in for control over feelings or emotions that haven't been fully explored. Although a child was teased once about his new haircut, or made fun of her name doesn't mean they were bullied but it does mean they were disrespected and treated unfairly.

## **Definition of Bullying**

For the purposes of providing a secure and safe place where all can learn without anxiety at Country Meadows Montessori School, we will identify bullying as repeated action taken by one or more persons with deliberate intention of hurting another either physically or emotionally. It may be of a physical, verbal or social nature or a combination of these. A person who is bullying has reached a stage of cognitive development where he or she is able to plan to carry out a premeditated intent to cause distress/harm to another.

Students will from time to time engage in teasing with friends. CMMS strives to help both parties involved in such a situation understand intent versus impact and guide students to resolving the interaction. Bullying, including cyberbullying, is a more serious act and is recognized 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:

1. Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student's or students' person or property;
2. Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student's or students' physical or mental health;
3. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' academic performance; or
4. Substantially interfering with the student's or students' ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by a school.

Bullying may take various forms, including without limitation one or more of the following: harassment, threats, spreading rumors, intimidation, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, theft, public humiliation, purposefully excluding someone from a group, destruction of property, or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. This list is meant

to be illustrative and non-exhaustive. We require all members of the CMMS community including but not limited to administration, faculty, staff, consultants, parents, students, and volunteers, to not engage in bullying, discrimination, or harassment of any other member of the CMMS community. This includes but is not limited to offensive comments or jokes, gestures, graffiti, or other verbal or physical conduct that creates a hostile or abusive environment or is intimidating, demeaning, or threatening.

**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, photo electronic 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 above.

The school may not request or require a student to provide a password or other related account information in order to gain access to the student's account or profile on a social networking site. The school may investigate or require a student to cooperate in an investigation if there is sufficient evidence to suggest the student's social network account violates the school's disciplinary policy. The school may require the student to share content during such an investigation.

## **Free Speech**

Bullying is contrary to State law and the policy of the school and is consistent with the 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.

## **Preventative Strategies**

Country Meadows Montessori School promotes the idea of respect and civility with our entire school community and makes expectations clear to children and adults about their behavior with others. This includes the teaching, modelling and practicing of "ground rules" taught and revisited at the beginning of each school year. The classroom communities meet regularly to discuss reminders of these ground rules that are focused on respect.

Conflict resolution is another practice promoted in order that the students learn to use their words to solve conflict with each other. This resolution process is something that is taught and practiced as early as toddlers. Of course, we take into account the developmental level of the children

involved and the adults are present as arbitrators. Students are directed to use these practices whenever the occasion arises to prevent verbal and emotional conflict.

## **Reporting**

When an incident occurs, staff members are required to complete a Special Incident Report and to send copies to the Head of School. Students are encouraged to immediately report bullying. A report may be made orally or in writing to the Head of School or any staff member with whom the student is comfortable speaking. Anyone, including staff members and parents/guardians, who has information about actual or threatened bullying is encouraged to report it to the Head of School or any staff member.

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Anonymous reports are also accepted; however, this shall not be construed to permit formal disciplinary action solely on the basis of an anonymous report.

## **Restorative Measures**

Any reported alleged incident will be kept confidential to the extent possible while they are investigated. Consistent with Federal and State laws and rules governing student privacy rights, the Head of School or designee shall promptly inform the parent(s)/guardian(s) of every student who is involved in an alleged incident of bullying and offer an opportunity to meet with the Head of School or designee to discuss the investigation, the findings of the investigation, and the actions taken to address the reported incident of bullying, including, as appropriate, the availability of social work services, counseling, other interventions and restorative measures.

"Restorative measures" means a continuum of school-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, that:

- are adapted to the particular needs of the Country Meadows Montessori School community,
- contribute to maintaining school safety,
- protect the integrity of a positive and productive learning climate,
- teach students the personal and interpersonal skills they will need to be successful in school and society,
- serve to build and restore relationships among students, families, schools, and communities, and
- reduce the likelihood of future disruption by balancing accountability with an understanding of students' behavioral health needs in order to keep students in school.
- increase student accountability if the incident of bullying is based on religion, race, ethnicity, or any other category that is identified in the Illinois Human Rights Act.

## **Procedures**

All reports will be taken seriously and investigated promptly by:

1. Making all reasonable efforts to complete the investigation in less than five (5) 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.
2. Involving appropriate school support personnel and other staff persons with knowledge, experience, and training on bullying prevention, as deemed appropriate, in the investigation process.
3. Notifying the Head of School or their designee of the report of the incident of bullying as soon as possible after the report is received.
4. Consistent with federal and State laws and rules governing student privacy rights, providing parents and guardians of the students 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.

## **Interventions**

The Head of School or designee shall investigate whether a reported incident of bullying is within the permissible scope of the school's jurisdiction.

- If the behavior is deemed or becomes extreme, the teacher will schedule a meeting with the parents, and, depending on the circumstance, with the Head of School or appropriate staff. Staff, parents, and child will respectfully work together to modify the behavior.
- If a pattern of willful, disruptive behavior develops, consequences may range from positive behavioral interventions up to and including suspension, expulsion, and/or reports to law enforcement as is required by law:
  - A. Teachers will record behavior observation
  - B. The teacher will inform the student's parents o Appropriate staff will be notified
  - C. The student, teacher, parents, and Head of School will work together to modify behavior and when appropriate additional professional help will be solicited.
- If a child persists in the unprovoked, willful, and deliberate hurting of others, after being reasoned with and experiencing consequences, there will be an immediate one (1) day suspension from school. Continued negative behavior will result in the school requiring a behavioral evaluation by a professional, and the possible removal of the student from the school.

The Head of School shall ensure the school provides the victim with information regarding services that available within the community, such as counseling, support services, and other programs.

## **Retaliation**

A reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of bullying is strictly prohibited. A student's act of reprisal or retaliation will be treated as bullying for the purposes of determining any consequences of other appropriate remedial actions. A student will not be punished for reporting bullying or supplying information, even if the school's investigation concludes that no bullying occurred.

However, knowingly making a false accusation or providing knowingly false information will be treated as bullying for purposes of determining any consequences of other appropriate remedial actions.

## **Policy & Review**

Country Meadows Montessori School's **Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment Policy** is based on the engagement of a range of school stakeholders, including students and families.

A copy of this bullying policy is included in the Parent Handbook, which is distributed annually to parents/guardians. A sign-off form acknowledging the parent/guardian has received and read the bullying policy is required annually for all Elementary and older school children. Staff members, including new employees upon hiring, receive a copy of the Staff Handbook, which contains this policy. The policy is posted on the school's website for reference.

The Country Meadows Montessori School's **Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment Policy** is reviewed every two years. As part of the process of reviewing and re-evaluating this policy, the school's Incident Reporting data is reviewed to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of the policy that includes, but is not limited to, factors such as the frequency of victimization; student, staff, and family observations of safety at a school; identification of areas of a school where bullying occurs; the types of bullying utilized; and bystander intervention or participation. The information developed as a result of the policy evaluation is made available in the school's Parent Handbook, Employee Handbook, accessible to school administrators, school board members, staff members, parents/guardians, and students and on the school's website.

Country Meadows Montessori School's **Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment Policy** is consistent with the policies of the school.

Board of Directors last approval date: August 21, 2023.

*If you suspect your child is bullying others, it's important to seek help for him or her as soon as possible. Without intervention, bullying can lead to serious academic, social, emotional and legal difficulties. Talk to your child's pediatrician, teacher, principal, school counselor, or family physician. If the bullying continues, a comprehensive evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional should be arranged. The evaluation can help you and your child understand what is causing the bullying, and help you develop a plan to stop the destructive behavior.*

*If you suspect your child may be the victim of bullying ask him or her to tell you what's going on. You can help by providing lots of opportunities to talk with you in an open and honest way.*

It's also important to respond in a positive and accepting manner. Let your child know it's not his or her fault, and that he or she did the right thing by telling you. If your child is aware of someone who is being bullied, encourage him or her to notify someone and get help.

If your child becomes withdrawn, depressed or reluctant to go to school, or if you see a decline in school performance, additional consultation or intervention may be required. A child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional can help your child and family and the school develop a strategy to deal with the bullying. Seeking professional assistance earlier can lessen the risk of lasting emotional consequences for your child.

Receipt and Acknowledgement of Country Meadows Montessori School's  
Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment Policy

I have read and been informed about the content, requirements and expectations of Country Meadows Montessori School's bullying/cyberbullying, intimidation and harassment policy. I have received a copy of the policy and agree to abide by the policy as a condition of enrollment.

If I have questions about the policy, I understand that I can consult with the teacher and/or school Administrator.

I have carefully read, understand and agree to abide by this policy.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Receipt By: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_