



**PREVENTION OF BULLYING AND VIOLENCE
AT THE NATIONAL CIRCUS SCHOOL**

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

OCTOBER 2015

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE PREVENTION OF BULLYING AND VIOLENCE ¹

***For students to do well, a positive school climate,
as well as a safe environment
for learning and teaching are essential.***

This present guide aims to present our Anti-Bullying and Anti-Violence Plan (our “Plan”). We also wish to draw your attention to the behaviour expected of you and your child in preventing bullying and violence, along with suggested measures that can help you and your child cope with this phenomenon.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

The Ministry of Education in Québec defines bullying as: “*any repeated direct or indirect behaviour, comment, act or gesture, whether deliberate or not, including in cyberspace, which occurs in a context where there is a power imbalance between the persons concerned and which causes distress and injures, hurts, oppresses, intimidates or ostracizes.*”

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

The National Circus School (the ‘School’) takes seriously its obligations to prevent acts of bullying and violence. We have drawn up an Anti-Bullying and Anti-Violence Plan that includes a range of preventative measures as well as this parents’ guide, which we invite you to read.

We have a zero tolerance policy for students who bully, either in person or online. We hope that students learn from the choices they make and understand that rules must be respected in order to live in society. They should be aware that by resorting to bullying or violence, they will face various disciplinary measures, including expulsion.

Parents are the first to instill the values of respect and tolerance in their children. As a parent yourself, your cooperation is essential to help not only the child who is a victim of bullying, but also the young bully who needs to cease such behaviour and adopt a different approach. Denying a problem does not solve it; this is why we are counting on you to observe your child and intervene by providing support where necessary, whether he ² is a victim, witness or perpetrator.

1. In case of any discrepancy between the French version of the present document and its English version, the French version shall prevail.

2. The masculine form is used in this text for the sake of readability only. In all cases, such usage designates without discrimination both female and male students.

***Like other forms of violence,
Bullying knows no social, cultural or economic boundaries.
It is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes.***

WHAT FORMS CAN BULLYING TAKE?

Bullying can take on many forms. It may be:

- Physical: hitting, pushing, shoving, theft of or damage to personal belongings;
- Verbal or psychological: insults, threats, mocking, or, sexist, racist or homophobic remarks;
- Social: rejection, excluding from a group, spreading gossip and rumors;
- Sexual: harassment, touching, hand gestures or interactions against a person's will;
- Electronic (commonly known as "cyberbullying"): spreading rumors or making hurtful comments by email, cell phone calls, text messaging or social networking sites.

The School's Plan refers to several forms of bullying in order to assist you in asserting what your child could be going through.

Since bullying takes on many forms, the following signs may help determine whether or not a bullying situation exists:

- Unequality of power between parties;
- Intent to cause harm;
- Feelings of distress on the part of the student being bullied;
- Repeated acts of bullying over a period of time.

Bullying is an attack on a person. Bullying is not a harmless conflict between individuals. Thus, jostling, play-fighting or an isolated insult or threat do not necessarily constitute bullying, although they may require an intervention given they do not constitute adequate behaviour.

Cyberbullying, for its part, is a form of bullying which involves the use of communication technologies, such as the Internet, characterized by certain given features of the technology being used by the bully:

- The bully can remain anonymous;
- The bully can pretend to be someone else;
- The bullying can take place from any location and at any time;
- Cyberspace bullying can take on different forms;
- The ability to spread words or photos is instantaneous and without limits;
- Hiding behind a screen, the bully feels less restrained in its comments than if face-to-face with the person it is bullying.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD TO COPE WITH BULLYING AND VIOLENCE?

Besides working with the School to help your child or teen stop the bullying, you can lead by setting an example. It is important to send a clear message that bullying is wrong and that reporting it is a brave and honorable thing to do.

You can help your child, regardless of his age groupe, by encouraging him to confide and by sharing with him some advice:

- Leave the scene of the bullying;
- Do not fight back or respond in any way, whether verbally or by text or email;
- Explain what happened to an adult (a member of the School' faculty or staff, onsite supervisor or the person responsible for bullying issues at the School);
- Share what happened with your siblings or parents and you will not feel you are alone;
- Find a friend who agrees to stay with you when you feel unsafe;
- Call the Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 or go to their website at www.kidshelpphone.ca;
- Communicate with the School's director of studies, Daniela Arendasova, at 514 982-0859, extension 227, or darendasova@enc.qc.ca.

IF MY CHILD IS A WITNESS OF A BULLYING BEHAVIOUR, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Everyone can help prevent bullying. In most cases, bullying takes place before witnesses. Bystanders to bullying may avoid getting involved for fear of becoming themselves a bullying target or by fear of making the situation worse.

You can help your child understand that bullying is unacceptable and that he can put an end to it by reporting the situation to an adult.

Here are some warning signs to look out for:

A student who witnesses bullying behaviour may:

- Experience feelings of anger or a sense of shame, guilt or helplessness;
- Fear becoming a target, or being associated with the person being bullied, the perpetrator or with the bullying behaviour;
- Not want to be considered a 'snitch';
- In some cases, experience emotional distress similar to what the person being bullied is going through;
- Collaborate with the bully by participating in the attack (active assistant);
- Encourage the bully by being a silent bystander, or by laughing or showing signs of reinforcement (reinforcing witness);
- Support the bully by refusing to get involved or remaining a passive witness (outsider);
- Assist the person being bullied by getting help from an adult (indirect defender);
- Help the person being bullied by verbally confronting the bully (active defender).

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS A VICTIM OF BULLYING?

Your child may not know what bullying really means, but he knows when a person makes him feel sad, anxious or helpless. Your child may not necessarily tell you if he is bullied, for fear that being a "tattletale" or "squealer" will make the situation worse. Even worse, it is not "cool."

The child can sometimes speak of "hassling" rather than "bullying" to describe the behaviour of which he is a victim. Teenagers often prefer to solve problems themselves, as they find it embarrassing to involve a parent.

Even if your child does not talk about bullying, certain signs are revealing. Rather than wait for your child to say something, you can look for signs indicating he is a victim of bullying, such as a change in behaviour, attitude or physical appearance.

Here are some warning signs to look out for:

A student who is bullied may:

- Be more emotional, shy, reserved or nervous than others;
- Being seen as different from the rest of the group because of certain traits (physical characteristic, way of reacting, cultural group, disability, learning difficulties, other);
- Show a submissive or passive demeanour when facing conflict;
- Have very few close friends at school;
- Be clingy, often seeking to be in the vicinity of an adult;
- Present some injuries, pain, headaches or stomach upsets;
- Come to class or return home with torn clothes or damaged belongings;
- Seem sad, depressed or unhappy, lose interest in school work, have lower marks in class;
- Experience mood swings, feelings of anger, fear, shame, doubt, guilt;
- Show signs of anxiety, loneliness, isolation or withdrawal, low self-esteem, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances;
- Deny the facts, make an effort to hide what has happened, turn to other friends, “escape” into the world of books or the digital realms (Facebook, other);
- Be late, absent, leave school or make detours on the way to school;
- Take refuge in the role of a victim, have suicidal thoughts or show violent behaviour.

Children who are being bullied may not want to go to school, may cry or fall sick on school days. They may refuse to participate in activities or social events with other students. They can misplace money or personal belongings, arrive home with torn clothes or broken items, and provide inconsistent explanations.

Teens who are victims of bullying and harassment may also start to talk about dropping out and avoid activities involving other students.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD IS A VICTIM OF BULLYING

First, you must stop the bullying.

Here are a few tips:

- Listen to your child and assure him that he has a right to be safe;
- Establish the facts of the matter accurately. If you can, write down what happened and when it took place;
- Help your child distinguish between “ratting someone out” or “telling,” and reporting an incident. Explain that reporting takes courage and is not meant to cause trouble for another student, but to protect all students, including himself;
- Urge your child to communicate with the person responsible for preventing bullying and violence at our school. In the case that your child refuses, do it for him;
- As difficult as it may be, try to remain calm so you can help your child and develop an action plan together;
- Stay on course. Keep an eye on your child's behaviour. Follow up on the measures agreed upon to end the bullying;
- Contact the police if the bullying involves a criminal act such as assault or use of a weapon, or if your child is threatened in the community outside of the School;
- As a follow-up, see what can be done to rebuild your child's self-esteem and encourage the development of positive social interactions.

We recommend that you:

- Help your child develop innate strengths and talents with an aim to developing greater self-esteem;
- Include the child in activities that will encourage a better body image;
- Support efforts to make new friends;
- Look for ways to encourage greater self-reliance;
- Avoid over-protecting your child or resolving the issue for him;
- Speak with school teachers or directors.

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT MY CHILD IS BULLYING OTHERS?

This is not an easy situation to accept but it is possible.

Children who physically bully other students may return home with bruises, scratches or torn clothing. They may have more spending money or be in possession of things they normally could not afford. They also risk being “bad mouthed” by other students.

Children who bully sometimes do so both at home and at school. Watch and listen to your children. Are there signs that one of them is being bullied by a brother or sister?

Here are some signs to look out for:

Students who bully others:

- Have limited ability to manage interpersonal conflicts, express themselves and communicate;
- Tend to misinterpret social information, attribute hostile intentions to others, and perceive hostility where none exists;
- Have a great need to dominate others;
- Experience little remorse and have difficulty understanding the feelings of others and expressing compassion;
- Believe that aggression is the best way to resolve conflicts;
- Give a false image of assurance and self-confidence;
- May experience a rise in social rank to leader, but in a negative way;
- Risk becoming dropouts;
- May develop long-term mental health and/or social adaptation problems (drug addiction, crime, domestic violence, other);
- Can learn better strategies and more suitable behaviours if the bullying situation is resolved quickly.

A child may adopt bullying behaviour over time, or after a major change, loss or disappointment.

Many bullies report having been bullied or rejected by their peers. Their behaviours take such forms as vengeance, or seeking some fun or emotional release. Peer pressure is also a major reason given for engaging in bullying.

Other aspects—the child's age, level of cognitive and social development, ability to understand the situation and issues, and capacity for empathy—should be considered in determining whether or not bullying has occurred and ensure a correct response.

Finally, a great number of students may become bullies, especially when in group situations. There are other important social components to bullying, as the bully's actions have an impact on the victim's social interactions. Bullying can also be fueled by the interactions within a group.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOUR CHILD BULLIES OTHERS?

The best way to dissuade a child from bullying is to set a good example and show him how to overcome difficulties without exercising force or resorting to aggression. Also, he needs to be told what exactly constitutes bullying. You should describe the different forms of bullying and explain that they are hurtful and dangerous. Let your child know that bullying is wrong and unacceptable in all cases.

Take the situation seriously; it is important to make your child responsible for his own behaviour.

Here are some actions you can take:

- Develop rules of conduct, and apply them consistently and judiciously;
- Learn how to reinforce appropriate behaviours;
- Monitor their friendships;
- Participate in recreational activities with your child.

HOW WILL OUR SCHOOL RESPOND TO AN INCIDENCE OF BULLYING?

The School now has a legal obligation to intervene. It holds the legal duty to put an end to an inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour that may have a negative effect on the School overall learning and teaching climate. They might include bullying, racist or sexist comments, or vandalism.

All staff and students, as well as parents, must report incidents that involve bullying or violence to the school administration or the person in charge of these issues.

The person responsible for students, Ms. Arendasova, will receive the complaint and investigate. In particular, she will:

- Meet with the student, alone or with the parents in order to determine the nature of the activity that has been detrimental to the student;
- The extent of the student's injury or grievance;
- The measures to be taken to ensure the student's safety.

Once the student's safety is assured, Ms. Arendasova also will communicate with the parents of the aggressor(s) and inform them of the following:

- The nature of the activity in which the child participated;
- The harm caused;
- The measures taken to ensure that the prohibited behaviour ceases;
- The disciplinary measures that will be imposed if necessary.

When considered important, the administration also will communicate with the parents of children who have witnessed acts of bullying or violence.

In every case, the incident will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The objective is to stop the actions and not to create publicity surrounding the aggressors.

The institution will respond within 24 hours to any request for protection that arises from the filing of a complaint, meet with the student and parents, and arrange for immediate corrective measures.

The institution undertakes to respond within 5 days to any request to investigate a problematic situation.

At all times, the complainant or his parents may contact the person responsible for these matters, Daniela Arendasova, at 514 982-0959, extension 227, or darendasova@enc.qc.ca.

References

The following documents served as the main sources in composing this document:

PrevNet, Canada's Authority on research and resources for bullying prevention, Queen's University, ON, <http://www.prevnet.ca/resources/policy-and-legislation/quebec>

Violence in the schools: Let's work on it together!, Action Plan to Prevent and Deal with Violence in the Schools 2008-2011, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec, <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/contenus-communs/education/bullying-and-violence-in-the-schools/>.

Further resources:

Fondation Jasmin Roy, <http://www.fondationjasminroy.com/en/need-help/>.

