Shankill
Parish
Lurgan

Anti-Bullying Policy

SHANKILL PARISH CHURCH LURGAN - ANTI-BULLYING POLICY - SHANKILL PARISH LURGAN

Shankill Parish is committed to providing a caring, supportive and friendly environment where children learn to value and respect each other and are challenged to reach their full potential through active participation.

Shankill Parish will not tolerate bullying by anyone in any of its activities.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Bullying causes physical and/or emotional harm and can result in significant problems of low self-esteem, social isolation, anxiety and depression for the children and young people subjected to it.

Bullying occurs in a variety of settings and can take place off and online. All settings in which children are provided with services or participate in activities must have rigorously enforced anti-bullying policies and procedures in place.

It is recognised that bullying affects the lives of an increasing number of children and can be the cause of genuine concerns about a child's welfare.

While bullying can happen to any child, some may be more vulnerable. These include:

children with disability or special educational needs;

those from ethnic minority and migrant groups, or from the Traveller community;

lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) children and those perceived to be LGBT;

and children of minority religious faiths.

There can be an increased vulnerability to bullying among children with special educational needs. This is particularly so among those who do not understand social cues and/or have difficulty communicating. Some children with complex needs may lack understanding of social situations and therefore trust everyone implicitly. Such children may be more vulnerable because they do not have the same social skills or capacity as others to recognise and defend themselves against bullying behaviour.

Church personnel should promote a positive anti-bullying ethos in their activities, raise awareness amongst other church personnel and children that bullying will not be tolerated and that anyone who witnesses an incident of bullying has a responsibility to report it.

By emphasising the Code of Behaviour, church personnel should create an environment in which children are valued as individuals and are encouraged and affirmed.

What can church personnel do if a child tells them they are being bullied?

• Listen calmly and accept what is said.

• Complete an incident form following the conversation and keep on file as this forms the basis of the bullying report. Notes should include nature of incident, date, time, location, names of those involved, witnesses, relevant history and child's response.

• Reassure them that help is available, action will be taken, the child was right to tell, it is not their fault, and it could happen to anyone.

• Negotiate confidentiality – be clear you'll tell only people who need to know but that you cannot guarantee confidentiality or secrecy.

• Ensure the child's safety. The member of church personnel should be aware that the safety of the child is paramount, and this can be maintained through appropriate supervision. Liaise with the parents/carers in relation to a solution and possible actions.

• Tell the child that you will keep them informed and how you intend to proceed.

• Respond to the incident – all actions should be guided by the needs of the child. Decide what action to take and by whom.

• Make a record of facts rather than opinions. Include details from the bullying report, details recounted by others involved, any agreements made, an account of action taken and suggestions for follow up and monitoring. This should be retained by the Parish Panel.

RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS OF BULLYING

There are a number of approaches which can be used, and the member of church personnel should determine which action to take depending on the incident of bullying.

1. The Code of Behaviour sets out the guidelines for children regarding boundaries and appropriate behaviour. Draw everyone's attention back to the Code of Behaviour and the consequences of not abiding by the Code.

2. The 'no blame' approach does not concentrate on who did what to whom, but instead it focuses on the feelings of the target and what the group involved in the bullying and the target can do to make this situation better. The 'no blame' approach allows the group involved in the bullying behaviour to think about the action that has taken place and the effect it has had on the target. It provides the perpetrator and the rest of the group involved in the bullying behaviour with an opportunity to redeem themselves.

3. Time Out – by providing some space and time between the perpetrator and target and allowing both parties involved to think about the incident that has taken place, time apart may aid the process of resolving the bullying, e.g. removal of the perpetrator away from the target to another group.

4. Denial of privileges – loss of certain privileges by the perpetrator in the group. It is hoped that by using this response the perpetrator may realise the impact of their actions on the target and the consequences for themselves.

5. Parental/Carer involvement – make parents/carers of all children involved aware of the incident of bullying and ask them to intervene in the situation.

6. Suspension or expulsion of the perpetrator may be used as a last resort in bullying where no other interventions have worked.

7. Disciplinary procedures must be applied in relation to any sanctioning of the perpetrator and advice should be sought in relation to the adoption of such procedures, where appropriate.

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is defined as 'any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others'.

Cyberbullying, similar to more traditional forms of bullying, must meet three main criteria:

• Intention to cause harm to the victim(s).

• Repetition of abusive behaviour(s) over time; however in some instances, one behavioural act can create an ongoing sense of intimidation for the victim (e.g. posting a humiliating photo/video which can be viewed by a large audience can have long-term effects).

• Imbalance of power between victim(s) and bully/bullies (i.e. super technological skills, anonymity). Cyberbullying differs from more traditional forms of bullying in a number of ways:

• The audience is larger.

• There are no time or location barriers.

• It can happen 24/7.

• The target's reaction is not often seen, leading to a reduction in feelings of empathy or guilt for the perpetrator.

What are the signs/symptoms that someone is being cyberbullied? Some signs or symptoms that may present when a child is experiencing cyberbullying include:

• More frequent health problems – headaches, stomach aches, frequent absenteeism, sleep problems, depression or suicidal thoughts.

• Behavioural and emotional changes – distressed, anxious, frustrated, fearful, angry.

• School-related changes – inability to concentrate, drop in academic performance, reluctance to attend school.

• Negative emotional expressions after use of social media – poor self-image, sadness, hopelessness, loneliness, suspicion of others.

• Changes in online behaviour – more careful or cautious approaches to communicating online.

• Being emotionally upset during or after using the Internet or the phone.

• Being very secretive or protective of their digital life.

• Wanting to stop using the computer or mobile phone.

• Being nervous or jumpy when getting an instant message, text or email.

• Avoiding discussions about computer or mobile phone activities.

• Physical symptoms such as self-harm, eating disorders and/or risky behaviours.

Actions church personnel should consider when a child is the target of cyberbullying:

• Confirm that you are dealing with bullying behaviour.

• Listen calmly and uncritically to the report the child is making.

• Remind the child that it is not their fault; it is the person who is doing the bullying that has the problem.

• Tell the child not to respond to the bully as this can exacerbate the issue.

• Ask the child if they have talked to their parents about the cyberbullying. If they have not, the Bishop/clergy/staff member/volunteer should offer to help the child to talk to their parents about the problem.

• The following advice should be given by the Bishop/clergy/staff member/volunteer to the parents of the child experiencing the cyberbullying:

- Keep a copy of all correspondence between the child and the bully.

- Encourage the child to remove the cyberbully as a ‘friend’ online and block them from his/her phone.

- Report the issue to the website and/or mobile phone company as appropriate.

- Serious issues may require to be reported to PSNI.

Issues requiring investigation by PSNI may include the making of inappropriate sexual suggestions, racist remarks or persistent bullying that is seriously damaging to the child’s well-being. In such situations the member of church personnel should report their concerns to the Parish Panel who can assist them to inform parents that they should report the cyberbullying or sexting to the PSNI by bringing the child’s phone to the local PSNI station and making a report.

Adopted by the Select Vestry on *22nd September 2026*